IDEAL AND REAL VICTIMS
Political Discourse and Media Representation in Contemporary Societies

Edited by
Susanna Vezzadini

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Layout: DoppioClickArt (San Lazzaro - Bo)

First edition: September 2024

To the memory of my parents,
Giuliana and Celso,
with grateful love.

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Prefaces

Victimization of civilians is a tragic, yet very frequent occurrence in most part of the worlds. From people targeted by attacks from insurgent groups to migrants attempting to cross borders, victims constitute a large and heterogenous mass that often lacks recognition and definition, also in academic terms. The volume by Susanna Vezzadini "Ideal and Real Victims. Political Discourse and Media Representation in Contemporary Societies" is an experiment and a successful one. It starts from the often-invoked premise of combining research and teaching and does so in an original way by integrating rather than separating the two dimensions. It is based on an idea that that underpins a class, *Power relations and victimization processes*, which Susanna Vezzadini has been teaching for years in the Master's degree in International Relations at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Bologna. Over the years, it became increasingly clear that it was essential to offer (graduate) students a view of problems in international politics that also focused on the individuals, often obscured by the grand narratives of power and relations among states (often, the most powerful states). Yet – and I believe that the richness and innovativeness of the book – students here are not just the audience, as they become protagonists of this learning experience: the case studies of the book are the outcome of the research projects.

The volume seeks to delve into the notion of victimhood, offering a nuanced exploration of how victims are constructed, represented, and perceived in various contexts. It does so by going to the core of the analysis the very lives and experiences of those who are frequently misrepresented in political discourse and media representation. The book begins with an examination of the conceptual

foundations of victims and their recognition (or lack of), tracing their evolution and situating it within the broader context of social sciences. This is a welcome introduction that – after defining key concepts also by reconstructing their genealogy and evolution – sheds light on the constitutive elements of what makes individuals "victims". The interaction between representation and media is scrutinized to reconstruct how victims are socially constructed through different mechanisms, and how denial of victimization is such a frequent phenomenon too. Empirical realities are addressed through various case studies – conducted by the class' students – that highlight the disparity between idealized and real victims. All chapters are connected by a *fil rouge* interrogate how political rhetoric and media portrayals often create a dichotomy between those deemed worthy of sympathy and those who are marginalized, questioning the criteria and consequences of such distinctions.

What emerges is of extreme importance to students and scholars in different domains. Though rooted in classical criminology and sociology, the book speaks to different audiences. Communication scholars and students will find the book central to the discussion on how the media wields significant power in constructing narratives of victimhood. Political scientists will immediately see the profound connections with how political authority is constructed and operates. For scholars working in diverse fields ranging from international relations to public policy, the book offers novel points of view to look at their daily objects of analysis. There is widespread attention at the reasons that underpin state and non-state actors to "victimize": here we can also look at the stories. Each case is thought-provoking and helps readers to challenge preconceived notions, inspiring further inquiry into processes of victimization.

The volume deepens the understanding and spark meaningful conversations about the intricate relationship between power, victimization, and representation. And it does so in an original way, by giving voice to a generation of aspiring scholars, analysts and practitioners suggesting to take stock of the human element in their analyses of political and social phenomena.

Francesco Niccolò Moro
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The volume represents, in the panorama of literature on the theme of victims and victimization processes, a contribution that is undoubtedly relevant for the richness and articulation of the contents and "case" studies offered to the reader, which are diverse and each of great significance. But even more so because they are introduced, by the editor, by a chapter of theoretical framework that masterfully reconstructs the complex and rich literature on the subject and fully illuminates the constant tension between recognition and denial, that characterizes the activities of defining, evaluating, and socially constructing victims' experience and lived.

This oscillation in the social and "political" consideration of victims by public opinion and institutions (some ignored, others, on the contrary, considered "ideal") is evident not only in a diachronic view that reconstructs the way in which, in different epochs, victims were considered and treated. It is even more evident if one pays attention to different types of victims, as the book does meritoriously with reference above all to the forms of denial of recognition. Not only those of common crime or determined by individual perpetrators, but also those – far more numerous, since they are "collective" – of wars and conflicts between states and organizations, of environmental catastrophes produced by the crimes of the powerful, of injustice, of social and economic discrimination, when not of torture and violence perpetrated by state apparatuses or by institutional sources.

There is no doubt that victims of individual, so-called "common" crimes, whether instrumental (such as theft or robbery) or "expressive" (such as assault, street violence or feminicide) have received increasing recognition in recent times. In particular, the victims of those crimes that most solicit media atten-

tion and political decision-makers' interest in search of arguments and support for policies of penal populism. Policies rhetorically represented as responding to a common feeling of solidarity with the suffering of victims, useful to represent themselves, by those who promote them and who are looking for easy consensus, as bulwarks of citizens' security. Security that they believe – contrary to all empirical evidence on the subject of recidivism – can be pursued through the road of inflicting retributive suffering and mere incapacitation of offenders. But only if we are talking about common crimes, possibly heinous, which can be represented in the pages of the crime chronicle through the stereotyping of the protagonists (better if, to some extent, "strangers", foreigners with respect to our social and cultural context). And if the victims themselves, as Vezzadini rightly observes, correspond to certain moral canons, those that exclude, to put it in common parlance, that they "had it coming".

Not identical recognition of the many other victims of crimes committed by the powerful, economic and corporate crimes; victims of structural and cultural violence that affects entire populations or entire generations; victims of violence generated by ideology and fanaticism, but also by political interests, perpetrated by institutional entities such as states and their apparatuses. Justified by the alleged "dangerousness" of those who are persecuted, in the name of national interest, or by displaying a "moral" superiority of those who inflict suffering on others to defend their interests or assert their own power (this is the case of women in many parts of the world or of those who are "different" by origin or skin color). In this case the variables that intervene in the dynamic between recognition and denial can be many and without a shadow of a doubt we can say that there are people and groups who have the right to be recognized as victims and others who have no such right, victims deserving of compassion and capable of arousing outrage, reactions of condemnation and actions to punish the guilty, and others who can be ignored even when truly innocent. Think of the children killed or injured, physically and even more so in the psyche, in the wars or acts of reprisal that we witness on a daily basis in these times. So frequent are these actions that they cause a growing loss of sensitivity and capacity to react – starting with the definition of certain acts as war crimes or genocide – that can bring it all to a halt.

What can be added to what can be found in the pages of this volume? Just one reflection. The need to focus not only on the suffering of the victims and the policies and services to support them, but also on all that has produced the victimization situation. And this, if we are talking about victims of common or individual crimes, in a twofold sense: on the one hand remedying the absence of sensitivity and prevention strategies capable of taking care – preventively – of

potential victims and of removing them from the risks of becoming victims; on the other hand, with reference to the many forms of marginality, exclusion, relational deficiencies, personality disorders, which characterize offenders, in the many cases in which the commission of offences and the landing in prison is the inevitable outcome of problematic life trajectories ignored by social and health policies.

A commitment, that of imagining and implementing "preventive" actions, which can also concern other forms of victimization, those that are the outcome of political or economic violence, of ethnic or religious hatred, which affect individuals but more widely groups, categories, communities, entire populations. This is certainly an arduous task, but it should be at the heart of a culture and a "policy" that truly cares about the processes of victimization in all the forms and degrees in which they occur. Processes that can only be avoided through the removal of the underlying "structural" (economic and cultural) causes that originate them and through the widespread affirmation of human rights. On this front, the various contributions in the volume offer elements of hope, when they speak of the efforts of many (organizations, media, politicians, jurists, ordinary citizens) in denouncing, mobilizing consciences, actively supporting, producing normative changes, even condemning those who consider themselves above justice and promoting, where possible, processes of reparation and reconciliation. Efforts – and here the role of research and universities is decisive – aimed at promoting a new culture permeated by increasing degrees of awareness in every citizen and in every local community in every part of the world.

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National Conference for the University Penitentiary Poles (CNUPP)

This is an important book, a book that should be read not only by those who deal professionally with social issues but by all our students who are, indeed, the main authors of it. Susanna Vezzadini, professor and researcher, composed it with them in a work that lasted four years, intense and engaging that certainly produced excellent results.

The writings collected here analyze the figure of the victim, a subject that, at least since the 1980s, has been much discussed from different perspectives, giving rise to what various scholars, primarily the Italian historian Giovanni De Luna, have described as "victim paradigm." This paradigm is characterized by the centrality of the role of the victims in academic research, especially in the field of Memory Studies, beginning with studies on the Shoah. Perhaps only recently the perspective has open up to consider other positions as well: the perpetrators first of all, but also figures with more nuanced and difficult-to-define responsibilities, such as the "implicated" subjects, not directly involved in violent actions, but not purely passive spectators either.

But it is not only in the field of Memory Studies that we find instances of victim paradigm: this has happened, and still happens, also in the media, in newspapers, in television programs that increasingly interview the victims of violence or abuse of power, whatever it may be. At the same time, associations of victims – and/or their relatives – have multiplied, related to very different situations, from mafia victims to earthquake victims, from left-wing extremism to fascist terrorism, from malpractice to epidemics each claiming its own specificity and rights. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this, but for the implicit risks of a tendency to emphasize: for example, the potential ambiguity of the notion of

"victims' rights," which risks to become a substitute for justice and social law, or their political exploitation in a populist and justicialist sense, easy to witness today.

One of the merits of this book is that it goes in the almost opposite direction to the paradigm just outlined, first of all starting with a critique of the genericity of the concept itself: to say "victim" is generic because victims are not all the same, there are many different categories of victims, often incommensurable with each other; generalization resets their differences to zero, making opaque the different specificities and erasing the individual stories of each and everyone. Indeed, if all victims are humanly commensurable, so is not their legal or political standing, nor their social recognition and the consideration in which they are held. Of course, there are no good victims and bad victims; nevertheless, there are – and this is the underlying thesis of the book – mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the recognition, or not, of different groups of victims, mechanisms that follow social and cultural prejudices and stereotypes strongly conditioned by the media system.

We all remember the picture of Alan Kurdi, the Syrian child of Kurdish origins, a little three-year-old migrant who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea and was found lying on the beach. It was an image that went around the world, arousing enormous emotion, largely due to some details in themselves irrelevant in the face of tragedy, but emotionally very significant: the child was alone on the beach, a small individual singularity, not part of an indistinct mass with no history and no name. Very small, so as to arouse tenderness and a protective instinct, but already an individual, he seemed to be asleep on the beach, in a natural, peaceful pose, his face a little hidden and not quite visible, corroborating the impression of a peaceful sleep rather than death. "Well" dressed, in a red T-shirt and blue shorts, with his little shoes still on his feet, closer to the image of our children than that of a desperate immigrant distant from our culture. All these elements contributed to the success of an image relaunched in the media, reproduced on murals all over the world, used by famous artists such as Ai Weiwei. Since then, hundreds and hundreds of children fleeing Libyan camps died in our seas, without any possibility of hope or future, thrown back on our beaches, but none of them has deserved more than a very brief mention and a distracted glance from us. Immigrants, especially those from North Africa, are perceived more as potential dangers for us than as victims.

Thus, there are huge differences in the status of victims; there are victims "deserving" more and victims "deserving" less: the femicide of a young woman seeking her independence in the world strikes us much more than that of a mature woman perhaps of non-irreproachable morals. Stefano Cucchi, a marginal

young man possibly using drugs, died from police mistreatment, as did Giulio Regeni, a brilliant Cambridge PhD student slaughtered by Egyptian intelligence services: both victims of police state violence but victims of different status, because their social "respectability" and reputation were different.

In its to some extent surprising cross-reading, lies the great merit of this work: to make us more aware of the stereotypes that we have now accepted as normal interpretive categories that prevent us from seeing those "real" victims who deviate from our idealizations. A book that makes us reflect on our interpretative automatisms and urges us to look at reality with more critical and attentive eyes.

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Introduction and Overview

Susanna Vezzadini

Since the late 1970s, much of the Western world has witnessed the re-discovery of the figure of the victim. After a long period in which victims fell into forgetfulness in coincidence with the establishment of the States of Law – that gradually moved them away from the criminal justice system as the holder of private interests in conflict with the public good to be protected – in more recent times victims have largely redeemed themselves from that oblivion.

Thus, victims of crime, war and conflicts, disaster and environmental catastrophes, injustice and discrimination have ceased to be confined to the margins of social attention, gaining a prominent place in the political agendas of governments and the special interest of the media (traditional and new). An undoubtedly positive change, in some respects almost revolutionary, which, however, does not seem to have been matched by a real and profound cultural change, so that the interest shown by society in its various components not infrequently has problematic or even critical implications.

In fact, it is undeniable that today victims are being talked about everywhere: their stories open broadcast news, cross dedicated broadcasts and television specials, are celebrated in the cinema that narrates their martyrdom, or the heroism with which tragic events are dealt with. Contextually, they constitute a powerful appeal across the political spectrum, who take it upon themselves to represent their instances and demands in various ways, as they cannot but stand "on the side of the victims." In many cases, and in spite of themselves, they end up at the center of the judicial chronicles, their stories investigated in depth, question after question, exposing them to a public opinion greedy for news and at the same time alarmed by the advance of crimes and iniquities. Stories that

become depictions of suffering that question the fragile condition of human beings, the precariousness and transience of each existence, and the presence of suffering in the world. Thus originates an extraordinarily articulated circularity between political and media attention, the purposes of the justice system, the curiosity of public opinion, destined to feed itself by generating what has rightly been defined as a peculiar characteristic of the contemporary era: an unprecedented, common and pervasive "fascination with victims" and their unfortunate condition.

But, indeed, the aspects of complexity and ambivalence are numerous. Political attention, for example, can easily turn into the instrumentalization of victims for the purpose of electoral consensus, as in the case of penal populism which, by confusing every victim's legitimate demand for justice with vindictive instances, fuels social alarm and community fears by offering as the only answer the mere raising of penalties and the exponential increase in their severity. Thus (intentionally?) failing to question the causes of the offence and to recognize the very needs of the offended thus originated – the need for listening and understanding, for truth, for prevention and protection, for change. Similarly, the risk posed by a media narrative aimed at vivisecting the lives of those involved, mercilessly feeding the voracious viewer with intimate, brutal, terrible details, harkens back to that "spectacle of suffering" that both attracts and repels, repeatedly denounced in recent years by scholars, associations and sometimes by the victims themselves.

At the same time, it should be noted that while, on the one hand, such growing interest would nevertheless seem to attest – in its virtuous ways – the emergence of a new sensitivity to all those who are in conditions of suffering and affliction as a result of crime, abuse, violence and injustice, on the other hand, there is – more subtly but sharply – the narrowing of the perimeter within which the status of victim is assigned on the basis of the application of predominantly moral criteria such as innocence, purity, lack of responsibility, respectability, and reputation. On these actually depend the public validation of the experienced harm, the recognition of the violated rights, the acceptance of the petitions proposed, and the eventual overcoming of the victim condition. This is an important process, consisting of various steps and dense with meanings, which, however, does not always concern all those who have been wronged, abused or are in a condition of suffering due to a tragic event. On the contrary, it is possible to say that there are subjects, categories or social groups, with respect to whom the application of the victim status is delayed or totally disregarded, because they are considered to be "lacking" those attributes considered fundamental to allow their recognition, this having important repercussions in terms of supportive policies and their implementation. This volume asks pre-

cisely about the reasons for such disallowance referring to the underlying power dynamics and social relations, the repercussions for the lives of individuals and communities, starting from the evidence that sees the notion of victim as a social construct. And, therefore, focusing on the distinction between "ideal victims" and non-ideal, or "real," victims.

First of all, the notion of *victim* as a social construct. That is, the definition of "who" is the victim is the result of the intersection, mutual influencing and conditioning, among values, cultural representations, legal and social norms, economic and political structures within a given context. The definition of victim, then, translates the mirroring of specific but relative instances as resulting from the power relations that govern a given system. From this perspective, the social and political roots of victimization must be highlighted, inevitably leading back to the "functional" character of the victim and the role he or she plays in contemporary societies.

Secondarily, the notion of the *ideal victim*. It is crucial, helping to unravel the many stereotypes and prejudices associated with this condition. The concept, elaborated by Nils Christie in his seminal 1986 essay *The Ideal Victim*, denounces the equivocal nature of society's gaze on the victim; a gaze that chooses, separates and selects within the variegated victim universe, distinguishing between subjects "deserving" of listening, assistance, support, and subjects "not quite deserving" because they lack the ideal characteristics, unable to correspond to an angelic image of the offended. Marginalized subjects, invisible to power and dysfunctional to the logic of the system; subjects who disregard social expectations with respect to the role conferred, with whom empathizing is more difficult. A dichotomous reading, antagonistic indeed, from which derives a particular interpretation of suffering in the world that, while affirming there are "absolute," unequivocal, indisputable victims, suggests a doubt, a perplexity, uncertainty with respect to the condition of others. For the latter, the path towards a possible recognition will be fraught and difficult, studded with obstacles and denials, suspending them in the limbo of inferiority.

However, exactly because the concepts of victim, and also that of "ideal victim," are a mirror of the hierarchy of values, principles, interests and instances present within a given socio-political-cultural context, therefore having a relative nature and character, they can undergo changes, being at different times attributed even to previously excluded subjects. Sometimes, unexpectedly, they may struggle for the assertion of their own rights, thus overturning stereotypes and prejudices. This point represents, after all, an element of positivity referring to what we might call the "fluidity" of a socially attributed (and subjectively perceived) label.

This volume intends to be an opportunity to reflect on these fundamental issues by investigating the mechanisms of inclusion-exclusion underlying the recognition, or more frequently the non-recognition, of victim condition experienced by certain individuals or groups through the analysis of case study deemed particularly significant in this perspective. Ideal victims, then? More often real victims: of political violence and state violence; of ideology and fanaticism (religious, political); victims who are "inconvenient" because they are deemed not entirely irresponsible, sometimes even considered dangerous, of whom national governments and even the international community care little. Victims today, and a thousand times more, as women, condemned therefore to physical and moral humiliation, denigration, blame, madness. Victims whose ransom no one wants to pay, whose value of human life is nil. Victims of indifference as well as of the endless fears of our contemporary society: a society that remove those considered as "different" or "deviant," confines them to the geographical and socio-cultural peripheries of the system, deprives them of fundamental rights or even annihilates them.

Yet, it must be said that sometimes these stories of injustice and suffering are not definitively written in their final outcome. The ending is not already decided, irreversible. On the contrary, thanks to the efforts of third sector and voluntary agencies, or international nongovernmental organizations; thanks to the reporting work of free rather than subservient media, of determined and pugnacious magistrates and politicians; thanks to a passionate and less prone public opinion, to undaunted and competent lawyers; but, most of all, thanks to the tenacity and perseverance of courageous family members, relatives and friends, those stories – those lives – are still alive. They are among us, we know them and we can tell about them, thus constituting an invaluable heritage in the analysis of the social and political roots of victimization.

The volume is structured in two parts. The first one intends to propose an in-depth and critical review of the scientific literature on victims and victimization processes in present-day societies. It is quite interesting to note that in some cases they are studies and research that far from revealing a benevolent and compassionate attitude towards victims, have not infrequently contributed to the edification of negative stereotypes and prejudices, which are reflected in the social gaze still directed towards offended people, offering a partial explanation to the evident difficulty of empathizing with them. Chapter I thus sheds light on the complexity of victim condition in contemporary Western societies, stressing the ambivalence – if not actually ambiguity – of the social attention towards victims in the political discourse and media narrative, without forgetting the presence of a public opinion often more curious than really involved in the suffering of the others.

The second part is dedicated to "Victims of political and state violence, discrimination and social exclusion". This section presents various contributions declined in the form of the case study as exemplifications and concrete applications of the conceptual framework discussed in Part I. These contributions originated within the course of *Power relations and victimization processes* that I taught at the University of Bologna for several years, at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, for the Second Cycle Degree in International Relations. They represent, in my opinion, strong examples dense with suggestions of how teaching and research can fruitfully meet and merge, complementing and mutually enriching each other. Here, in fact, a reflection on current events – with specific regard to victims, processes of victimization and social exclusion – is born and rooted. A reflection capable, as well, of pushing itself outside the academic context, to address and involve the broader community, its components and the many social actors that make it up, as I will try to make more explicit in the conclusion to the volume (*Epilogue*). And so, the peculiarity of the contributions that make up the second part of the book is that they, all of them, are signed by several students who over the years have taken the course I taught. They, individually or in small groups as appropriate, had the opportunity to work and reflect on these issues, particularly on the juxtaposition of ideal and real victims in contemporary societies, their representation within political discourse and media narratives, thus offering critical readings and brilliant insights with respect to some stories of denial and misrecognition, or – in other cases – of redemption, rescue and affirmation.

In particular, Chapter 2 deals with the victims of "Bloody Sunday" in Northern Ireland, killed by the British paratroopers during a demonstration in Londonderry, in 1972. The chapter examines how the victim's and offender's status in the UK changed along with the British Government's political objectives and ideologies; it also examines the media coverage on those victims in Ireland and the UK and finally compares how the victims are portrayed differently in each country.

Chapter 3 discusses four different groups of victims among civilian population in the terroristic attacks of the Nigeria based-group Boko Haram (which refers to itself as "Nigerian Taliban") and the distinct experiences of violence that result from this conduct. In fact, women, children, elderly people, and young Christian and Muslim did not receive the same social and international recognition although each of them has been exposed to extremely serious forms of violence. Only those victims fulfilling the characteristics of the "ideal victim" were given social recognition more readily, leading to an unequal distribution of help and support by NGOs and international governments, and establishing a hierarchy of victims.

Chapter 4 consists of an analysis of Stefano Cucchi's case, in Italy, from his arrest which occurred on the 15th of October 2016 to his death, dated the 22nd of October of the same year, applying the dichotomy of ideal-real victim. In particular, the chapter critically focuses on the political and mediatic reaction to the case, the processes of victim blaming and misrecognition, the experience lived by Cucchi's family, in order to highlight the complexities embodied in victimization processes.

Chapter 5 explores the impact of power relations imbalances applied to the case of Giulio Regeni, the Italian researcher who was found dead in Cairo, Egypt, in 2016. In this perspective, the theoretical definition of ideal victim is contextualized within the frame of political victimization, in order to provide the elements that determine at the end Giulio Regeni's ideal victim status, after being misrecognized, and being the recipient of forms of blaming and discrediting by Egyptian authorities. The case is analyzed by comparing the versions of events provided by the Italian and the Egyptian media and their respective implications.

Chapter 6 is about "comfort stations" during the World War II, set up by the Imperial Army of Japan to effectively function as brothels for their soldiers. To find the "comfort women" that were to live in these stations, girls from southeast Asia (mostly underaged) were abducted by the military and the government of Japan. At the end of the war, a significant percentage of them was executed. Decades after the war, the physical abuse and rape that those women had experienced began to be publicized to the rest of the world and a legal battle for justice and recognition commenced. The chapter focuses on the institutional responses over time and the role played by the media with regard to the condition of these marginalized and forgotten victims.

Chapter 7 investigates how can the concept of ideal victim be applied in the context of international crimes such as genocide, within the case study of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. The chapter aims to examine the international and local media reactions to the issue, as well as how social media such as Facebook and Twitter impact the perceptions of locals in Myanmar (with differences in reporting the genocide between Western media and local media), while the ruling class has kept denying the genocide in order to protect its own status.

Chapter 8 applied the theoretical construction of ideal victim to the context of Latin American migration to the United States, a phenomenon that has occurred in increasing numbers since the turn of the century. From the viewpoint of victimology, this case study becomes interesting because it questions the binary opposition between victims and offenders: the analysis highlights that Latin American migrants can be both perceived as ideal victims and ideal offenders,

which is emphasized by multiple external actors which use different strategies to either underline the vulnerable or the deviant side of the migrants. In particular, the chapter focuses on the situation of migrant children in detention camps at the US-border separated from their parents, and how different media outlet frame migration discourse for their own ideological purpose.

Chapter 9 analyses two inter-related case-studies, that of two-year-old Alan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee whose body was found life-less on a Turkish beach, and that of refugee groups in general. These two apparently very similar cases belong to the refugee category, but are treated from political, social and media perspectives in divergent ways. Alan Kurdi had a face, a family and a story and his photographs shocked the international system; on the contrary refugees escaping wars, oppressive regimes, economic difficulties, or humanitarian crises are labelled as a collective cluster thus preventing any sympathetic attitude of solidarity in neo-liberal societies. The case of Calais witnesses the reality of migration perceptions exemplifying how belonging to a particular country can make a significant difference to people's lives.

Chapter 10 aims to uncover the social construction behind the victimization processes of people experiencing homelessness. In fact, in today's society homelessness is still perceived as a condition to be blamed for rather than a product of social inequalities and structural violence. Based on these perceptions and stereotypes, homeless people go through a process of dehumanization which prevents them to be identified as victims. As such, they do not fit well into the priorities of the public agenda and therefore inadequate support is provided to help them break away from their condition.

Part I

THE NEW ATTENTION FOR VICTIMS
IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Chapter 1
Victims between social recognition and denial

Susanna Vezzadini

1. Socio-cultural implications of the word "victim"

The word "victim" (from Latin *victĭma*) has etymological roots far back in time referring to the condition experienced by the subject offered in sacrifice, the "sacrificed," as found crosswise in many Western and Middle Eastern cultures. The word originates from the crasis of the Latin verbs *vincīre* and *vincere*: the former referred to the condition of immobility typical of animals and individuals tightly bound in the ancient times and offered in sacrifice to the deity for propitiatory purposes; the latter, on the other hand, to the condition experienced by the one who was forced to undergo the victor's action, to submit to his will, and thus the defeated. In both cases, the subject thus represented was left with little to do. Unable to react and destined to bend to the will of the victor, his condition was of suffering and helplessness, obedience, and passivity: a cultural legacy difficult to eliminate and still often associated with those who suffer an offense, regardless of the causes behind it (Vezzadini 2012). Particularly significant, especially because of the reinforcement offered to it by Jewish-Christian thought and tradition, is the reference to the sacrificial condition, which describes the victim as the subject who is sacrificed; this is still present today in many languages spoken in the Western world: think, precisely, of the English *victim*, the French *victime* and the Italian *vittima*; the German uses the suggestive word *Opfer*, which with a single noun refers to the (sacrificial) offering and contextually to the subject who has suffered the wrong. And again the Scandinavian *Förnerlamb*, in which even the image of the sacrificial lamb appears; the Dutch *slacht-offer*, which explicitly recalls the subject slaughtered in

the rite of sacrifice. The same moreover is found in modern Hebrew and in many Arabic-derived languages (van Dijk 2009) in which the idea of martyrdom, of the immolation of the victim for propitiatory purposes, still echoes. Entirely different is the meaning that is echoed by the words employed in many Asian countries, and more generally in the East, to refer to this same subject: in Japan, for example, the translation of the term victim corresponds to what we would define as the "wounded, suffering part" – where the word employed is *higaisha* (被害者), formed of three *kanji* that can be translated as "receiving", "harm/injury" and "someone/person." The theme of sacrifice, which is pervasive and recurring in Western culture, disappears here, as does the call for higher suffering caused by the restoration of social order, peace and harmony between humans and gods. In contrast, Eastern cultures are permeated by the depiction of a victim who, having suffered harm, needs to be helped and supported by the community because he or she is part of it. Not an isolated or separate monad to be immolated in the useful sacrifice, but part of the community which, precisely because of this, cannot remain indifferent to his suffering but rather must take charge of it, must take care for it. For that harm belongs to everyone, and no one can claim to be not responsible.

At the same time, as far as Indo-European languages are concerned, it should be noted that from about 1600 onward, particularly in Europe, the progressive humanization of the figure of Jesus Christ, that began with the Renaissance, will increasingly facilitate the use and dissemination of terms such as "sacrificial victim" and "expiatory victim" to refer to the Son of the Father. He is the one who through martyrdom redeemed the world from original sin, the true sacrificial lamb (the very Holy Lamb). From this point on, the sacrificial gesture will invariably be associated with the victim condition, marking it through two essential features: the presumption of innocence that the victim would enjoy and, secondly, the possibility of forgiveness, in the image of the Son of God on the cross (van Dijk 2009). The implications of such a representation carry important weight in terms of how we think of and depict the victim today. The sacrifice also suggests the impossibility to modify the events and their outcome, narrating a fate that seems already sealed and for which no different solution or alternative is allowed.

Only from the middle of the twentieth century – particularly since the end of World War II – did the concept of victim, as it is understood today, begin to establish itself in common parlance by being extended to a plurality of conditions, individual and group, also indicating subjects affected by crimes and offenses, disasters and catastrophes, violence and atrocities. It will supplant the concept of the oppressed, widespread in previous centuries and particularly in the 19th

century, thus implying a real change on the conceptual and socio-cultural level. In fact, the notion of oppression refers to specific structural conditions, mainly of a socio-economic order, destined to completely invest the biography of the individual, expressing itself within logics marked by domination and submission (Pitch 2009). Peculiarity of this condition is to unite all those who are forced to experience the same situation (of poverty, for example, of exploitation) within a social system divided into classes. However, exactly being ascribable to a precise social group will limit the ability of the oppressed to elicit closeness and empathy from the wider community; on the contrary, the notion of victim by invoking the element of vulnerability common to everyone, will provoke more widespread feelings of identification and solidarity.

However, it should be noted how in more recent times the terminological debate has highlighted some critical issues inherent in the word victim and its use, pointing out how the word "victim" seems to imply a certain degree of passivity, withdrawal into oneself, inability to react. In this perspective we note, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, an increasing prevalence of the word 'survivor', which seems referred to "(...) an element of agency and inner strength on the part of the person concerned to take at least some control over their circumstances and to take action to survive the trauma that has come their way" (Corteen et al. 2016: 264). So, while it is almost common to associate to the word "victim" some undesirable qualities such as weakness, the tendency to conceal, a lack of control over external events, powerlessness and shame, the word "survivor" suggests a condition of resilience, the ability to struggle against negative situations, the capability to overcome. Even the possibility to react, that seems to be neglected or denied within the word "victim." That may also explain why so many victims in more recent times refuse to be labeled by the social system as well as by the media and in the political discourse as victims. As suggested by a number of research in the field of victimology (Fohring 2018; Vezzadini 2018), to avoid the victim label is an act of self-preservation and self-protection, offering the opportunity to give coherent accounts or explanations of what happened and, at the same time, offering continuity to one's self-identity among past, present and future.

1.1 The contribution of Social Sciences to victim's recognition

The realization that the notion of victim – though necessary to describe the transitory condition of the offended subject – cannot be employed to summarize the complexity of human experience has led some disciplines, philosophy, and sociology first and foremost, to emphasize the notion of recognition as a

possible outcome of the victimization process and at the same time a landing place to strive for. In truth, it is precisely the social context that often constitutes an impediment toward this goal, giving rise to obstacles that confine the subject in the limbo of partial or limited recognition, or even disallowing and denying this possibility completely (Vezzadini 2012). In fact, the process of victimization can be described as a process of violation of trust expectations (Vezzadini 2006), those fundamental pillars that operate at different levels – conscious and unconscious – of existence constituting its barycenter, giving meaning and significance to the social relations that develop there. The victim can thus be represented as a betrayed subject, deprived of trust at different levels: for example, that of interpersonal and community relations where violence, injustice, crime takes place; that of relations with institutions that are not always able to prevent, but also to defend, protect, respond with authentic gestures of justice to the offense perpetrated. But such betrayal, or deprivation of trust, pertains to even deeper, almost subterranean dimensions – and therefore all the more difficult to unveil and cure. For example, trust in oneself, in one's capacity for self-determination and choice, in one's ability to discern between what is good and bad, right and wrong, in one's resources, in one's ability to react and respond constructively to injustice. And again, trust in the harmonious flow of everyday life, of existence itself when threatened, violated, wounded by unexpected events, for which victims often have no words to describe. A pain, a sense of disorientation that muffles the voice, that reduces to silence. As sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1963) recalled, when faced with the betrayal of fiduciary expectations there are two paths facing the subject: employing the theatrical metaphor, one can first decide to "withdraw from the scene." That is, to remove oneself from society, to isolate oneself so as not to be confronted every day with the visibility of the offense, its "tangibility." But such a strategy, far from being an effective ploy often turns out to be a trap, because in loneliness and self-referential closure negative feelings are amplified, humiliation increases and is often accompanied by the desire for revenge. Alternatively, there is the possibility of "returning to the scene": this choice also has high costs, because it involves continually confronting the pain and discomfort of the wrong suffered; nevertheless, it contains the possibility of re-acting, of opening oneself to the world by restarting events, rejecting the resignation that follows violence and reaffirming one's being, one's presence. "Returning to the scene" means deciding to re-write one's story in a different ink, through one's own eyes and the words one chooses to use – rather than those imposed by others – thus recalling the vivid expression of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2004), when he asserted that for the subject "being able to say" is equivalent to "doing things with words."

The concept of social recognition, as well as those of misrecognition or denial, are at the center of the reflection of a number of scholars who, through their works, have helped to denounce the ambivalence of the social gaze toward others considered as "different," highlighting the complexity of the condition, but also the indispensable struggle that sometimes needs to be undertaken to put an end to the overpowering and affirm one's own identity and history.

In this perspective, the contribution of Alfred Schutz, a philosopher and sociologist with a phenomenological approach – Viennese of Jewish origin and forced into exile in the United States following Hitler's rise to power – is particularly opportune with regard to the fertile parallelism that arises between the figure of the victim and those of the stranger and the homecomer (Vezzadini 2012), to whom he dedicated two of his best-known essays. First of all, it should be emphasized that among the fundamental concepts of this author's thought, the concept of "schemes of reference" has a relevant place, referring to the cultural patterns experienced from birth by each individual as inserted in an intersubjective world already organized and traversed by pre-established meanings, necessary in order to delimit reality. Therefore, through the processes of "typification" of the experiences the subject comes into contact with objects, taking for granted the idea that others in the group may have of them. Thinking, deciding, reacting, and making choices appear to be based on cultural patterns totally familiar, functioning for its members as an unquestioned scheme of reference, which allow an immediate and apparently easy understanding of everyday life. But it may happen – and this is where the parallelism with the victim emerges – that the intrinsic validity of such explanations ("their truth") is called into question by an unexpected or dramatic event ("the crisis"), becoming those social, cultural, emotional and moral references less certain and secure. Those schemes of orientation and interpretation then appear unpredictable, often indecipherable or incomprehensible: they actually do not work anymore, while revealing the difficulty and the relativity of "thinking as usual." The system of relevance adopted in the past is no more able to give meaning to the new situations experienced, so the subject need to question everything that until a short time before seemed to be unquestionable. From these concepts, Schutz will modulate the figures at the center of the two important essays with an autobiographical slant: *The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology* (1944), which traces the landing in the United States as an exile and the difficult confrontation with the new reality, and *The Homecomer* (1945), which recalls the experience at the front during World War I, on the border with Italy, and the return to a homeland shattered and humiliated by the conflict. Symbolic figures, to which traits and characteristics of victims can be juxtaposed precisely because of the condition of disorientation experienced:

> If only one of these assumptions ceases to stand the test, thinking as usual becomes unworkable. (…) The cultural pattern no longer functions as a system of tested recipes at hand; it reveals that its applicability is restricted to a specific historical situation. Yet the stranger, by reason of his personal crisis, does not share the above-mentioned basic assumptions. He becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group (Schutz 1944: 502).

Such disorientation arises from the new awareness of one's own vulnerability and the experience of the fragility on which human and social relationships rest. Similarly, victimization is an experience that forces one to place oneself outside the perimeter of the ordinary, the "as usual," and therefore it is configured as a difficult passage to accept, define, manage and overcome. As Hannah Arendt points out in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), the victim feels that he or she no longer belongs to the familiar world; and Schutz himself – who that dismemberment of identity knew on his own skin – grasps this passage clearly when in the essay on *The Homecomer*, while recalling that "'To feel at home' is an expression of the highest degree of familiarity and intimacy" (Schutz 1945: 370), a little later adds:

> This is the aspect of the social structure of the home world for the man who lives in it. The aspect changes entirely for the man who has left home. To him life at home is no longer accessible in immediacy. He has stepped, so to speak, into another social dimension not covered by the system of coordinates used as the scheme of reference for life at home (Schutz 1945: 372).

Nevertheless, Schutz will rely on more optimistic conclusions. Indeed, he hopes for a return to the world of family and affection by trusting in a community eager, in turn, to rebuild social ties broken by the advent of the "crisis," opening up to mutual recognition between its own expectations and those of the homecomer, accepting that something has inevitably changed in the meantime in both the conditions:

> Yet, the change in the system of relevance and in the degree of intimacy just described is differently experienced by the assent one and by the home group (Schutz 1945: 373).
> In the beginning it is not only the homeland that shows to the homecomer an unaccustomed face. The homecomer appears equally strange to those who expect him, and the thick air about him will keep him unknown. Both the homecomer and the welcomer will need the help of a Mentor to "make them wise to things" (Schutz 1945: 376).

With regard to the reactions of the social context and their important influence on the subject's self-perception, fundamental is the contribution of Erving Goffman in *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (first edition in 1963). Here are considered the practices of inferiorization through which society, by applying a label most often negative, distinguishes and places people within specific (sub)categories. Such a label is precisely a *stigma*, for the Ancient Greeks a mark of recognition that makes the subject "different" from others (the "normal ones"), thus not entirely deserving of belonging to the same social consortium:

> By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority (...). We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one (...) (Goffman 1968: 15-16).

Similarly, the victim is also to some extent a "marked" subject: not only because he or she inevitably bears on himself or herself the wounds – moral, psychic, emotional and physical – of the event suffered; but because the one who suffers harm becomes, in the eyes of the community, a subject different "from before" and again "dissimilar" from others. It is precisely the social gaze directed at the victims that explains why it is so difficult to relate to them: society, Goffman reminds us, is often unprepared, as well as afraid, of those whom it defines as "different," from which may result in difficulties to elaborate appropriate, respectful, balanced reactions. And just as Goffman narrates in memorable pages about the figure of the cripple who wanted to dance and was therefore surrounded by the embarrassment of the bystanders that felt uncomfortable while he was not adhering to social expectations relating to "his role," even with regard to the victim the feelings are often contradictory and ambivalent: fear and distrust, reserve and curiosity, pity and discomfort:

> I also learned that the cripple must be careful not to act differently from what people expect him to do. Above all they expect the cripple to be crippled; to be disabled and helpless: to be inferior to themselves, and they will become suspicious and insecure if the cripple falls short of these expectations (Goffman 1968: 134).

At other times, the stigmatized persons, like the victims, become the recipient of discredit and forms of devaluation, blaming them for the incident and con-

fining them within dynamics of marginalization and social exclusion. Then the humiliation and shame originated by the misunderstanding drive the subjects to isolation and social withdrawal, experiencing feelings of distrust, anger, frustration and hostility that expose them to new suffering and further processes of victimization.

In more recent times, the theme of social recognition-and its denial-has been the focus of reflection by German philosopher and sociologist Axel Honneth, considered a leading reference of the so-called "last generation" of the Frankfurt School. The connection between the concepts of *Anerkennung* and *Mißachtung* is analyzed in his work *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (translated into English in 1995 and first published in German in 1992) where, employing a theoretical and methodological approach that aims to bring liberal positions and communitarian doctrines into dialogue, Honneth questions the social processes that lead to the recognition of the subject in contemporary societies, and the places where lack of recognition can occur instead. He considers three moments – or realms – fundamental to the construction of personal identity, namely that of primary relations, legal relations and finally that of broader ethical communitarian relations. In this framework, where recognition is missed, partial or denied, the instrument of the "struggle for recognition" (a concept indebted to the youthful writings of G.W.F. Hegel) becomes the indispensable act aimed at the creation of more ethically mature relations of recognition, a prerequisite to the development of a concrete community of free citizens. With the term *Mißachtung* the author refers to any mode of denied recognition, which is profoundly negative because it limits each person's freedom of action, affecting the positive self-image and self-understanding as a result of the social relations in which the subject is embedded. The approval of others, in fact, their consideration or appreciation, are fundamental elements for every human being. Misrecognition thus provides an ethical reason for social struggles of a different nature, that is, for all those conflicts present in the social structure capable of producing victims: of mistreatment and abuse, harassment or prevarication, violations of fundamental rights (political, social, civil). The process of "reification" that results from such practices deprives the individual of his value, degrades him to a mere object or instrument with respect to other ends, making it impossible for him to dispose of himself freely and consciously, his body, his will and self-determination. According to Honneth, we see such a process of "reification" operating in contemporary societies: here it is told that all citizens enjoy the same rights, but in fact their concrete enjoyment is tied to the power dynamics of economic reality, to the actual distribution of economic resources within a given social context.

Where this distribution is not balanced, but rather unbalanced in favor of one social class or group, the sense of discontent, frustration and humiliation is bound to increase, pushing the individual out of the community dimension. However, estrangement from the social context is not the only solution. On the contrary, precisely the struggle, at the basis of which is the feeling of indignation (as opposed to that of resignation) becomes the moral *medium* aimed at the attainment of a later and higher stage of recognition, toward the acquisition of a more mature – though never final – condition of social justice. A recognition that, with regard to the three fundamental areas mentioned above, will enable the subject to strengthen self-confidence within the primary relationships of love and affection (the "significant others"), self-respect in legal relationships – as the bearer of rights and simultaneously of normative obligations to others – and finally self-esteem, thanks to the supportive and authentically inclusive gaze deferred by the community.

2. Studying victims and victimization processes: theoretical perspectives

2.1 The Positivistic approach

To try to understand more fully the ambivalences, and indeed ambiguities, behind the word "victim," it is necessary to take a historical-temporal and socio-cultural step backwards. The cross-reference is to the constructs developed by the Positive School of criminology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and their translation, a few decades later, to the newly born discipline that studies victims: victimology. Here the notion of *victim hierarchy* will be consolidated, destined to have important reflections in current events and for our reflection on victimization processes.

Positivist thought – in the field of socio-criminology and beyond victimology – regards the elaboration of typologies on the methodological level as central. Uniting positions that are all in all not overlapping, such as those of the French sociologists Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim or the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, are in fact a series of constructs among which the first and most relevant consists in considering and analyzing social facts as things by applying to them the method of investigation typical of the "hard sciences." Thus, the close and deterministic relationship between causes and effects is emphasized, applying this axiom to human behavior and social dynamics. This premise gives an account of the elaboration and classification of types, and typologies, within which to frame and explain the variety of human behavioral phenomena – specifically, for Cesare Lombroso, crimes and crimi-

nal behaviors. Actually, the figure of the "born delinquent" (as outlined in his main work *L'uomo delinquente* [1876 first edition in Italian]), will later influence the studies not only of many other authors in Italy, Germany, and North America, but will have important implications precisely in the definition of a "born victim," the latent victim of whom German criminologist Hans von Hentig will speak in 1948. Without to forget the influence of criminological positivism on fascism in Italy, through the contributions in the socio-legal field of some of its exponents, and finally the adherence to the regime of some of them. Victim typologies constitute from the beginning an attempt to interpret and simplify the complexity of reality, linking different types of victimization to specific psycho-social and bio-anthropological characteristics of the individual, or group, that suffered the offense. While certainly some merits should be acknowledged to such an approach, such as constituting an attempt to respond to the need to develop prevention strategies based on victims' characteristics, its limitations should not be overlooked. The first, and perhaps most relevant, is that of interpreting victimization as solely the result of individual or behavioral characteristics of the subject, means to underestimate or totally disregard the impact of social factors and power dynamics within society. It is exactly what happened with the notion of *victim proneness* proposed by von Hentig, which refers to the *latent victim*, such by natural determinism (i.e., his or her personality traits) inevitably and repeatedly exposed to abuses and violations. Secondly, victim typologies multiply and amplify the presence of stereotypes and prejudices in the head of the victim figure: typical is the case of the concept of *victim precipitation*, elaborated in the late 1950s and 1960s by Wolfgang and Amir, in which they emphasized not only the eventual "participation" of the victims in the dynamics of crime but above all their *responsibility*, and by extension their *culpability*.

Victim types thus are based on the guilt/innocence dichotomy, from which derives the victim hierarchy whose implications, even today, should not be underestimated. A hierarchy that is functional to a precise political discourse and a corresponding media narrative that ostensibly places all victims at the center while, in fact, it selects some deemed most deserving of attention – and then support, help, recognition – at the expense of all others, based on criteria of usefulness and functionality with respect to the system they want to preserve. At the top of such victim hierarchy is the ideal victim, innocent, pure, totally irresponsible with respect to what has been suffered. At the opposite end of the pyramid, at the bottom, stand the other victims: those considered as not entirely deserving of attention, support, recognition since they too are responsible for what happened. The latter are referred to as having partly or wholly

"contributed to their own fate," and this is because of specific personality and character traits, life choices, having engaged in behaviors indicated as unsuitable or socially unacceptable. The offense suffered is thus reinterpreted considering the deterministic cause-and-effect nexus: if those individuals, it is stated explicitly, had not exposed themselves through questionable actions, words or conduct, nothing would have happened to them. Here, then, the latter also "deserve" different treatment from institutions and communities, placing them on the scale of social, political, and institutional recognition at a lower level; and that is precisely because of their intrinsic characteristics, the adopted behavior, or their belonging to groups and social categories considered as inferior and undesirable. A discourse that is firmly rooted in positivist thinking, bringing stereotypes and prejudices in a field of study – the one of victimology – that already unfortunately contemplates many.

In order to fully understand the implications of such a reading, it is worth recalling where von Hentig himself, a German criminal psychologist and politician of Jewish descent forced to expatriate to the United States by the advent of Nazism, was starting from. In 1948 he published a handbook of criminology entitled *The Criminal and his Victim: Studies in the Sociobiology of Crime* (von Hentig 1979)*:* a work perhaps not otherwise memorable except for that last chapter XII entitled *The Contribution of the Victim to the Genesis of Crime (Part IV The Victim)*. Here the author questions the possible role played by the victim in the dynamics of crime by presenting the first typology on the basis of the concept of *mutuality;* thus, consigning to the history of social and criminological sciences the indelible image of the relationship between victim and offender borrowed from that between prey and predator in the struggle for survival in the animal world. The author asserts:

> I maintain that many criminal deeds are more indicative of a subject-object relation than of the perpetrator alone. There is a definitive mutuality of some sort (...) In the long process leading gradually to the unlawful result, credit and debit are not infrequently indistinguishable (von Hentig 1979: 384).

He further adds:

> It would not be correct nor complete to speak of a carnivorous animal, its habits and characteristics, without looking at the prey on which it lives. In certain sense the animals which devour and those that are devoured complement each other. Although it looks one-sided as far as for the final outcome goes, it is not a totally unilateral form of relationship. They work upon each other profoundly and continually, even before the moment of disaster (von Hentig 1979: 385).

The future prey, therefore, takes an active part in the dynamics through even an initial provocation. This is what happens in the human world, says the author, where the victim is more rarely completely innocent, while it is possible to find a share of responsibility even in the most serious cases. It is precisely from here that the strand of studies known as positivist victimology begins, which understands this branch of study as ancillary to criminology, encompassing the totality of biological, psychological, sociological, and legal-criminological knowledge concerning the offended person. Specific analysis will be devoted to the personality of the victim, her biological, psychological, and moral traits, her socio-cultural characteristics, possible relationships with the offender and the role she plays in the genesis and dynamics of the crime (Fattah 1967). The approach, also known as *conservative victimology*, is interested in the study of factors that contribute to the non-random selection of victims, and elaborates the types of victims who, based on certain bio-anthropological, psychic and social characteristics, ultimately turn out to be more predisposed to suffer a crime, violation, wrong or abuse[1]. Thus, von Hentig imagines in the very last lines of his volume, "With a thorough knowledge of the interrelations between doer and sufferer new approaches to the detection of crime will be opened" (von Hentig 1979: 450).

But the approach, as mentioned, contemplates various risks, the most obvious referring to the notion of *victim precipitation*, coined in the 1950s by U.S. criminologist Marvin Wolfgang and later taken up by his student Menachem Amir. In research related to the phenomenology of homicide in the city of Philadelphia, the author in fact indicates by the term *victim precipitation* "those criminal homicides in which the victim is a direct, positive precipitator in the crime" (Wolfgang 1957: 2). In particular, the working definition emphasizes that:

> The role of the victim is characterized by as having been the first in the homicide drama to use physical force directed against his subsequent slayer. The victim-

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[1]   Examples of typologies of victims could be found in von Hentig's volume (first edition in 1948), where the Author distinguishes born victims and society-made victims (the young, the female, the old or the mentally defective victims are in the first group, while immigrants, minorities, dull normal, the depressed, the acquisitive and the wanton, the lonesome and the heartbroken, tormentors and the blocked-exempted-fighting victims are in the second one); in Mendelsohn's typology of victims, which are classified in accordance with the degree of their guilty in the contribution to the crime (the completely innocent victim, the victim with minor guilt, the one guilty as the offender, the victim more guilty and the mostly guilty victim, until the victim who is guilty alone - 1956). During the Seventies, Fattah designed five major classes as following: nonparticipating victims, latent or predisposed victims, provocative victims, participating victims, and false victims; then Schafer elaborated a very well-known typology representing the unrelated victim, the provocative victim, the precipitative victim, the biologically weak victim, the socially weak victim, the self-victimizing victim and the political one (Schafer 1977).

precipitated cases are those in which the victim was the first to show and use a deadly weapon, to strike a blow in an altercation-in short, the first to commence the interplay or resort to physical violence (Wolfgang 1957: 2).

The term is correlated with some specific factors, recurring in 26 percent of the cases examined, just like the presence of a previous relationship between the two parties, the abuse of alcohol and drugs, the presence of previous arrest records for both victim and offender. Wolfgang's study, which had a micro-sociological slant and thus never aimed at expressing greater representativeness, was immediately subjected to numerous criticisms, mainly methodological in nature, due to the sources used (the reports of the local Police Department, in which the definition of the crime situation was greatly affected by the attributionist perspective of the suspect/defendant). Although detractors often pointed out the obvious limitations of such a study, the findings allowed for later theoretical developments such as, for example, the Proximity and the Equivalent group hypothesis (Karmen 2004) in which the similarities existing in certain situations between aggressor and victim are highlighted; a perspective applied especially to studies of the dynamics within organized crime. Renewed criticisms were made of the concept of *victim precipitation* in its later application by Amir (1968) in cases of forcible rape, in the same geographic-spatial context as the homicide study. Here the working definition employed by the author immediately proved particularly problematic, describing

those rape situations in which the victim actually, or so it was deemed, agreed to sexual relations but retracted before the actual act or did not react strongly enough when the suggestion was made by the offender(s). The term also applies to cases in risky or vulnerable situations, marred with sexuality, especially when the victim uses what could be interpreted as indecency in language and gestures, or constitute what could be taken as an invitation to sexual relations (Amir 1968: 495).

Although the author already acknowledged at the time how such a definition was undeniably problematic by attributing relevance exclusively to the aggressor's point of view, with respect to a crime in which stereotypes and prejudices have been contributing to the discrediting and blaming of victims for centuries, in fact it was not really challenged. On the contrary, even today it is reflected, and forcefully so, in media representations of rape victims, and more generally of gender-based violence, finding numerous echoes even in the dynamics within the courtrooms: for example, in criminal proceedings against sexual violence, where victims often experience profound forms of violation of their

dignity and further forms of victimization precisely by those who would have the duty to defend and protect them.

2.2 Towards a global victimology

Approximately at the same time as von Hentig was questioning the possible responsibilities of the crime victim, Benjamin Mendelsohn, in Romania, first introduced the neologism "*victimhood*" in late 1930 in a long unpublished paper on victims of rape. Despite a beginning traceable to the sphere of criminal and criminological sciences with a clear positivist matrix (precisely see the classification he elaborated starting from the concept of innocence/guilt of victims), in the subsequent developments of his thought Mendelsohn would arrive at quite other considerations capable of placing the universal notion of "suffering of all victims" at the center of his study (Mendelsohn 1976). Thus, while affirming the need to fund an autonomous discipline conceptually and methodologically capable of studying victims, regardless of the causes of their condition (crimes, catastrophes, abuse of power), he describes victimology as a *general phenomenon*, "the science of victims and the victim," whose goal will be to prevent further forms of suffering. The author's merit is that he is the first to have grasped the eminently "social" character of suffering, its social roots, uniting all those who suffer and paying attention to the possible causes that provoke stigmatization, isolation, and exclusion in contemporary societies.

Mendelsohn's reflections have found an important and wide-ranging response. A growing number of scholars have seized on the call to give birth to a *general victimology*, capable of promoting an autonomous approach to analysis, albeit in dialogue with other disciplines and open to comparison. Thus, it is argued, victimization is rooted first and foremost in social dynamics, from gender inequalities to racism, to forms of injustice and exploitation that affect the most vulnerable; from the violation of rights in the workplace to the lack of protections in health care or respect for the environment; and finally taking root in misgovernance and inequities consummated paradoxically by the justice system itself. This is the theme that animates the progressive or radical side of the new discipline – referred to as *radical victimology*, whose goal is the unraveling and removal of the pockets of discrimination and marginalization most often tolerated by the system for its own benefit. Also moving in this perspective is the humanistic approach of the discipline – or *human victimology* – which focuses on the protection of violated human, social, civil and political rights, helping to denounce a system that, while claiming to recognize such rights on a theoretical level, in fact denies them by tying them in their actual enjoyment to economic reality.

In particular, the reflection brought by the American sociologist and political scientist Robert Elias (1986), among the proponents of a *global victimology* within which the different souls recalled will converge – *general, radical* and *human victimology* – remains fundamental. According to the author, new relevance must be given to the political element, understood in the noblest sense of the term, that is, as the ability of politics to reorient and redirect research in this area, avoiding preconceived interpretations or, worse, rhetoric definition of the problem. The call for the role that politics should play constitutes, in Elias, the underlying theme of his entire extensive production, requiring that it would be able to foster and undertake concrete actions aimed at reducing the multiple risks of victimization present in societies. However, while Elias urges "the" policy to assume an effective role in counteracting the causes of victimization, he sharply criticizes "the" de facto policies devised and implemented, denouncing their often manipulative and instrumental traits. The actual – only partly paradoxical – outcome of such "attention" can be easily grasped if one observes that, even in the face of the plurality of experiences gained in recent decades in the areas of support and assistance, today many victims remain victims, even experiencing further forms of re-victimization by those institutions that should be taking charge of them (Elias 1993). One can thus understand why, already in his most important work entitled *The Politics of Victimization. Victims, Victimology and Human Rights* (1986), Elias affirmed the need to

> dissolve the "mental prison" that often characterizes how we think about victimization, and substitute a new, broader conception that considers not only common crime but also corporate and state crime, that examines not only individual criminals but also institutional wrongdoing, and that encompasses not merely traditional crime but all crime against humanity. In sum, we will wed victimology to human rights. A "new" victimology would, ironically, only return us back to our original conception of victimology, established over forty years ago. Back then, we defined victimology as the study of *all* victims, not merely *crime* victims. We should recapture the focus (Elias 1986: 7).

2.3 Radical victimology and the critique to the politicization of victims' cause

To "recapture the focus" as suggested by Elias, we need to also consider the political role victims of crime – but not only – play in contemporary Western societies. In this perspective social sciences offer an important contribution to reveal the instrumentalization and manipulation by politicians of both parties searching for political consensus, helping to distinguish and separate "the Facts and the Rhetoric" as in the title of a very well-known article written by E.A. Fattah (1992).

In the beginning was Richard Quinney. A Marxian philosopher and sociologist, he was among the founders of Radical Victimology and probably the first to critically question "who" is the victim in capitalist societies, that is, what are the defining criteria and parameters employed inside a socio-political and economic-cultural context governed by the tyranny of the labor, of ever-increasing productivity. In the essay *Who is the victim?* (1972) – "not an innocent question," the author emphasizes – he questions the function assumed by this subject within a system divided into classes, in which those who dominate and command also hold the ownership of the means of production, having the power to condition the cultural models of the subordinate classes. Within this framework, the criminal law has no neutral value; on the contrary, it constitutes the instrument with which control is exercised – "discipline and punish," as stated by Michel Foucault (1975) – to maintain the social order. Actually, the latter reflects the values and goals of the dominant classes, which can thus maintain – through the enforcement of criminal law – the predominance over the subordinate classes. Deviance, especially politically motivated deviance, must be vigorously resisted, legitimizing the use of force to keep the *status quo* unchanged: "While every act may conceivably involve a victim, only those acts that threaten the welfare of the ruling class become crimes. Social harm, no matter how abstract, is a reality decided upon by those in power" (Quinney 1974: 315). In this context, the victim assumes a central role and performs a primary political function, distracting public opinion from the possible failures of the ruling classes and, at the same time, authorizing the application of increasingly severe and securitarian criminal and sanction policies, in relation to which the victim becomes a flag to be waved by invoking order and security. Its mere presence justifies the intervention of force and repressive measures to restore and guarantee social order:

> The presence of a victim, then, the one officially designated, is an indication that the existing social order has been challenged. Which is also to say, the rhetoric of victimization is one more weapon the ruling class uses to justify and perpetuate its own existence. The victim, a concrete one, apart from the state itself, is held up as a defense of the social order (Quinney 1974: 315-316).

However, it would be wrong to think that all victims serve this purpose: in truth, only those functional to the interests of the dominant classes will be invested with such status, political and social recognition, while the others (Quinney cites for example the victims of police force and brutality, of war, of the "correctional" system, the victims of state violence, and oppression) will not be recognized at all. They are excluded because they are considered a threat to that

social order that discriminates against them, producing suffering and marginalization for them. The victim, in this perspective, is thus a useful, functional, and relative concept, just as relative and partial (i.e., "biased") is the notion of justice that is adapted to the needs of the classes from time to time in power: this is what populisms feed on, Quinney reminds us, in every age.

At the same time, the victim as a subject capable of catalyzing the emotions and feelings of the community in the face of the offense perpetrated also performs another function, readily captured and outlined by Jonathan Simon in his most important work, suggestively titled *Governing through Crime. How the war on crime transformed American democracy and created a culture of fear* (2007). A role, and a function, that clearly emerges in the aftermath of the terroristic attack of 9/11, 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York, becoming the element capable of unifying societies that are profoundly differentiated and fragmented internally (for ethnic, religious, economic, and political, linguistic-cultural reasons etc.), thus always at risk of implosion, clashes, and conflict. Therefore, in contemporary societies the victim – sometimes described as a martyr, sometimes as a hero – becomes the symbol of the more general condition of exposure to the risk of crimes, disasters, catastrophes. A condition of manifest vulnerability which is easy to empathize, becoming the tangible symbol of it. Thus, Simon reminds us, it is precisely in the guise of victims of crime that Americans – and not only they – can more easily imagine themselves as united: because the threat of an offence helps to reshape the differences between them, urging them to march united against the source of their anxieties, the enemy to be fought. In this perspective, political power has much to gain, and looking benevolently at victims; declaring oneself for their defense, protection and vindication of wrongs violated is always useful in terms of political consensus. Self-describing oneself as "on the side of the victims" is an effective slogan, not particularly onerous and instead very fruitful in campaigning, as E. A. Fattah reminded over thirty years ago:

> Crime victims are not the first group whose cause is exploited by unpopular governments seeking a higher rating in opinion polls, by opportunist politicians seeking electoral votes, or by incompetent public officials trying to detract attention from their failure to control crime or reduce its incidence. Showing concern for crime victims acts as a cover-up to the inefficiency of the system, and its inability to prevent victimization (Fattah 1992: 45).

The result, continued the author, is the "politicization of the victims' cause," while only the attentive voter is able to notice that very little is done for the

victims by allocating adequate resources – economic, material and properly trained personnel – for their support and help.

2.4 Vulnerability, symbolic violence and intersectionality

According to the perspective adopted by radical victimologists – like, for example Quinney – victimization processes can be understood by looking at power and power relations. Giving primacy to these types of dimensions means focusing firstly on the notion of vulnerability, as socially constructed. In this perspective, are important not only law breakings or the violations of criminal laws but also the analysis and the interpretation of social dynamics of exclusion and discrimination in contemporary society. Vulnerability is also at the roots of dynamics of oppression in particular when they are exercised in contexts of poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and marginalization by government policies or private institutions and international corporations (Elias 1986).

For these reasons, important is the notion of symbolic violence elaborated by French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu in the early 1970s. The concept refers to acts that are violent in content but which, however, because of the ways they are imparted and administered and, above all, because of their introjection by the recipients – who perceive them as "natural" – are not actually considered harmful or coercive. These are forms of violence that, in Bourdieu's own words, are "gentle, imperceptible"; yet they play a decisive role in many social situations by implying tangible consequences referred to power relations between those who dominate and those who are dominated. Symbolic violence, as a form of violence exercised upon a social agent with his/her "complicity," is difficult to be recognized and unveiled, since its daily concealment is ensured by social coverings: for example, the view of the world and things, the conceptual and cognitive categories with which reality is named, language, and the attribution of social roles. Therefore, this notion appears today to be fundamental to understanding those processes of victimization in which violence functions by resting precisely on the socio-cultural and cognitive structures of those who suffer it: in other words, it is as if the victims have deeply incorporated – unconsciously – thought and bodily structures, categories of perception and models of evaluation, capable of silently shaping their awareness. Thus, the violence exerted by the social structure is not overt, explicit and aggressive, but rather expresses itself subtly, forcing its victims into marginality and obedience. Emblematic is the case of male domination (Bourdieu 2014), investigated through the notion of habitus. The concept of symbolic violence also allows to unveil the ambivalences of culture: in fact, the latter, instead of contributing to the self-determination of the subject and his/her freedom, can become a

legitimizing factor with respect to violent acts, since it is based on the sharing of the communicative codes employed between those who oppress and those who are oppressed. From this perspective, it is not enough to say – this is Bourdieu's harsh critique of Leftist political thought – that it is necessary to make the dominated aware of such dynamics, since they themselves are often part of that "game"; rather, what is needed is a constant and in-depth work of questioning and revising the cognitive and thought structures, and the forms of interpretation of the world, that contribute to legitimizing and concealing this kind of violence: language, in particular, and the use of it by the media in our societies.

The notion of symbolic violence can be considered, from a certain point of view, as prodromal to the concept, developed in recent times, of intersectionality, elaborated by the civil rights advocate and professor concerned in race and gender issues, Kimberlé Crenshaw, since 1993, which has important implications at the social and cultural levels. The author focuses first on the concept of power relations, and thus on the layering of these relations within the social contest. Considering them as an articulated and dense set of reciprocal constraints, allows us to grasp the multiple consequences that they determine on individuals and on the categories to which they belong. The result is first and foremost the creation of a hierarchy of individuals and categories, built on the basis of relations of subordination and social exclusion, pandering to the interests of the ruling classes, in order to favor the maintenance of their power and the *status quo*. Specifically, the author states, in U.S. society two axes of oppression underlie the social dynamics of marginalization and, indeed, oppression of social groups considered inferior: an axis of sexist oppression (that concerns the biological axis of women) and another axis of racist oppression (regarding in particular Afro-American people). In the context of contemporary social forces, the combination of these two axes and positions produces different life experiences for Black women (compared, for example, to white women or black men), different social expectations as well as peculiar self-perceptions, a system of continuous discrimination and the complete impossibility to recognize one's needs. According to Crenshaw, the aim is the preservation of the existing structure, through the exploitation and the – cultural, political, professional – marginalization of some categories (2017).

3. "Ideal" victims, between stereotypes and prejudices

The media and political tendency to propose and disseminate images of the victim as an innocent and defenseless subject has important reflections regarding

first the full, authentic and non-instrumental recognition of all victims, of every victim. It should be noted, moreover, how such an interpretative approach is based – more or less explicitly, as the case may be – on a process of simplification aimed at recounting the victim universe inside a dichotomy: on the one hand, the victim against the offender, represented as belonging to different and antagonistic worlds, where no dialogue, confrontation and much less encounter can be imagined (thus denying a priori any possibility to restorative justice practices); on the other hand, within the victim universe itself, a contraposition arises between deserving victims and victims less deserving of attention, listening and support from institutions and the community, depending on the characteristics attributed to them. It is precisely from these observations that the development of the concept of the "ideal victim" and its critique by Norwegian sociologist and criminologist Nils Christie, in 1986, and later, in 2007, by American humanitarian law scholar Erica Bouris, will originate.

3.1 The social construction of the ideal victim

Christie's famous essay on the ideal victim opens these words:

> By "ideal victim" I have instead in mind a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are gave the complete and legitimate status of being a victim. The ideal victim is, in my use of the term, a sort of public status of the same type and level of abstraction as that for example of a "hero" or a "traitor." It is difficult to count these ideal victims. Just as it is difficult to count heroes (Christie 1986: 12).

The notion of the ideal victim in the author's depiction – partly due to the well-known example of the elderly woman visiting her sick sister on a public street during the day, where she is attacked by a stranger who brutally robs her, then dissipating her loot in alcohol at the pub – immediately takes on the characteristics of a critique of the stereotypical narrative of "who" should be considered a victim today. A representation valued by politicians, across the board, and supported by the media, indicating who "deserves" to be labeled as such, hence the validation of victim status and the consequent benefits in terms of assistance, help, support. The ideal victim is thus such from a series of attributes that are recognized and that make her worthy of attention and interest. The five attributes identified and described by Christie are the following:

> (1) The victim is weak. Sick, old or very young people are particularly well suited as ideal victims. (2) The victim was carrying out a respectable project –

caring for her sister. (3) She was where she could not possibly be blamed for being – in the street during the daytime. (4) The offender was big and bad. (5) The offender was unknown and in no personal relationship to her. (Christie 1986: 12).

Then she (or he), first of all, must be considered as a weak subject; that is, mind you: not simply "being weak," but being considered as such by those observing from the outside. Weak, by definition, are children, women, the elderly; it is therefore first and foremost to such categories that the definition of "ideal victim" is most frequently affixed. However, it should be understood in conjunction with other attributes, which problematically do not always converge toward the same depiction. For example, victims are considered ideal if, at the time they suffer the violence or offense, they are intent on a respectable project (e.g., they are working, caring for people in need), placing themselves where it is not possible to be blamed (at school, on a public street in the daytime). But, as recalled, the correlation of such criteria is by no means taken for granted: for example, not all women who suffer from sexual abuse or rape are recognized in such terms: rather frequently some of them are considered provoking or favoring the offence, therefore the status of (ideal) victim is de facto denied. Not even the elderly, and even children, are immune to the double standard: indeed, several factors contribute to delivering their stories to the front pages of newspapers and the attention of politicians. For example, age itself: so, the closer one approaches puberty or adolescence, the less one will be identified as a "child," diminishing social sympathy for the "unfortunate victims." This is sharply recalled by Luca Mavelli (2022), in his volume on the value of human lives in neoliberal societies, with regard to the reception in 2016 in the United Kingdom of young migrants and refugees from Syria, recipients of very different forms of reception and treatment depending on their age: the closer to majority, or outwardly bearing characters related to normal physical development, the more these children experienced hostility and closure, sometimes being perceived as a threat and danger to the social order. Thus, in fact, the author recalls:

> when the first batch of child refugees arrived, they failed to meet the expectations of their clients. 'These don't look like "children" to me', conservative MP David Davies tweeted (cited in McLaughlin 2018: 1763), capturing the sense of disappointment of the British public. The latter expected cute, little, cuddy victims (...) and instead was delivered young adolescents, many of whom unashamedly displayed signs of puberty (fascial hair, muscles, height) (Mavelli 2022: 105).

This provoked a hardening in reception policies, hostility toward these young refugees, the demand – by many politicians – for them to undergo medical investigations to verify their age. The UK had given willingness to take in sick children, women who had been abused, men who had been tortured: not "anything else," it was reiterated. And the press, by publishing on-the-front-page pictures of such "grown-up" youngsters, fed and amplified social fears and the suspicion the British public had been tricked into its generosity. Another influential variable is the social class to which one belongs: if disadvantaged or lower, public and institutional recognition will be less immediate, as Marian Duggan and Vicky Heap recall about the different empathy triggered when faced with two cases of disappearances of young girls in Portugal and UK, in the same period. As a consequence, the two cases experienced a "different treatment as a result of other forms of prejudice. (...) Despite both being children (at the time of their disappearance) typified as 'ideal victims', the marked differences in responses indicated a hierarchy based on 'virtuousness' (in this case, social class)" (Corteen et al. 2016: 244).

Moreover, the most obvious contradiction that the "ideal victim" brings, lies in the dichotomy/compresence between weakness and strength. As Christie himself points out, the victim

> must be strong enough to be listened to, or dare to talk. But she (he) must at the very same time be *weak enough not to become a threat to other important interests*. A minimum of strength is a precondition to being listened to, but sufficient strength to threaten others would not be a good basis for creating the type of general and public sympathy that is associated with the status of being a victim (Christie 1986: 15).

The victim, to be truly such, must embody the condition of absolute weakness – placing herself/himself diametrically opposite to the offender – to earn unreserved public sympathy. At the same time, it is clear that victims will be able to make their voice heard if they are also endowed with a certain strength, determination, resourcefulness; but these requirements must not be over-emphasized, on pain of nullifying that ideal and angelic image that is the focus of securitarian campaigns to which a victim is needed to defend and, above all, avenge. A victim functional to the political discourse and capable of raising the audience, without, however, exceeding in protagonism and visibility. In this sense, repeated and vehement demands for attention, or whiny "victimhood," are skillfully shunned.

Now, if the construction of the image of the ideal victim is problematic, representing an obstacle to the full recognition of the "reality" of all victims (including the inevitable *chiaroscuros* of each existence), it appears even more

negative in certain circumstances, for example when one must intervene in contexts marked by very high complexity as in the cases of inter-ethnic conflicts and wars. A real drama present in numerous areas of the earth. By the end of the last century such dramatic clashes have been the main concern of the international community, which, however, rarely has the means of pressure and resources capable of bringing the massacres to an end or elaborating a shared plan for peace – as can be seen in the case of the current wars (Russia and Ukraine, Israel and the Gaza Strip). On the contrary, often the deployment of the already scanty and scarce resources – material, human and economic – in such contexts is guided by a dichotomous, and therefore necessarily simplified, interpretation of the conflict, distinguishing in their intervention international humanitarian or nongovernmental organizations between "good victims" and "bad victims"; and therefore, since these are theaters of war where victims abound on both sides, of "deserving victims" (of aid, support) and "other not fully deserving subjects."

Following the reflections proposed by Erika Bouris, it is possible to identify four requirements/parameters that guide in such complex and multifaceted contexts the activity of international organizations in the allocation of limited available resources. Here the notion of the ideal victim acquires additional valences, and purposes, posing itself as a discriminating factor for the implementation of humanitarian policies dedicated to groups and social categories defined as victims *par excellence*, as opposed to other subjects – individual or collective – that do not fall under this definition. These attributes pertain to the supposed innocence of the victim, his/her purity and moral superiority over the aggressor, and the total absence of responsibility with respect to what has been suffered. In particular, the first among the indicated parameters is certainly the most relevant, capable of largely conditioning narrative and media rhetoric as well as the implementation of concrete aid policies. The innocence of the victims, sacrificed on the altars of ideology or human folly, wars, climatic and environmental adversity, inexperience, political negligence, immorality and corruption, refers first and foremost to a moral condition, contributing in itself to construct that dichotomous interpretation of events for which good is placed on one side and evil, inevitably, on the other. However, uncritically adhering to this perspective entails various distortions, disallowing the variability of contexts and their complexity especially when international forces are involved, as well as the multiple nuances that connote human interactions. As stated by the author:

> A discourse of the complex political victim challenges the simple, reductionist image of the innocent victim to show more precisely the nuance and the complexity of those suffering political victimization. Yet in so doing, a discourse of

the gray victim *never denies the victim status of individual*. It reaffirms the humanity of all victims. Rather than hold the victim up to a nearly unreachable standard of pure good and pure innocence (and fault her when she does not) a discourse of the complex political victim embraces the complexities and the contradictions of the victim identity in order to better recognize her, better respond to her, and better contribute to peace (Bouris 2007: 7-8).

Moreover, emphasizing this dichotomy in the absolutization of an innocent and angelic victim, means "to widen the moral gap between the perpetrator and victim, to assist in moral calculations that make it easier to recognize and sympathize with the victim and condemn the perpetrator" (Bouris 2007: 37), definitively closing the door to any hypothesis of future paths of pacification. For this reason, the highest expression of violated and immolated innocence is the child-victim, whose image of extreme vulnerability replicated in deprived contexts of war, violence or abuse testifies to the atavistic evidence of the struggle between good and evil, clamoring for the observer to stand against all injustice and violation of human beings (Hart 2023). A position that can be understood and shared in the assumption of a principle, but which risks turning into a mere exercise in rhetoric aimed at gaining political consensus and media approval. The media are aware of this, multiplying in the press and Internet images of children in contexts of suffering and death, contextually offering to public curiosity above all the plastic representation of a defeat: that of pity and compassion (Ward 2011). A second character is purity, referred to a condition of non-contamination, or corruption – again, the latter, a term that refers to the notion of guilt. The victim is such insofar as he/she stands beyond any possible reproach or discredit; no dishonor stains or tarnishes his/her transparency. The problem arises if one must decide which victims "deserve" to be helped, supported, protected: because the requirement of purity so understood is dangerous and misleading, discriminating and excluding a plurality of subjects who also have suffered injustice, wrongs, violations, crimes. The third parameter concerns the moral superiority of the victim: precisely the suffering experienced, in fact, would contribute to the acquisition of this characteristic by making the same, in the eyes of the community, a kind of moral guide – or point of reference. To forgive, then, means to place the offender on the same level, to readmit the criminal within the social consortium starting from the recognition of a common humanity. By performing such a gesture, which distinguishes and connotes the victim distinctly from the offender, the offended party becomes a symbol and model for the community: the victim is the one who, despite having suffered the most unjust of sufferings, knows how to extend the hands toward the

other in a gesture of reconciliation that banishes the specter of possible revenge and retaliation. And while the offender ceases to be named as beast, demon, and monster, the "triumph of the victim" (Bouris 2007) is simultaneously affirmed in the exercise of a power that readmits into society those who were no longer worthy of it. But this is a controversial point, as a different position should not be overlooked: in fact, to forgive the aggressor could be considered as an act of renunciation and surrender, the final capitulation of the humble.

Finally, there is another character that contributes to the creation of the ideal victim, the absolute absence of responsibility with respect to the events suffered. Nearly half a century after the elaboration of the term "victim precipitation" – and its equally critical variations on the theme such as *victim provocation*, *victim facilitation*, *victim participation* – it is possible to observe that stereotypes and preconceptions on the point are difficult to eradicate by questioning the suffering of those who have suffered injustice and violations, being considered not entirely unrelated to the dynamics of the events. Victimization in these cases is downplayed, often making victims subject of scrutiny into trials.

As can be understood, the notion of the ideal victim has significant effects on the way the offender is portrayed, negatively affecting the perception of the community as well as the possibility of reintegration into the social context once the sentence is served. Exactly as that portrayal of the ideal victim constitutes an abstraction dense with stereotypes, but with important concrete consequences, there is here another figure that shares the same characters, being specular and opposite to the first: so is for ideal offender, a sort of the "pure evil," as suggested by the title of the best-known work by social psychologist Roy Baumeister (1997). In fact, just as reminded in Christie's definition, this figure would also be connoted in media and political discourse by certain basic attributes: for example, being able to intentionally inflict harm and suffering on victims, being in this motivated only by the desire to experience pleasure, amusement. Emphasis would thus be placed on irrational traits rather than on rational or instrumental motives. Evil and evil offenders are also described as capable of behaving in an extremely brutal, cruel manner, and this "by nature," thus becoming impossible to think of their changing, adhering to other values and principles that impede their reeducation and reentry into society. Finally, this figure is imagined – as Christie himself already suggested – always arriving from the outside, an inevitably enemy-stranger, more like to the beasts in the jungle than to the human beings (sensitive, civilized, respectful...). (Ideal) offenders and victims would therefore belong to distinct, separate universes, between which there is no possibility of confrontation, dialogue, encounter. Yet, paradoxically, there is a point of encounter between them: as A. Pember-

ton (2011) reminds us, it resides in the campaigns of penal populism, in which the call for harsher and longer sentences is in fact presented to public opinion "in the name of the victims," as an example of a just response to their condition of suffering. This invocation is counterpointed by total indifference to the emerging needs deriving from the victim condition: that of truth, of course, but also that of understanding – as the possibility to understand and of being understood – and the need for change. These are needs frequently ignored and disregarded, because too complex would perhaps be the interventions to accommodate them and formulate adequate responses. Not mere slogans that speak to the public belly, but the construction of shared and articulated paths, within which to recognize each other as people first and foremost, and not as labels or social roles functional to certain political logics.

3.2 What about the "other" victims? Just World belief theory and blaming process

At this point of reflection, a question arises: what about all those who, while suffering abuse, harassment and violence in the various contexts of life and work, do not intercept the interest of the media and politics, not responding to the image of the angelic victim increasingly at the center of the public narrative? Everyone, in their daily lives, comes into contact with suffering, with processes of victimization or even social exclusion that are more or less close. How, then, to understand, interpret and deal with such situations? Stanley Cohen, in the *Preface* to his seminal volume *States of Denial. Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, recalls, "The subject, if not the pretension, remains the same: what do we do with our knowledge about the suffering of others, and what does this knowledge do to us?" (Cohen 2001: X). And some lines below:

> (…) 'acknowledgement'. This is what 'should' happen when people are actively aroused – thinking, feeling or acting – by the information. They respond appropriately, in the psychological and moral senses, to what they know. They see a problem that needs their attention; they get upset or angry and express sympathy or compassion; and they do something: intervene, help, become committed (Cohen 2001: X).

But it is quite evident that people do not always behave this way; rather, most of the time there is a tendency to tolerate, if not justify, the suffering of others. If the victim is not ideal, belonging instead to categories or social groups regarded as disadvantaged, deviant, marginalized the likelihood of doubt being expressed about the dynamics of the event, reputation or lifestyle, is high. The Just World

belief theory elaborated by social-psychologist Melvin Lerner since the early 1960s, while conducting some experiments in the social field, emphasizes the adaptive function of the beliefs in a "just world" to cope with the presence of injustice and social inequalities in society (Lerner 1980; 1998). In contemporary Western societies, where others' suffering is everyday shown by the media regardless the cruelty of stories or images, people nevertheless want to believe the world is a safe and fair place to live. For this reason, they need to find ways in order to conceptualize, rationalize, interpret and explain the presence of situations of suffering, injustice and fear. The Just World attitude is exactly a manner to react to these conditions: very simply, it suggests that the world is just, because people get what they deserve. So bad things happen to whom that deserves it or, in other words, negative events happen to some individuals (or groups) because of their fault. This belief is rooted in a generalized feeling that for brevity can be described as follows, "good things happen to good people, bad things to bad people." But, of course, this is a superficial and almost superstitious way of looking at reality which, instead, is far more complex, less linear and obvious. In fact, exactly as the "myth" of the ideal victim shows, bad things also happen to good people. And so, Lerner wonders, in the face of this awareness (which explains the subtitle of the volume published in 1980, because the just world belief is "a fundamental delusion"), how do we reinterpret and even justify the presence of suffering, harm and injustice in our societies? The fact is people employ different strategies to maintain the "justice motives", every time something seems to threaten the belief in a just world. These strategies could be grouped into three main different types: rational strategies, irrational ones, and finally protective strategies. They represent a way to react to the delusion caused by the just world belief failure, to cope with the presence of injustice in a just world (Pemberton 2011). While rational strategies involve the acceptance of injustice in our lives, including actions to prevent it before it occurs or to compensate and restore victims after justice has been violated or denied, the irrational strategies preserve the "justice motive" refusing to accept injustice and suffering by applying a new interpretation of them. So, people can reinterpret the causes at the ground of suffering, believing victims are in part or totally responsible for the harm, or they can consider as negative even the personal characteristics of victims themselves. In this last example, the Just World belief theory seems to suggest there is something wrong in people who get victimized. But as acutely reminded by R. Elias:

> Our tendency to blame victims for their fate comes from several cultural attitudes. (...) We conclude that even if victims do not precipitate their crime, they nevertheless must deserve their fate because good people manage to escape

harms and live the good life. This attitude emerges not only from lingering religious teachings, but also from our strong attachment to the tenets of "social Darwinism." If people get victimized, it only shows their unfitness. As a result, many totally innocent victims tend to blame themselves for their fate (Elias 1986: 16).

It sounds more like a condemn pronounced by society. Among irrational strategies there is also the reinterpretation of the consequences of the events; for example, they can now be considered in a positive light so that the victimization results as a learning experience, able to strengthen the character and develop altruistic attitudes toward other people in difficulties. The concept of post-traumatic growth is indeed recognized by victims themselves, in many cases well documented also in victimological scientific literature (van Dijk 2009). Moreover, in this second macro group finds place the cognitive and psychological distancing between observer and victims, so that they are considered to be different from "normal" people. A typical example are migrants on boats; here psychological and emotional distancing are a necessity so as not to feel distress or desperation in the face of their tragic, inhuman condition. No feelings of sympathy or identification with their stories is then permitted. The last group of strategies includes protective interpretations just as the "two worlds theory" and the "ultimate justice": both strategies present a reinterpretation of victimization processes as possible even unfair. The first one recalling the fact that maybe our world is just – but not necessarily their; while the second strategy suggests the presence of an immanent dimension where finally justice will be done: if not now, for sure in the future – where religious convictions play a strong influence on this belief.

Precisely the concept of blaming deserves some additional remarks. It consists of motions of discredit, disapproval or devaluation directed by society at those individuals deemed undeserving of recognition through the application of victim status. Despite having suffered harm, experiencing conditions of marginality or suffering, they are kept on the sidelines, and kept there for reasons that have little, in truth, to do with the event suffered and much, instead, with their place in a socio-economic and political system divided into classes. The term has been proposed in this sense in the early 1970s by William Ryan, an American psychologist, in his work *Blaming the Victim* (1971). His volume still represents one of the most vivid denunciations of capitalist ideology remarking the self-absolving tendency of a society that while ostensibly pretending to work for the weakest and most disadvantaged, in reality tends to reproduce the same dynamics aimed at perpetuating a system of power for the benefit of the wealthiest and dominant classes. Thus greeted its appearance by the influential

sociologist Herbert J. Gans: "This book shows exactly how we blame the victims of poverty rather than the real villain, the inequality of American society. An impassioned, often brilliant exposé of middle class ideology." A society, the North American one, guilty, according to the author, of fostering the persistent spread of multiple forms of injustice and discrimination while pretending to work against them. The notion of blaming the victim, which Ryan imagines mainly applied to ethnic minorities and the most disadvantaged groups of his time, plays a central function by contributing to the unraveling of the mystifying character of the ideology in the American Way of Life, showing its true purpose consisting in maintaining the *status quo*. In fact, to cast "discredit" on the victims, feeding the vicious circle that confines them in the limbo of inferiority and non-humanity by forcing them to live in a condition of perpetual disadvantage, are first and foremost those who seem to care for victims. Thus the lady WASP (*White Anglo-Saxon Protestant*) is moved, and outraged, by the terrible living conditions of children in the negro slums and negro ghettos of the great metropolises; the social scientist and the social worker, the lawman and the politician are outraged at the exclusion and marginalization that affect certain categories of people (the poor, African-Americans, small-time deviants, alcoholics and prostitutes); but all, Ryan asserts, inevitably ask themselves: "*what is wrong with the victim?*". What is "wrong" according to the author, is quickly stated: the gaze that society devotes to them, resulting in confining them in a marginal but yet functional role in order to maintain the social order. In this way, the question "*what is wrong with the victim?*" translates indeed a vital need: that of being able to consider oneself "*Not* Guilty" – that is, totally not responsible – in the face of the injustices, poverty, and inequalities that day after day parade (more or less silently) before our eyes as "decent," integrated and ordered citizens. That of *blaming the victim* is then an ancient reality-distorting mechanism (a mythology, the author argues), employed since time immemorial to justify oneself and feel legitimized despite everything, to exclude one's responsibility in the face of society's dramas. In particular, Ryan asserts that the action of expressing blame – or at any rate perplexity, doubt – toward the victim finds a place in countless ideologies underlying the construction of American society, rationalizing cruelty and injustice. The process behind such an approach can be summarized with regard to three basic steps: (a) first, in the victims it is observed that "there is something wrong," being with all evidence "different" from those who have never suffered forms of victimization; (b) second, this very diversity justifies and makes one understand their being victimized: if they were "the same" as everyone else, nothing would happen; (c) finally – the crux of the matter – it is equally clear that the situation can only be changed if the victims are the ones

who really want it: in other words, changing their attitudes and behavior will prevent victimization, present and future. Thus, the author suggests ironically:

> As we might expect, the logical outcome of analyzing social problems in terms of the deficiencies of the victim is the development of programs aimed at correcting those deficiencies. The formula for action becomes extraordinary simple: change the victim. All of this happens so smoothly that it seems downright rational. First, identify a social problem. Second, study those affected by the problem and discover in what ways they are different from the rest of us as a consequence of deprivation and injustice. Third, define the differences as the cause of the social problem itself. Finally, of course, assign a government bureaucrat to invent a humanitarian action program to correct the differences (Ryan 1976: 8-9).

We are in the presence of what Ryan defined as a new, more subtle and sophisticated form of social Darwinism, the basis of which is constituted by a terminological substitution, so that from the old reactionary formulation we arrive at a more modern and functional "humanitarian formulation." A harsh critique, which calls for a serious examination of conscience not only of the society of well-wishers but also the whole community, reminding how no one is really entitled to "call himself (or herself) out" when the violated dignity of the human being is at stake.

However, the attribution of responsibility, or blame, to the victim has much to do with its identification as a modern scapegoat. It, as Tom Douglas reminds us in *Scapegoats. Transferring Blame* (1995), in contemporary societies is deliberately and intentionally chosen precisely to serve as a cover for the failures and errors committed by others – usually those who hold political, economic, and cultural power in a given society. Unlike ancient times when his sacrifice served to appease the wrath of the deity by facilitating the restoration of order and harmony within a community, today the scapegoat is called upon to collaborate despite himself, through his own sacrifice, in the concealment of the failings or transgressions of others, taking responsibility for them and paying for them himself with blame, denigration and social reproach. Moreover, to be sacrificed today is more rarely life, but far more often the scapegoat is condemned to the loss of intangible and yet fundamental aspects of personal and social identity, such as honor, reputation, respectability, and social prestige. And while the victim-scapegoat will lose the esteem and consideration of the community in this process of "blame and blame transfer," the social and public image of the individual – group, institution – who caused the failure, will be preserved through the sacrifice of others, also allowing the (self-)absolution of the same.

Behind the modern scapegoat, its identification and sacrifice, often lie complex emotions originating in ignorance or selfishness, such as fear of the different or hatred of particular groups or social categories, intolerance, imagining that their immolation preserves the integrity of the context to which they belong as well as their own power. But, as sharply reminded by M. Schofield quoted by Douglas in the opening of Chapter 6:

> Throughout history the dominant majority has sought out and punished scapegoats. If the age-old idea of the scapegoat were true and we really could cure some of the ills of our society by sacrificing a few individuals, there might be something to be said for it and the only difficulty would be to decide who is to be next. But the sacrifice does not decrease our troubles. It increases them. Not only is it unjust and cruel to the goat, it covers up the problems instead of solving them. The scapegoat's punishment deflects the same fate from us for the sins we have committed ourselves. At the same time the scapegoat provides us with the flattering illusion that we are superior to him... (Douglas 1995: 85).

So, who is the next?

4. The media and the spectacle of suffering

4.1 The hierarchy of news

The rediscovery of the victim in the Western world, after years of little interest in this figure, has resulted in important effects on the media – traditional and new – with regard to the broader narrative of violent and criminal events, conflicts and wars, atrocities. Moreover, the link between the narration of the victimizing experience, to which television broadcasts, reportage and interviews with "protagonists" are devoted, and its relevance to contemporary political discourse is evident, so much so that we can describe this era as marked by "fascination pour les épisodes émotionnels négatifs," as French psychologist Bernard Rimé defines it. A *fascination émotionelle* that can first of all be explained with regard to the fact that "L'être humain cherche compulsivement à produire du sens en présence des événements du monde, et cette faculté est particuliérement stimulée par les événements émotionnels qui, par définition, prennent l'individu au dépourvu" (Rimé 2015: 126). Thus, the victims' stories of suffering and affliction sadden and indignify us, but above all, they question us about the meaning of pain in (our) existence. Their search for justice and truth becomes ours, their demand for recognition seems indispensable to us for the continued survival of humankind itself. Then there is a second important factor, as mentioned by J. Simon:

the identification to the more extensive condition of vulnerability experienced in contemporary societies, which makes the victim a kind of unifying factor within complex societies, always at risk of implosion because of the multiplicity of conflicts and contrasts within it. In this way, the victim becomes the subject in whom everyone can mirror himself – without, however, being "in his shoes," ending up playing a useful role politically as well. His or her story intrigues and attracts, one wonders what would happen "if it happened to us"; but concretely, one can remain on the living room couch asking such questions, while images of the misfortune scroll by on the video of the television set or personal computer. The victim thus performs a kind of vicarious function with respect to ancient anxieties and unspeakable fears concerning the inscrutability of human destiny; together it operates as a social catalyst of those emotions – fear, anger, horror – that are unleashed jointly and contextually within the social context upon the occurrence of dramatic events, as, moreover, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim had already intuited in his 1893 work *De la division du travail social.*

However, it is precisely the ambivalent attitude made of closeness and distancing that, once again, is at the origin of the limitations and distortions in which media interest and, consequently, the public incur. One glosses here over the ways not always ethical and respectful of others' pain with which some journalists address victims, or their families, in the immediacy of dramatic events or during the holding of trials: questions that are often disrespectful of people's intimacy, merciless. In addition, today we are overwhelmed by an almost uninterrupted flow of news, information, images and communiqués, which at the very least risk dazing the viewer and catapulting him (or her) in the short space of a few minutes from a bloody news event to a disaster, from a war front to a coup d'état: quickly, without mediation, just by zapping from one channel to another, from one site to another. Such redundancy and variability of content – as never before in human history – has important implications for how we represent, deal with, and react to victims and their suffering.

Lilie Chouliaraki tells us about the "hierarchy of news" with regard the selection made by the media in their narrative of others' suffering, to catch the public attention. This emanates from a plurality of elements: the way events are narrated and placed in space and time, their position within news schedules and news reports, the type of victims involved, and, importantly, the wide range of emotions and reactions that are elicited in the spectator. In particular, the hierarchy of news concerning distant suffering consists of three main categories: adventure, emergency and ecstatic news. In her essay *The Mediation of suffering and the vision of a cosmopolitan public* (2008), the author suggests that the process of "mediation" – by which the combination of language and images give

a specific representation of victims and harms, producing meaning about it – "propose to media audiences specific ways of engaging with distant suffering (...) encompassing a wide range of ethical positions, from responsibility and care to indifference and apathy (...)" (Chouliaraki 2008: 372). While it is almost sure that the media themes do not directly determine the public's reactions and the ways people get engaged in action, nevertheless the media could play a role in the construction of prejudices and their implementation towards individuals or categories considered as inferior, and therefore marginalized, for example exacerbating a negative attitude or feelings of intolerance. Sometimes the consequences are particularly severe, as with regard to the normalization of violent conduct or in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes leading to practices of discrimination, social exclusion up to the complete denial of the other.

According to Chouliaraki

> through their systematic choices of word and image, the media do not only expose audiences to the spectacles of distant suffering but, in so doing, they simultaneously expose them to specific *dispositions to feel, think and act* toward each instance of suffering (Chouliaraki 2008: 372).

The three categories of news have specific elements of relevance with regard to the lights and shadows that media attention places on victims in contemporary times. For example, adventure news does not produce real participation in the viewer; the news is placed in the midst of many others, presented quickly through a concise and often aseptic narration of facts ("a chain of random and isolated 'curiosities'"), without reference to the presence of victims except through the use of numerical expression. Such news is also placed within an abstract spatio-temporal context, where events are told as a simple registration of facts, thus unable to emotionally engage the public and resulting in cognitive and moral distancing. Emergency news, on the other hand, is chosen to open broadcasts editions ("prime time news") and is presented through the attentive, careful choice of words and images capable of providing an empathetic narrative, so as to induce feelings of co-emotion and pity in the spectator. Here events are told in details and victims are represented with their own faces: they are "stories of life," projects and interests, dreams and desires. The latter passage explains why such news stories are able to propel the viewer toward emergency action (material or financial as well) in order to help and support victims, while the spectator feels close to them and their suffering. The last category is that of ecstatic news referring the narrative of extraordinary events, i.e., situations that literally stand outside the ordinary everyday life. Therefore, the "ecstatic" ele-

ment is essential, provoking a break in the ordinary temporality; a condition in which disbelief, shock and amazement easily merge. In the face of such narratives, the viewer remains "nailed" to the video, feeling closeness and compassion for the victims, experiencing dependence toward the narrative. Ecstatic news follows the facts moment by moment, which are presented as unique events in history, "when a minute seems to last a lifetime"; events capable of producing momentous turning points, after which nothing will be the same as before. The narrative is therefore rich in details and particulars about the unfortunate victims; again the public is told about their passions, interests and dramatically interrupted relationships, so that the spectator can take part in their suffering and create a connection, or even a overlapping, between those existences and his/her own, through the establishment – continuous and intense – of what the author calls a sort of "reflexive identification". This is how the viewer is called upon to intervene: because the suffering narrated is not only of the victims but invests the entire community: in the "global village," it is configured as the suffering of everyone.

4.2 Victims between visibility and compassion fatigue

Of course, what has been said should not make us forget that the images conveyed through the media, which represent the condition experienced by the victims of crime and violence, war and conflict, atrocities and torture, natural disasters, perform the main and indispensable function of making visible what is distant, concealed, removed or mystified. Their commitment toward social denunciation is substantial and indisputable.

Such considerations, however, do not preclude the emergence of two orders of problems. First, as Susan Sontag (2003) already reminded us discussing the proposing of the photographic image, one is never only in the presence of the mere reporting of a fact. On the contrary, photographing – as well as shooting a video, a reportage, a docufilm – always implies an action of selection: someone chooses, first of all, or even in the course of events, the object to be framed (and what is to be excluded instead), the chosen angle, the detail to be emphasized. So, the issue of relevance – which is also a problem – arises: some stories of suffering certainly turn out to be more attractive than others, for example because of the role played by the victim, his/her characteristics, his/her place within the social system. In a metaphorical sense, here, too, the framing is chosen, from which the placement of that story within the vast and articulated landscape of the media narrative will descend. It is moreover evident, and consequent to what has been stated, that such operations can only refer to a simpli-

fied depiction of the subject experiencing that event; a depiction – and here is the problem – that translates a stereotyped image of the victim by emphasizing the characters and traits most useful and functional for the purposes set. Thus contributing to the creation of a static, monolithic image of the same, unable to account for the many facets and complexities of the human condition. An artificial, inauthentic image which seems, again, to preclude any possibility of transformation and change: a sort of sublimation of what victims, and human beings, in reality are not.

It should also be noted that suddenly finding oneself – and without having wanted to – at the center of the media and public scene has significant implications also in emotional and relational terms for the exposed subject. Feelings of annoyance, embarrassment and shame, discomfort are among the most common and certainly do not help to distance oneself from an unwanted condition. Such exposure can result in increased visibility, and it is certainly true that some victims choose to recount and tell their stories publicly, sharing their experience in the media in many cases in the hope that it may help prevent or limit the recurrence of other similar events. Or again, to seek broader validation of their suffering, asking for institutional or social recognition, afferent to the community. Sometimes these individuals, or groups, are accused of protagonism, of seeking notoriety – as if they were any "Big Brother" reality participants in search of fame. Thus, in the age of keyboard haters on the Internet, it is not implausible that, in the short span of time, from being a role model or a hero to be celebrated, the victim turns into the recipient of blame and violent criticism. Although, as E. Goffman (1968) recalled about the bearer of stigma, it should not be forgotten that even victims, precisely because they are human beings, may wish to take advantage of the benefits of such a condition, accepting the instrumentalization not only of politics but also of the media, which through their stories raise the audience of TV programs and the circulation of newspapers (traditional and online). Famous is the passage in which the author, dealing with those who make their stigma a profession, with his usual irony points out how the same, instead of leaning on the crutch, use it as a golf club, ceasing to represent their reference group having embarked on the personal career of "professional stigmatized."

A second problem to highlight is inherent to the enormous flow of information to which we are subjected in contemporary Western societies, through multiple media and channels of communication: if in the past radio and television, in addition to the press, conveyed the most important news, today the real source of information is represented by the Internet, consulted and questioned transversally by generations and at every moment of the day and night.

Again, Susan Sontag pointed out (2003), however, how some images are rises of "memento mori" to which one should devote time, attention, and dedication, transforming themselves into objects of contemplation capable of offering the occasion for a deeper reflection on the theme of the suffering of the others. In this regard, the author emphasized how it would be necessary to create a space consecrated to them, "secular icons" of current societies, and their injustices, offered to our gaze. But where could be that public space coated with a sacred aura, if today the mall is just the more attractive and maybe emblematic place of our times?

These considerations explain why today continuous exposure to the viewing and telling of others' suffering causes, quite frequently, that reaction referred to as *compassion fatigue* or even *media fatigue* (Moeller 1999; Cohen 2001). A kind of torpor, indifference and apathy that is generated in the public exactly as an outcome of the overdose of negative and tragic news. The term compassion fatigue was firstly coined in 1992 by the historian and writer Carla Joinson regarding the hospital context. It refers to a condition of psychological and emotional exhaustion that implies a diminished ability to feel compassion for others, their suffering and to empathize with them. At the beginning, it has been studied with regard to helping professions: doctors and nurses, police officers or informal caregivers are exposed to a continuous proximity to victims' suffering, thus provoking feelings of helplessness, irritability and lack of concentration. But in more recent times scholars like Susan Moeller or Stanley Cohen considered the concept referred to the role played by the media in the narrative of others' suffering and the impact it has today on the public, thus remarking an important concept's shift with respect to the two contexts. According to their studies, compassion fatigue (and media fatigue) refers to an emotional, cognitive, psychological and moral distancing as a mean of defense in front of the huge amount of images of others' suffering and cruel descriptions of this condition. An overdose of images of pain and sufferance is hard to be tolerated, and that is why it is not infrequent to react to them in a fatalistic way as a mean of defense. In fact, while in the case of medical contexts and caregivers compassion fatigue originates in the desire to help and alleviate the harm (and in the frustration that emerges when it is not possible to intervene like that), in the case of media's audience the very risk is to get used to disasters, violence and shocked images knowing only very little can be done, if really nothing. This tell us about the process of normalization of suffering in our times: to get exposed repeatedly to bad and tragic news leads the public to apathy, passivity, insensitivity and lack of interest. People could feel reluctant to react properly to suffering; but, according to Cohen, this is exactly what the individual spirit of the global labor

wants: mitigating compassion for people considered "distant" is what needs to be done. The other side of the coin is sensationalism: stories and events must be represented as more and more tragic and violent, in order to capture the attention and the empathy of a frightened, but also more and more overwhelmed and exhausted, public.

5. From neutralization to dehumanization

In the late 1950s, two American sociologists, David Matza and Gresham M. Sykes, elaborated the notion of *techniques of neutralization* aimed at highlighting how the deviant needs to elaborate justifications for his or her conduct, pointing to explanations that would allow – from their own point of view – a suspension of sanction, whether moral or legal, therefore legitimizing the transgression. Such "techniques" would allow individuals to neutralize the negative implications of their behaviors, as well as temporarily suspend their loyalty to internalized social values, opening brackets of "freedom" that permit the commission of wrongdoing (the *drift*). Among the various modalities described, victim denial appears to be of particular interest, since it is an expedient that allows the offender to consider the deviant act as legitimate punishment or necessary vindication to one who has already committed a wrong, for which the victim deserves to suffer the offense. In this same perspective, the violent action or abuse may be directed all the more toward individuals deemed inferior, recipients of social blame or even deserving of condemnation, so that from the perpetrator's point of view "there is no victim." This is what happens when the targets of such conduct are subjects already marginalized (people in prostitution, drug addicts, homeless, transsexuals), or in the framework of *hate crimes* directed toward members of ethnic, political and religious minorities whose fundamental rights suffer significant impairments – thus making them more vulnerable to further violations. Another technique of neutralization, namely the denial of injury, reiterates how – again from the perpetrator's point of view – the acts committed cannot result in truly negative consequences, and this is either because the victim, by reason of his or her *status,* is a person who can afford to suffer loss, damage, humiliation and moral harassment, or because in the deviant's will – as reported after the fact – the intention to truly bring suffering through his or her conduct was absent: "The injury, it may be claimed, is not really an injury; rather, it is a form of rightful retaliation or punishment. By a subtle alchemy the delinquent moves himself into the position of the avenger and the victim is transformed into a wrong-doer" (Sykes & Matza 1957: 668).

Similar to neutralization techniques operate the *moral disengagement mechanisms* elaborated in more recent years by Albert Bandura (1986). The latter, by allowing the subject to loosen control over his or her impulses, limit – and sometimes nullify – the sense of guilt that arises from the cognitive dissonance originated by the consequences of one's actions, thus favoring the commission of conduct otherwise considered reprehensible. According to the theory of moral thought and action, there is a significant correlation between realized conduct and internalized moral principles, their relationship being mediated by self-regulatory mechanisms and internal sanctions (such as guilt or self-blame) capable of anticipating and preventing immoral behavior. In this manner they contribute to the maintenance of that inner harmony indispensable to the subject. However, precisely this system of self-control can, under certain circumstances, be deactivated through the use of psychological mechanisms capable of producing the loosening of inner controls. In particular, Bandura, alongside such mechanisms as moral justification of conduct, advantageous comparison, diffusion or displacement of responsibility, identifies some that are particularly effective, unfortunately, precisely in relation to processes of victimization. So it is with the attribution of blame to the victim or the euphemistic labelling – a sort of "sanitizing language" which, by transforming negative conducts making them respectable, modifies and manipulates the perception of facts from the victim's own gaze. According to the Italian psychologist Chiara Volpato (2011), it should not be underestimated how the depowering, or debasement, even the destruction of language are mechanisms that profoundly affect the victim's self-perception, her self-image, depriving of the attributes that define humanity and making the pain invisible. In this perspective, the dehumanization of the other – which for Bandura follows from the activation of the mechanisms of moral disengagement – implies the disappearance of moral sanctions in the agent subject. In fact, when one perceives in the other a human being, empathic reactions are felt toward him or her, which make it more arduous to bring physical, psychological, moral pain or suffering, without causing feelings of anguish, shame or guilt in the perpetrator. On the contrary, attributing non-human characters to the other inhibits or reduces the emergence of such feelings. In this way, the inner, familiar connection among subjects is lost, and the other is no longer considered similar but subhuman, inferior: a mere object against which everything is permitted. This happens, as Herbert C. Kelman reminded us in his seminal essay *Violence without restraint: Reflections on the Dehumnization of victims and victimizers* (1973), because processes of dehumanization rob human beings of the two main qualities that define them: identity and community. According to the author:

> To accord a person identity is to perceive him as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices, and entitled to live his own life on the basis of his own goals and values. To accord a person community is to perceive him – along with one's self – as part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other, who recognize each other's individuality, and who respect each other's rights. These two features together constitute the basis for individual worth – for the acceptance of the individual is an end in himself, rather than a means toward some extraneous end (Kelman 1973: 48-49).

When people are deprived of these agentic and communal aspects of humanness, they are individuated, loose their capacity to evoke compassion and moral emotions – they become an abstraction, just numbers – and they are finally treated as means toward vicious ends.

For the victim, this implies dramatic consequences: the denial and disavowal of his or her individuality forces him or her within a rigid categorical belonging, in which the only possible reality is that of the non-human, of an externally imposed reification of subjectivity; a paradoxical belonging, moreover, with respect to which one will have to adapt if intends to survive.

Dehumanization is then able to assume other forms being a social phenomenon that occurs in interpersonal as well as among intergroup dynamics. For this reason, it assumes different constructions depending on the domains it occurs (Opotow, Gerson & Woodside 2005; Volpato 2011). In this perspective, animalization is the most ancient form, more often used in relation to ethnicity issues, race or immigration processes, genocide. In all these cases people are considered as animals or savages with brutish appetites for violence and sex, impulsive and even prone to criminality. In case of wars and conflicts populations are described as dogs, pigs, rats or insects, by the application of animal metaphors able to describe them as threats to the social order. Another form is mechanization, which may assume different features: technology in general and computer in particular are important contexts in which to realize the reduction of humans to machines. It recalls the notion of alienation in the Marxist approach and the condition of exploitation that so many people experience today in different situations, in factories as well as in the *caporalato*, or regarding the so called "delivery boys." It involves the pursuit of efficacy and regularity, a way of working and living constructed on procedures like standardization and routinization, an approach to life more often rational, unemotional and lacking spontaneity. Even demonization is still present in contemporary societies: inside the war contexts, it results as a propaganda technique often applied against the enemies depicted as evils, monsters. But in many other contexts (even the political one, for example inside the electoral campaigns), women are still described as witches, har-

pies or emissaries of the evil, just like we were in the Middle Ages and among the pages of the *Malleus Maleficarum*'s book. Finally, biologization describes the others using the organism metaphor: undesirable individuals or categories are referred as virus or cancer according to the paradigm of the public safety, or social security, comparing them to bacteriological elements and parasites able to infect and corrupt the social body. In this perspective they are considered a danger, being insensible to pain and prone to immoral behavior; thus, unfit to live in community with "normal" people. Their fate is already written: they must disappear as in the case of sanctioned massacres and extreme dehumanization (Kelman 1973), be destroyed, legitimizing what has been called in every era the "cleaning," or final, solution: the genocide.

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Part II

VICTIMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND STATE VIOLENCE, DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Chapter 2
The victims of Bloody Sunday

Anna Harkin

Abstract

The chapter focuses on the status given to the victims of Bloody Sunday and how it developed over time. It is argued that governments play a large role in whether victims are perceived as ideal or not. This contribution examines how the victim's and offender's status in the UK changed along with the British Government's political objectives and ideologies. Indeed, the government can manipulate the perception of victims thus deciding whether victims meet the criteria to classify a victim as ideal. This contribution also looks at the large role the media plays in defining a victim as ideal or non-ideal. This chapter examines the media coverage on the victims of Bloody Sunday in Ireland and the UK and compares how the victims are portrayed differently in each country.

Keywords: Bloody Sunday – Government influence – UK and Irish media representations

1. Introduction

In 2010, almost four decades after 26 civilians were shot and 14 killed by British paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, the victims of Bloody Sunday were finally granted innocent victim status by the UK government.[1] For years, the British army and government had whitewashed the events and placed blame

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[1]   https://qubpublichistory.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/bloody-sunday-victims.jpg.

on the victims, so why after so much time was ideal victim status finally granted? In this chapter it will be argued that the victims of Bloody Sunday were not given ideal victim status in 1972 because it was against the British government's political ideology to show the victims as innocent. However, after the troubles came to an end it was no longer against the British government's interest to deny ideal victim status to those injured and killed in Bloody Sunday. For this reason, ideal victim status was finally granted to the victims of Bloody Sunday, almost forty years after the events unravelled. As has been discussed previously in this book, there are five criteria laid out by Christie which a victim must meet to be granted ideal victim status (Christie 1986). However, it will be argued in this contribution that meeting these criteria is a subjective matter. Governments can manipulate the perception of victims to make them fit Christie's criteria or else make them miss out on criteria thus making them less ideal. In controlling whether or not a victim meets the criteria needed to obtain ideal victim status the media has a key role in portraying this perception of victims. The role the government and media have in granting ideal victim status will be highlighted by comparing the reaction of the Irish government and media to Bloody Sunday with the reaction of the British Government and Media to Bloody Sunday.

2. Ideal Victim

Christie defines ideal victims as a "person or category of individual who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim" (Christie 1986: 12). Balia Spalek furthers this and argues that support and services are justified on behalf of ideal victims (Spalek 2006). Being granted ideal status is thus important to victims as it legitimizes their trauma and allows them to access valuable services.

Being an ideal victim is a "public status" and this status is granted when a victim meets the five criteria laid out by Christie (1986) which are: The victim is weak; the victim is carrying out an honorable task; the victim cannot be blamed for their presence; the victim has no personal relationship with the offender and the offender is big and bad. When a person meets all of these characteristics, they can then be said to be ideal. However, as will be argued in this essay, Christie's criteria cannot stand alone in granting ideal victim status, there are other factors which must be taken into account when looking at ideal and non-ideal victims. This chapter will focus on the impact governments can make on whether victims receive ideal status or not.

Victims can be portrayed as ideal or non-ideal depending on whether it furthers or harms a government's ideology (Schwöbel-Patel 2015). When it is in the government's best interest victims are portrayed as innocent and ideal. However, if a victim being portrayed as ideal is inconvenient or problematic for a government the status can either be denied, or if previously granted, it can be revoked. McEvoy and McConnachie (2012) argue that ideal victims are ideal citizens as they aid in governments securing political power as victims are politicized to the government's benefit. If initially a victim being granted ideal status is against the interest of a government, the government can refuse to grant ideal status to the victim. However, if in the future the government's agenda changes, ideal status can later be granted.[2] This chapter submits that the UK refused to grant victim status to Northern Ireland as it went against their political ideology, but when it no longer conflicted with the political agenda of the UK ideal victim status was given to the victims.

3. History of Bloody Sunday

3.1 Historical context to Bloody Sunday

The events of Bloody Sunday took place during the troubles in Northern Ireland when society was divided and falling into a state of turmoil. In order to understand the political and social tensions of the time, it is important to have a brief understanding of the history of Northern Ireland. For hundreds of years there were a series of plantations in Ireland which aimed at getting the country under British rule. In 1609 the plantation of Ulster took place and many protestant settlers from Scotland, England and Wales arrived. By 1703 under 5 percent of landowners in Ulster were catholic (Darby 1995). Ulster, the province which covers the north of Ireland, differed from the rest of the country after the plantations, as it had a large protestant majority who did not identify with Irish culture. This protestant majority in Ulster resulted in many wishing to stay part of the UK after the Irish war of independence ended in 1921.

In 1921 Ireland was partitioned with six counties in Ulster remaining as part of the United Kingdom and the rest of Ireland gaining independence. The prot-

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[2]   An example of this fluctuating victim status is given by Schwöbel-Patel (2015). In this example Schwöbel-Patel points out that refugees from Libya, the victims who suffered under Gadhafi, were initially called 'brave lions' by the British Prime Minister David Cameron, but when they became asylum seekers they were then referred to as a 'swarm'. This shows that ideal victim status could be given when it did not harm the agenda of the British government, however when it was no longer convenient for the asylum seekers to be seen as ideal, the status was revoked.

estants within these six counties felt they could only keep this partition with constant vigilance and so different measures were taken, one of which included a police force which was almost exclusively protestant. Elections were biased towards Unionists as Gerrymandering was carried out openly. Economic discrimination was used against the catholic minority which consisted of one third of the population. These actions led to much hostility between Catholics and Protestants (Darby 1995). Another reason however for the unrest in Northern Ireland was due to the British government refusing to acknowledge the discrimination occurring in the North (Conway 2010). This created a hostility between Catholics and the British as well as Catholics and Protestants. Catholics were often Nationalists which means they wanted a united Ireland, and Protestants were mostly Unionists which means they wished to remain with the UK (Darby 1995). It was due to this conflict of political ideologies and discrimination that the troubles evolved in Northern Ireland which lasted 30 years.

Due to growing civil disorder the British sent over troops which were initially welcomed by the catholic population however the troops soon were seen to side with Unionists and this created further unrest in the North (McCleery 2016). The provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army) started a violent campaign due to the unrest and tension which existed between the nationalists and unionists. In 1971 internment was introduced which allowed for the imprisonment without trial of many catholic nationalists.

3.2 The events of Bloody Sunday and its aftermath

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was founded in 1967 to demand an end to discrimination. In response to internment, they organized a march on the 30th of January 1972 which resulted in the British paratroopers shooting 26 civilians, 14 of whom were killed. This march had been banned by the authorities but had continued anyway. Prior to the march the Army had been given orders to arrest and detain the marchers and barricades were set up along the route of the march. When the Protestors arrived at the barricade a riot broke out with protestors throwing bricks and bottles. The paras initially reacted with purple water dye and rubber bullets and at 3.55 pm the British army fired their first shots. Ten minutes later the order to make arrests was given and they pursued the protestors with gunfire (Conway 2010). The army shot recklessly into the crowd, despite hundreds of eyewitnesses at the march, killing marchers who were running and crawling away. One victim, James Wray, was shot whilst mortally wounded on the ground. Another victim, Bernard McGuigan, was shot and killed whilst waving a white handkerchief trying to

get to the aid of Patrick Doherty who was wounded (Saville 2010). It is also important to note the devastation caused by these events extended beyond those who were wounded and killed, as noted by the band U2 in their song dedicated to Bloody Sunday, the event resulted in "mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart."

After the events of Bloody Sunday, the UK set up an inquiry carried out by lord Widgery. The report of the inquiry stated that the soldiers "bordered on reckless" but were fired on first and so should be exonerated (Widgery 1972). The report put blame on the victims despite countless eyewitness reports claiming the victims were unarmed. This was seen by nationalists to be a whitewashing and many people who had previously wanted a peaceful approach to a united Ireland joined the IRA (Conway 2010). In 1998 another inquiry was set up to investigate the events and this resulted in the Saville report (Saville et al. 2010). This report is seen as a true reflection of events and placed blame on the Soldiers and stated that the victims were innocent. It resulted in an official apology from the Prime Minister of the UK and a legal investigation into the soldiers involved in the killings.

The Republic of Ireland's response was different to that of the UK. After the events, the UK exonerated their soldiers and placed blame on the victims, whereas the Irish government gave support towards the victims and condemned the actions of the soldier (Lynch 1972). The Republic of Ireland promised funding to help non-violent protests by the nationalists in the north. They also called for an international inquiry as a British inquiry would not be good enough (Conway 2010). Furthermore, the Taoiseach of Ireland in a public broadcast requested an end to military involvement in the catholic areas of Northern Ireland as well as an end to internment (Lynch 1972). This shows a completely different attitude than the official reaction of the UK. It is asserted that this is due to the different political ideologies of both governments which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

4. Ideal victims and the role of governments

From looking at the history of Bloody Sunday it is clear that the Republic of Ireland readily gave support to the victims, therefore it can be said they were given ideal victim status. However, in the UK the victims were not readily granted victim status and were not given supports and so are not ideal victims. By looking at the political ideologies of both these states it will be shown how their motivation's differed in granting ideal victim status.

4.1 Political ideologies at the time of the Troubles

The Republic of Ireland has had a strong link to Catholicism and while being neutral and supporting the British in their response to the troubles, stated that the Republic's first priority was "the protection of the lives and property of Nationalists in Northern Ireland" (Kennedy 2018: 69). At the time of Bloody Sunday, the Irish Constitution laid claim to the North and so it is evident that the allegiance of the Irish government was more with the Nationalists as opposed to the Unionists. One incident which clearly demonstrates the support of the Irish government for the Nationalists in the North is the setting up of infantry groups along the border of Northern Ireland in 1969. The Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, released a statement declaring that his government would not "stand by," however Irish troops were never actually deployed for a number of reasons including a lack of manpower (Longwill 2009). Because the Irish government sided with the Nationalists when it came to tensions in Northern Ireland, it was not against the ideologies of the Irish government to portray the victims of Bloody Sunday as ideal. The UK however, unlike the Republic of Ireland, was seen to favor the protestant and unionist majority in the north and it did not follow their political agenda or ideology to grant ideal status to the victims of Bloody Sunday. The British army was seen to favor unionists, and the British government did not address the issues of discrimination in the North thus showing a disregard towards the minority nationalist population (Conway 2010). The British government framed the conflict as a domestic campaign of terrorism and in particular painted the Nationalist population as terrorists. The troubles were deemed a national emergency as opposed to an armed conflict and so were dealt with under national law and not international law (Hearty 2019). By being under national law, the British government could frame the situation as they wished, without receiving international scrutiny. For this reason, it was in the political interest of the British government to portray the victims as non-ideal and keep up the façade of nationalists being terrorists and the troubles being a domestic issue.

As well as this political ideology which wanted to portray the situation in Northern Ireland as a domestic terrorist issue, there was a political motivation to defend the armed forces of the state. Admitting to the innocence of the victims of Bloody Sunday, according to Christie, is admitting to the guilt of the British soldiers because "the more ideal a victim is, the more ideal becomes the offender" (Christie 1986: 18). It was thus clearly against the interests of the British government to grant ideal status to the victims of Bloody Sunday as it would paint the British Army in a negative light. Furthermore, as pointed out by Garland (2001) governments use ideal victims to justify more punitive responses to

crime and disorder. However, if the British granted ideal status to the victims of Bloody Sunday, the government would be admitting to the wrongdoings of its law enforcement, thus undermining the legitimacy of army intervention in the North of Ireland. Due to the divergence of political motivations, both states portrayed the victims differently to suit their political ideologies.

4.2 Did the victims of Bloody Sunday meet Christie's criteria and how were the victims portrayed differently using these criteria?

Being an ideal victim is a subjective matter. Victims can be ideal in one place and non-ideal in another. What really matters in achieving ideal victim status is how one is portrayed. By looking at each of Christie's criteria it is clear that both the Irish and British government gave different portrayals of the victims and their victimization. In Ireland, the victims can be said to be ideal, but the British government's initial reaction to Bloody Sunday could not be said to have granted ideal victim status. However, with time, the portrayal of the victims has changed and so has their status within the UK. The first requirement of Christie's is that the victim must be weak (1986). The victims of Bloody Sunday from official reports were in an inferior position: unarmed and unprepared to receive fire from the British army. The 13 victims who died instantly were between 17 and 41 years old and among them six were teenagers.[3] All of the victims were men and Christie argues that women are seen as weaker than men (1986), however, the fact that the men were unarmed, and teenagers were killed suggests that the victims were weak. Whilst the victims may objectively be defined as weak, this does not mean they were portrayed in this way. The British government and media portrayed the victims as aggressive and violent thus making them threatening and strong as opposed to weak. The Widgery report not only manipulated the facts but told lies to portray victims as strong and threatening. They did this by stating that the victims were armed and members of the IRA (Widgery 1972). This takes away the perception that the victims were weak thus making them non-ideal. In the Republic of Ireland however, the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch stated in a public broadcast that "the government is satisfied that British soldiers recklessly fired on unarmed civilians" (1972), thus showing the victims as weak and defenseless. In addition to being weak, the victim must be carrying out a respectable project (Christie 1986). The march was organized by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association to protest the British policy of internment. The main

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3   M. Melaugh, "'Bloody Sunday', Derry 30 January 1972 - Names of the Dead and Injured", https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/deadinj.htm.

reason for their demonstration was therefore towards equal civil rights and the fight against administrative internment. In the Republic of Ireland, the victims were portrayed to have been carrying out a respectable project. The day after the events of Bloody Sunday, Jack Lynch (1972) called for an end to internment, this is clearly stating that the aims of the march were legitimate as the Irish Republic believed it necessary to ensure peace in Northern Ireland. In the UK, the victims were seen as marching in a violent march which was illegal and linked to paramilitary groups (Curtis 1984). The British paid more attention to the illegalities of the march than to the reasons behind the march thus not portraying the victims to be carrying out a respectable project.

The third criterion is that the victim should not be blamed for his or her presence on the street (Christie 1986). The march in which the victims were engaged was not permitted and so objectively this could make the victims less ideal. However, there is still a divergence in how victims were portrayed using this criterion. The victims were blamed by the UK for their presence on the street as it was an illegal march, and the British government went so far as to put blame on the organizers for the deaths of the victims stating that no deaths would have happened had they followed the ban (Widgery 1972). In Ireland, the march was seen as honorable. Unlike the British media, the Irish media did not blame the victims for their presence on the street as they were seen to be fighting for a just cause and so the victims were again further seen as ideal.

The fourth criterion put forward by Christie is that the offender must be big and bad (1986). When the British authorities learned about the march, they sent tanks and paratroopers as reinforcements to the location. Although British paratroopers had no reason to believe they were under threat from the victims, according to the Saville report (2010), 21 members of the British Army fired more than 100 live rounds over the course of the day in violation of orders issued to every British soldier serving in Northern Ireland at the time. Again, the UK portrayed these events very differently to how they were actually carried out in order to prevent ideal victim status being given to the victims of Bloody Sunday. The victims were falsely accused of firing at the army first (Widgery 1972). The guilt of the victims was thus played up in order to defend the offenders. In the Republic of Ireland, the army were portrayed as big and bad offenders who fired on defenseless victims (Lynch 1972). There is a strong link between the offender and victim and when the offender is ideal so is the victim (Christie 1986). The British, by portraying the offenders as acting rationally within the law, are again adding to the portrayal of the Bloody Sunday victims as non-ideal, whereas the Irish government are portraying the offenders as ideal and so also declaring victims as ideal too.

The last criterion which is needed to be an ideal victim is that there is no relationship between the offender and victim. As the offenders were British paramilitaries and the victims were Northern Irish civilians there was no personal relationship between the offender and victim. This criterion was not relied on by either the UK or Ireland in creating their portrayals of the victims. Instead, the first four criteria were used in granting or refusing ideal victim status.

By looking at these criteria and how the victim's characteristics were manipulated either to be seen as ideal victims or non-ideal victims, it is clear that perception is what matters most when looking at Christie's concept of an ideal victim. Very few victims will meet all criteria put forward by Christie as it requires 5 variables all to occur at the same time. There is however a hierarchy of victimhood from most ideal to less ideal (Gracia, 2018). The victims of Bloody Sunday objectively should be classified not as completely ideal, but close to ideal. The victims were unarmed and were dealing with a big and bad offender. As well as this they were marching for an honorable cause and many of the victims were young. However, they cannot objectively be granted complete ideal victim status under Christie's criteria as they were breaking the law by carrying out an illegal march, and the protestors threw bottles and bricks at the army. However, this did not warrant being shot at by the paratroopers. When the army pursued the crowd, they shot at protestors who were trying to flee and so could not be seen to be a threat. For these reasons it is maintained that the victims are close to ideal but cannot be granted full victim status. When granting ideal status however, whether objectively the victims are ideal or not is irrelevant. Instead, their portrayal is the most important factor to be considered. The portrayal of the victims in the Republic of Ireland left out details which may have made the victims seem less innocent and ideal, however in the UK the government altered the facts in order to put blame on the victims. This act by the UK goes to show how far governments will go to portray victims in the way they wish.

4.3 The changing of victim status

1998 marked a key milestone in Northern Ireland with the peace processes resulting in the Good Friday Agreement. This treaty which involved both the British government, Irish government, and the paramilitary groups, put an official end to the troubles. With the beginning of a peaceful era in Northern Ireland, the British agenda to frame the troubles as a domestic terrorist campaign was no longer needed. For this reason, it was no longer against the British political ideology to admit to the innocence of the victims of Bloody Sunday and so a

new enquiry into the events could be set up. This inquiry was carried out under lord Saville and was called the Saville report (2010).

The Saville report is regarded as relaying a true account of the events of Bloody Sunday and disproves many of the findings in the Widgery report (Mc Laughlin & Baker 2015). The Saville report admits to the innocence of the victims and the guilt of the army, who fired recklessly at unarmed protestors. With the release of the Saville report came the statements of the Prime Minister David Cameron. He stated that what happened was "both unjustified and unjustifiable, it was wrong" (2010). The UK government's acknowledgement of the innocence of the victims and the wrongdoing of the army allowed the victims finally to be granted ideal status, something the families of victims had been requesting for decades (Barcat 2012). The Saville report also led to the trial and conviction of soldier F., one of the soldiers involved in Bloody Sunday. This case study shows how when the political interests of a government change, so can their portrayal of events which can lead to a change in victim status.

It is important to note however that the British government was careful not to condone the British defense forces as a whole, only those involved in Bloody Sunday. The Prime Minister refers to British soldiers being the "finest in the world" and states that the soldiers are asked to serve in "very difficult and dangerous circumstances." The Prime Minister later went on to say how "Bloody Sunday is not the defining story of the service the British Army gave in Northern Ireland" and "Our armed forces displayed enormous courage and professionalism in upholding democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland" (Cameron 2010). These comments from David Cameron show that the UK government was still worried about granting ideal status to the victims of Bloody Sunday by admitting to the guilt of the offenders. The UK government was very careful not to put a negative light on the defense forces. To give ideal victim status it was necessary to admit to the wrongdoing of the army because of the link between the guilt of offenders and the innocence of victims (Christie 1986). To counteract the negative attention being brought to the British army Cameron was careful to acknowledge the great work of the army outside the events of Bloody Sunday. This thus ensured that giving ideal victim status did not go against the government's agenda of respecting and commending the defense forces of the UK. To conclude this section, what is most important to note is that what really matters when victims are to be given ideal status is how the victims are perceived and portrayed. These portrayals of victims can be decided by governments depending on what their political views and interests are. This is clear from the different portrayals put forward of victims from both the Irish and British government. Furthermore, in admitting to the

wrongdoing of the soldiers involved in Bloody Sunday, the British government was careful to remind people of the other great work carried out by the army to ensure that the UK's interest in defending the honor of their defense forces was protected.

5. Implications

The response of the British government to the victims of Bloody Sunday had many implications, one of which was adding to the tensions in Northern Ireland. The nationalist community in Northern Ireland were outraged by the official report of events in the Widgery report. The report was seen as a whitewashing and it furthered nationalist resentment towards the British government and led to more people joining the IRA (McCleery, 2016).

When speaking of the incident, a Northern Ireland politician said:

> This was not an ambush on a lonely road, It wasn't someone throwing a bomb into a pub and then disappearing. Bloody Sunday happened in broad daylight. It was witnessed by hundreds of people. Every shooting was witnessed, some by scores of people at close quarters (Fletcher 2019).

From this quotation it is clear that the victims of Bloody Sunday were not the terrorists the British had painted them out as. Many witnesses saw the innocence of those who were killed and the atrocities carried out by the soldiers. The community of Derry knew the victims were innocent but were still being denied the victim-status they deserved, and the perpetrators were not being prosecuted. This outrage at the British for refusing the victims ideal-status led to further tension and violence in the north. It also led to further distrust of the British. The response of nationalists in Northern Ireland to the Widgery reports shows how important it is for victims and their families to receive ideal-victim status when innocent.

The outrage from the Widgery report led to the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign which after years of activism helped push for the Saville report (Barcat 2012). Whilst the change of the British political agenda was key to allowing for a new inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday, the response of the people of Northern Ireland in demanding a new inquiry also impacted the setting up of the Saville Report. Had there not been such an outcry at the denial of ideal status given to the victims Bloody Sunday in the Widgery report, it is likely that there would not have been a second inquiry into the matter.

Another impact of the government response to Bloody Sunday, is access to justice and services. Without being granted ideal victim status from the British government there were very little services available to the victims who had been wounded and the families of the dead. There was no legal support or recognition and despite calls for a new inquiry it still took over twenty-five years to launch a new inquiry. However, once ideal victim status was granted to the victim of Bloody Sunday a legal investigation was opened into the matter and finally there was a way for the victims and families to receive justice. The government, as stated, were careful not to taint the name of the British army in general however and only one soldier was charged with murder which may show the reluctance of the state to place blame on soldiers when acting on duty. The events of Bloody Sunday had an impact across the world with commemorative events taking place in cities including London, Glasgow, and Cardiff (Conway 2011). These marches spread further in the 80s to cities such as New York and Boston. It is important to note however that these marches were organized in places with many Irish immigrants and so these commemorations are more so a reflection of the impact of the Irish response to Bloody Sunday as opposed to the world's response. However, the influence of Irish emigrants ought not to be overlooked with the 25th anniversary of Bloody Sunday leading to a commemorative march in Milan which called for a new inquiry into the events, and the commemorative march in London calling for a withdrawal of the British army from Northern Ireland.

6. Role of the media

Our perception of crime and victimization is highly influenced by how the crime is defined, how the victims are portrayed and how the public understands what happened. Media reports on crime and victimization have a significant impact on people's attitude towards the people involved (Jewkes 2015). While the criminal justice system focuses on the offender and the crime, the media tends to focus more on the victims, on what they have experienced (Greer 2010). However, the media also tends to portray news from the angle of government officials, thus giving a biased story which only portrays victims in the way the government wants them to be seen (Elias 1986: 41). This is particularly the case with regards to media coverage on the victims of Bloody Sunday. The complexity of a victim's status and the importance placed on portrayal of victims makes the work of the media interesting as the words used, the journalistic style adopted and the images captured are able to change notably our conscience and our analyses.

The portrayal of the victims of Bloody Sunday has changed over time in the media. This is because the media's representation of events tends to correspond with the government's account of events thus only showing one side of the story. When the government's account changes, so does the media's. This is an issue as the media often affects how victims are seen by the public and the accounts of governments are not always trustworthy as governments may want to hide wrongdoings of officials (Elias 1986: 41). This approach of the media in portraying victims is particularly evident in the British media who closely resemble the attitude of the British government towards the victims of Bloody Sunday. With the release of the Widgery report the British media portrayed victims as non-ideal as they were portrayed as aggressive criminals.

6.1 A comparison of the British and Irish media on Bloody Sunday (1972-1998)

The extent to which the media backed up the statements of the British government is highlighted by the fact that the media were present at the march and so had first-hand accounts of events (McCleary 2016: 977). Despite having witnessed the soldiers attack unprovoked, the British media still sided with the government, going against their own eyewitness accounts. A clear example of the British media siding with the army and government accounts can be seen in *The Guardian* newspaper. Their reporter, Simon Winchester, was at the event and reported on his experience at the march and the injustices which occurred, even stating that one sniper fired two shots at him. Despite this eyewitness report, the lead article drew attention to the illegalities of the march and how warning had been given of the dangers of protesting.[4] This shows how the media endeavored to align their stories with that of official government statements.

It is interesting to compare the response of British media to the events of Bloody Sunday to the Irish media. The British media, following the government's portrayal of victims as non-ideal, can be seen in the biased language used by British papers against the victims. As stated by Elias (1986) the media often use sensationalism to create a unique angle of a story rather than representing reality. Certain words are used to create bias for or against the victims.

The British bias against victims is seen in an article from *The Daily Telegraph* (31st January 1972) printed the day after Bloody Sunday. The paper wrote "banned march erupts into Riot" and the article also claimed that the IRA were told to "shoot as many troops as possible." By referring to the march as a riot,

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[4]   *The Guardian*, January 31, 1972, https://i.guim.co.uk/img/static/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/
2011/6/1/1306941828608/1972leader.jpg?width=620&quality=45&dpr=2&s=none.

the paper sensationalizes the story by alluding to the fact that the victims were acting violently. *The Daily Telegraph*, by drawing attention to the illegalities of the march, is placing blame on the victims for their presence, thus not allowing Christie's third criterion to apply to the victims which is that victims ought not to be blamed for their presence. The victims were also portrayed as guilty as the article refers to the orders given to the IRA, a statement which was proven to be false in the Saville report. This account given by *The Daily Telegraph* is in line with the army's statement that they were acting in self-defense, and the government supported the statements of the army too.

The Irish media gives a very different portrayal of the events. The Irish media declared the Widgery report to be whitewashing and painted the victims as ideal. This portrayal of victims is shown in *The Irish Independent*, a newspaper in the Republic of Ireland, who's headline reads "13 civilians killed in massacre as British fire on meeting." A pulled quote from the article reads "priest tells of 'point-blank' shots on trapped boys."[5] This article is clearly portraying the victims as weak and innocent and thus ideal. Using the term "massacre" evokes feelings of pity towards the marchers and by describing the event as a "meeting" as opposed to a "riot" gives a different angle to the British press as it changes the biased language alluding to the violence. As well as this, by describing the victims as "trapped boys," the paper portrays the victims as innocent and vulnerable which is in complete contrast to *The Daily Telegraph* who painted the victims as criminals who were marching illegally and were acting violently. The Irish portrayal of the events thus represents the victims of Bloody Sunday as ideal.

The Irish media's portrayal of the victims fits in with how the media often tells a story from a victim's point of view as opposed to the offender's and creates sympathy for the victim (Greer 2010). It is argued that the different portrayals of the victims of Bloody Sunday are due to the British press supporting the official inquiry and statement's given by their government. As the Irish media does not represent the British government, the portrayal of events differed from the British media and instead followed the typical approach of the media to crimes, and portrayed the victims as being innocent. The Irish media however may have been following the political agenda of the Irish government which gave support to Nationalists in Northern Ireland. It is important to note however that the Irish government's agenda was not anywhere near as strong as the British government's agenda. While the Irish media always portrayed the victims of Bloody Sunday as innocent, the British press portrayed the victims negatively. However, when the British government opened a new inquiry into Bloody Sunday, it gave

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5   *The Irish Independent*, January 31, 1972.

the message that the Widgery report may have been wrong. With this change of opinion by the government, the media also changed its opinion and began portraying the victims in a different light.

6.2 The British media and Bloody Sunday (1998-Present)

The British media changed their vision and argumentation when the initiative was taken to write the second report. While the media sometimes tends to take a superficial view of crime, omitting the underlying sources (Elias 1986), the second report has helped reveal the truth of Bloody Sunday. Saville's investigation had a significant impact on the politics of memory and highly contributed to widespread media interest and exposure on Bloody Sunday (Pötzsch 2012). The approval of a new inquiry marked a turning point as it could be interpreted as a reconsideration of the status of the victims. The British media were more respectful to the wounded and to the relatives, giving them the dignity of being portrayed as ideal victims. It was not only the news media who examined the events of Bloody Sunday and portrayed victims in a different light. Documentaries and songs were made about the victims and these had a great importance in changing the public's view of victims. Two British documentaries on Bloody Sunday illustrate this point, first *Sunday*, directed by Charles McDougall and written by Jimmy McGovern (2002) and second, *Bloody Sunday*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2002). The documentary *Sunday* was made with official documents and extended interviews and the actors were eyewitnesses and relatives of those involved that day. Both films caught national attention, in Britain and in Ireland (Pötzsch 2012). The movies were crucial to raising awareness of the events outside of Derry. It was important to the families that the victim's stories were shared outside the facts of the Widgery report. Both films, while made 8 years before the Saville report, reflect many of the conclusions which came from the 2010 report. Also, books on this topic have been published since 1998 such as *Bloody Sunday: Truths, Lies and the Saville Inquiry* (Murray, 2012) in which Douglas Murray shared stories on the individuals involved in Bloody Sunday.

After 12 years of extensive work, the Saville report was published in 2010. On June 16th, a number of newspapers dedicated their front page to the Saville report and to the commemoration of Bloody Sunday. The words used by the British press changed from their initial reports of calling the march an illegal riot to referring to it as a "massacre" (*The Daily Mail*, 16th June 2010) and the victims as "innocent" (*The Daily Telegraph*). Upon admitting to the innocence of the victims of Bloody Sunday, the media began playing a positive role on the behalf of the victims and their families. The media attracted the public's atten-

tion, calling for their sympathy and their pity. Moreover, the media gave a platform to the families of the victims, which had not been done before. One relative of a victim of Bloody Sunday stated "the victims have been vindicated. The Parachute Regiment has been disgraced. The truth has been brought home at last. Widgery's great lie has been laid bare."[6] This media approach reinforced the ideal status of victims in the public opinion, their legitimacy and their right to be heard. It is interesting to note however that whilst the media readily gave ideal-victim status to the victims, the offenders were not readily given ideal-offender status. Whilst the soldier's involved were villainized and blamed for the deaths of victims, the media, like the UK government, were very careful to reinforce the good name of the army. As stated by McLoughlin and Baker (2015: 64) many papers worried about the implications of the Saville report on soldiers. The reaction of many of the British papers reflects the government's agenda to paint their defense forces in a positive light in order to legitimize their foreign policies and spending on defense. In the *Daily Mail*,[7] the headline declared the innocence of the victims of Bloody Sunday, however it was beside a large piece on the hero's in Afghanistan. This is clearly trying to balance the criticism of the soldiers involved in Bloody Sunday by commending other soldiers who show the "true face" of the British army.

7. Conclusion

Being granted ideal victim status is no trivial matter. Those injured in Bloody Sunday and the families of those who were killed, campaigned for years to achieve ideal victim status. The Nationalist community were enraged by the whitewashing, which added to the tensions in Northern Ireland, and commemorative marches occurred in various cities around the world in memory of those who were killed and injured in Bloody Sunday. This shows the importance that is placed on the recognition of ideal victim status.

This contribution has looked at how the portrayal of victims by the government is key to achieving ideal victim status. If victims are portrayed to have met the criteria put forward by Christie, then they will be seen as ideal. Govern-

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[6]   *The Guardian*, June 16, 2010, https://i.guim.co.uk/img/static/sys-images/Media/Pix/pictures/2010 /6/16/1276683216240/The-Guardian-004.jpg?width=880&quality=45&auto=format&fit=max&dpr =2&s=e1cce325c7cf4d542711b1d916ac13bf.

[7]   *Daily Mail*, June 16, 2010, https://i.guim.co.uk/img/static/sys-images/Media/Pix/pictures/2010/6/ 16/1276683212474/Daily-Mail-002.jpg?width=880&quality=45&auto=format&fit=max&dpr=2&s= 02b9e64c534cd6e8068825e7ecc46787.

ments, however, decide whether or not to grant ideal victim status based on their political interests and so victims can go from being non-ideal to ideal over time. Victims can also be seen as ideal in one country but non-ideal in another depending on the political agenda and ideologies of governments. The media plays a vital role in this portrayal of victims. The media often reflects the views of their government. This was highlighted in the British media's response to the victims of Bloody Sunday which portrayed victims in the same way as the British government. This is problematic as it supports the government's portrayal of victims even if it is not a factual or objective reflection of events.

With the release of the Saville report in 2010, ideal status was finally granted to the victims of Bloody Sunday. This recognition likely would not have come about had the troubles not come to an end and the political ideologies of the British government changed with regards to Northern Ireland. With the British government granting ideal status to the victims of Bloody Sunday, came a change in the media's portrayal of victims. Despite this recognition of ideal victim status coming almost 40 years after the tragic deaths of the victims, accountability is critical for the families to make peace with this dark past.

Broken bottles under children's feet
Bodies Strewn Across the dead-end street
But I won't heed the battle call
It puts my back up
Puts my back up against the wall
U2, *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, 1983

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Chapter 3
The victims of Boko Haram

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Abstract

Attacks on the civilian population are an integral part of the terroristic strategy of the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram. The following chapter discusses four different groups of victims and their distinct experiences of violence that result from this conduct: women, children, elderly people, and young Christian and Muslim men. It can be observed that these different groups do not receive the same social recognition although each of them is exposed to violence by Boko Haram. By applying the notion of the 'ideal victim' to each group, the chapter finds that those victims fulfilling the characteristics of the 'ideal victim' are given social recognition more readily. The chapter concludes by discussing the unequal distribution of social recognition, establishing a hierarchy of victims based on the former, and pointing out the problematic consequences of the aforementioned.

Keywords: Boko Haram – Ideal victim – Terrorism

1. Introduction

The notion of ideal victims becomes significantly relevant in regard to analyzing victims of Boko Haram. Over the last decades the Nigerian Islamist terrorist group has systematically employed violence against civilians which has caused the death and displacement of thousands of people. Within the research field, the exact year of Boko Haram's emergence is uncertain. However, scholars argue that Boko Haram became visible in the early 2000s when Mohammed Yusuf became their leader (Iyekekpolo 2016: 2212). The group evolved

from a non-violent movement operating mainly in the Muslim predominant Northeast of Nigeria (Mohammed 2014). Opposing Western education and the secularization of the Nigerian society, the organization based its beliefs on a strict interpretation of the Qur'an, demanding the implementation of the Sharia law. The economic deprivation that the majority of the Nigerian population experienced caused deep greed and frustration, where some felt responsible to take action and change the situation in the country (Akinola 2015; Iyekekpolo 2016). Through sermons, Muhammad Yusuf pointed out the corruption and misconduct of the government. The group appealed to many teenagers, so much so that Yusuf has been defined as "the leader of young people" (Ekhomu 2020: 4). The unstable situation in the country established a political momentum, and several Nigerian politicians promoted Boko Haram's wish for a full implementation of the Sharia.

The first years of Boko Haram's activities focused on preaching, trying to recruit new members and spread its ideas through verbal critiques of the Nigerian system, which was depicted as altered by Western values (Pérouse de Montclos 2014). The turning point in the strategy of the group occurred between 2009 and 2010, after two episodes that strongly opposed the adherents of the organization against the government's forces. On 11 June 2009, in Maiduguri, the police stopped some Boko Haram's members during a funeral procession, because they were not wearing their motorcycle helmets. The possibility of being arrested created a conflictual atmosphere in which the authorities started shooting against the almost 300 mourners, causing 20 deaths (Ekhomu 2020). On 24 July, Hassan Sani Badami, a supporter of the group, caused an explosion at his house while building an improvised explosive device. He died on impact, however, his assistant, wife and little child, despite severe injuries, were immediately interrogated. On 25 July, Yusuf declared that what happened to Badami "had earned him a place in paradise" (Ekhomu 2020: 25), calling for a mobilization of its followers. The response was immediate as on July 26, attacks were carried out on a police station in Bauchi City and several buildings in Maiduguri such as the Police Mobile Force training college and the new prison. The authorities counteracted surrounding the headquarters of Boko Haram, leading to a battle of four days and 700-1000 dead Islamic adherents (Matfess 2017). Many arrests were carried out, including the imprisonment of Yusuf in the Giwa military barracks (Maiduguri). After a few days, he was moved to the State Police Headquarters, where some agents shot him, claiming he was trying to escape.

The extra-judicial murder of the leader marked a radical change in Boko Haram's approach. The members of the group disappeared for 14 months, leaving Maiduguri and settling in the countryside. Only in April 2010, they released a

video in which Abubakar Shekau, second-in-command of Yusuf, declared himself as the new leader. This shift led to the beginning of the most violent phase of the organization, which adopted a terroristic strategy, openly opposing the Nigerian authorities. The responses from the Nigerian government, including indiscriminate killings of Boko Haram members and as well as many civilians, have been strongly criticized for also violating human rights. This was a driver of popular acceptance to Boko Haram, and caused a common lack of faith in the Nigerian government's ability to de-escalate the situation (Campbell 2014).

Shekau supported a more violent practice of targeted assassinations, hostage taking and suicide bombings to impose his ideology and build an Islamic caliphate. His vision condemned the government as responsible for poverty and deprivation, which hit especially the northeastern regions, and proposed the implementation of Islamic values as the only solution. From this perspective, any means became suitable for creating a country led by Boko Haram. Violent attacks began soon, when 759 prisoners were freed from Bauchi Prison in September 2010. In August 2011, the United Nations headquarters in Abuja represented the first target of suicide bombing implemented by the organization, killing 24 people and injuring over 100 (Pérouse de Montclos 2014). The terrorist strategy showed to be effective during these years as Boko Haram managed to control 75% of Borno State (Ekhomu 2020). Furthermore, the violent approach implied an indiscriminate targeting, which included civilians, in particular, the so-called "infidels", namely anyone who does not share the group's beliefs (Pérouse de Montclos 2014). The casualties became so many that Boko Haram was labeled the deadliest terrorist organization in 2014, killing 6,664 people (Searcey & Santora 2015).

The targeting of the population, encompassing Muslims, by Shekau arose doubts about his leadership, provoking the split into two factions in 2016: the Islamic State-West Africa Province (ISWAP) of Abu Musab al-Barnawi and *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS) headed by Abubakar Shekau. During the latest years, the group has lost control of many territories in North-East Nigeria, however, the terroristic strategy is still a threat to the population. In particular, JAS keeps using suicide bombs to hit its targets, while ISWAP organizes large-scale attacks involving mainly military forces (Mahmood & Ani 2018). Despite an overall loss of power, the Nigerian people cannot live a normal life yet as the danger of Boko Haram is still present.

As laid out above, attacks on the civilian population are part of the terroristic strategy of Boko Haram. In the following chapter, we aim to examine different groups of victims. When it comes to recognizing victimhood, society plays a significant role. According to Nils Christie's theory of the 'ideal victim', society eval-

uates the individuals' worthiness of receiving legitimate victim status based on the presence of the following six attributes: 1) The victim is weak; 2) The victim carries out a respectable project; 3) The victim is not to be blamed and has not precipitated the situation; 4) The victim's offender is big and bad; 5) The offender is unknown by the victim; 6) The victim is not opposed to "counter-powers" and is thus powerful enough to successfully claim the victim status (Christie 1986: 12). If the six attributes are not possessed, it deprives individuals from receiving victim status. Problematically, it is that the notion of ideal victim has many real implications, despite that it does not reflect the actual reality. Here, Christie presents the distinction between the ideal victim and non-ideal victim to emphasize how this distinction anticipates injustice in society. The non-ideal victim may both be the victim who has a personal relation to the offender, or the victim being victimized without knowing. The ideal victim mobilizes a sympathy that the non-ideal victim does not receive from society. This gives the ideal victim an advance. Without receiving the deserved and desired social recognition, the non-ideal victim is blamed for their own suffering both by society and by themselves.

Our focus is to discuss whether the four following groups can be characterized as ideal victims: women, child soldiers, elderly people and young Christian and Muslim men. We will apply the notion of ideal victim to each of the groups of victims to discuss how social recognition depends on the group's fulfillment of the characteristics of an ideal victim. We will further analyze how social recognition of victimhood is unequally distributed despite the fact that the four groups of victims are all a result of the violent acts of Boko Haram. We show that a hierarchy of social recognition can be established among the victim groups considered with those fulfilling the characteristics of an ideal victim at the top.

2. Analysis

2.1 Women and girls: victims of sexual violence

2.1.1. Situation of female victims of Boko Haram

On the night of 14 to 15 April 2014, Boko Haram launched its most well-known attack on civilians to date. The terrorists broke into a public school in the town of Chibok, northeastern Nigeria where they found a group of 276 schoolgirls in their dormitories. The girls had been staying in the school to sit their final exams (Maiangwa & Agbiboa 2014: 52). After pillaging the school and burning it to its grounds, they loaded the 16- to 18-year-old girls onto a truck and abducted them (Human Rights Watch 2014). While 57 of them were able to escape immediately, the traces of the other 219 girls disappeared (Jibril

2015: 1). On 5 May 2014, an hour-long video was released in which the Boko Haram leader threatened to sell the girls as slaves and wives on the black market. Simultaneously, he offered the girls' freedom under the condition that the government released a considerable number of the group's imprisoned militants (Maiangwa & Agbiboa 2014: 52). Only in October 2016, 32 months after the abduction, the first group of 21 girls was liberated following negotiations between the government and Boko Haram, mediated by the Swiss government and the International Committee of the Red Cross. 82 more followed in May 2017. As of February 2018, 112 of the girls were still missing. According to testimonies given by those freed, the abducted girls suffered violence, enslavement, forced conversion to Islam, and were forcibly married to fighters. Many of them became pregnant during their captivity (Ijasuen 2022).

The abduction of the Chibok girls is an example of gender-based violence – violence that is "based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015: 5) – regularly used by Boko Haram. Women are specifically targeted and subjected to special forms of violence. In particular, Boko Haram refers to Sharia Law, that is based on "rigidly gendered ideological structures" (Zenn & Pearson 2014: 51) and centrally features women's inferiority to men (Maiangwa & Agbiboa 2014: 51).

What makes the case of the Chibok girls outstanding is the public global outrage with which it was met. Under the hashtag *#bringbackourgirls*, activists all over the world demanded the release of the girls. This phenomenon can be understood when employing the analytical framework of the 'ideal victim'.

2.1.2 Women and girls as the ideal victims?
The abducted girls meet all the characteristics of ideal victims. They are perceived as weak because of their young age and gender in a patriarchal society. At the time of their victimization the girls were carrying out the respectable project of working on their final exams. This is especially remarkable in a region where only four percent of young women finish secondary school (Maxfield 2016: 894). Thus, one could even portray them as bravely fighting against structural inequalities. Moreover, the girls cannot be blamed for being at the school where the offense happened and did not precipitate it. Access to formal education is a human right and therefore being at school cannot be considered a precipitation of offense. Lastly, in their struggle to successfully claim their victim status, the girls were especially supported by white feminist movements from the Global North. They successfully made their story heard under the hashtag #bringbackourgirls. Those, from a postcolonial point of view, powerful actors were able to make the victimhood of the girls recognized on a global level (Maxfield 2016: 890).

Additionally, the Boko Haram fighters fulfill all the characteristics to represent the opposite of the ideal victims. The male fighters were stronger than the victims. Furthermore, the dominant discourse on Islamist terrorists describes them as evil, irrational, and abnormal (Gunning & Jackson 2011: 375). Moreover, the terrorists were unknown offenders that abducted the girls, not because of a personal relationship but merely as an instrument for creating leverage for negotiations between the state and the terrorist group to compel the government to release their fighters (Zenn & Pearson 2014: 47).

In line with the theoretical expectations, the Chibok girls were given social recognition of their victimhood most readily by the #bringbackourgirls campaign. The abduction of the schoolgirls was met with an "unprecedented local and global outrage" (Maiangwa & Agbiboa 2014: 52). The girls' story spread fast via social media, especially on Twitter, attracting public attention from all over the world.[1] Even prominent figures such as First Lady Michelle Obama promoted the hashtag on their social media channels (Ita-Giwa 2014). Furthermore, it inspired protests in multiple countries like Nigeria, France, and the USA (Olutokunbo et al. 2015: 69). The campaign also caused international organizations, agencies, and foreign states to intervene in the matter (Jibril 2015: 2). Among other efforts, an international coalition of Western states, such as the US and UK, was formed to help the Nigerian government in trying to find the girls with technical and specialist assistance (Jibril 2015: 2). In summary, the campaign provided an opportunity for diverse actors all around the world to unite beyond national, cultural, and religious boundaries and fight for the release of the ideal victims. This, certainly, created a "culture of oneness, sense of belonging and togetherness among nations" (Olutokunbo et al. 2015: 69).

At the same time, it is also necessary to point out problematic aspects of the campaign. The campaign was run by at least two groups of activists with different objectives. On the one hand, local Nigerian and diasporic activists aimed at applying pressure on the Nigerian government to take concrete actions to free the girls (Maxfield 2016: 892).[2] This fight was placed in the wider criticism of the Nigerian government for being unable to protect its own citizens from Boko Haram due to corruption deteriorating Nigeria's armed forces (Maxfield 2016: 892). Employed forms of activism included practical politi-

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[1]   The cast of *The Expendables 3* at the 67th Cannes festival in 2014 participating in the campaign: https://nilegirl.medium.com/remember-that-time-when-celebs-turned-the-missing-schoolgirls-fiasco-into-a-reality-show-d56440f1f7bb.

[2]   Protest action in Abuja, Nigeria in April 2019, the 5th anniversary of the abduction: https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_more-100-chibok-girls-still-missing-seven-years-later/6204623.html.

cal actions, such as discussions, the so-called "Speak Out Saturdays" (Maxfield 2016: 888), and campaigns to raise awareness like the Global Week of Action in October 2014, and the campaign for "43 Days of Multinational Rescue" (Maxfield 2016: 894).

On the other hand, activists from the Global North saw themselves as able and competent to speak on behalf of the Nigerian girls, mostly online, as well as during demonstrations and protests (Maxfield 2016: 891). This must be problematized from a postcolonial point of view. Those activists readily appropriated the campaign and the victims as "our girls" (Maxfield 2016: 892). Moreover, proposed solutions for the situation mainly relied on the involvement of the US and UK in the matter (Maxfield 2016: 893) although this was heavily questioned by activists from the Global South (Maxfield 2016: 890).

Moreover, the campaign facilitated the reproduction of neo-colonial narratives such as the threat posed by Muslim terrorists, especially to women (Maxfield 2016: 889) and the stereotype of "helpless African girls, in need of protection (by White imperial powers) against dangerous, violent African men" (Maxfield 2016: 891).

It is also worth noticing that months after the campaign in the Global North died out, local efforts went on (Maxfield 2016: 894). This points to a further problematic implication resulting from the concept of the ideal victim. Social recognition of and support for the ideal victim might be easily reduced to "a feel-good effort that improve[s] the self-esteem of activists but fail[s] to produce palpable results" (Maxfield 2016: 886). It is at constant risk of being instrumentalized by actors to demonstrate their empathy or find a common ground to unite on, especially when (international) communities are divided and at risk of imploding.

2.2. Child soldiers

2.2.1. Child soldiers of Boko Haram

In Nigeria, the employment of minors in warfare environments has been a tactic applied since the beginning of Boko Haram's activities: according to the UN Security Council (2017: 6), "at least 8,000 children have been recruited and used by Boko Haram since 2009". When the armed conflict between the terroristic group and the national authorities started to become harsher in 2013, both parties widely used young boys (Kajjo & Kaina 2020). Abduction was a prominent tactic used by the Islamist group in order to increase their human resources (United Nations Security Council 2017). Even after the division of the organization in 2016, the two factions – Islamic State West Africa Province

(ISWAP) and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad (JAS) – have kept using infants as combatants (Amnesty International 2020a).

The recruitment of young boys is still ongoing as proved by a 27-minutes video released by ISWAP on 18 January 2022, which shows children in military uniforms, training and executing Nigerian army soldiers. Furthermore, the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) has recently stated that only in February 2022 "about 200 young boys graduated from Darul Quran" (Samuel & Ojewale 2022), one of ISWAP's training camps, implying the current use of children as lethal weapons by Boko Haram.

Even when the youngest managed to escape the threat of the Islamist group, they cannot return to a normal existence. The Nigerian authorities detain those who flee due to the probability that they may be spies, often without any evidence. The government's process of "screening" involves almost every person who leaves Boko Haram's territory and implies torture and ill-treatment to obtain confessions from the suspects. This practice is opaque and often concludes with unlawful and long detentions in which human rights are blatantly violated. Amnesty International (2020a: 45) reports "inhumane conditions" such as overcrowded cells with adults and children together, lack of toilets and ventilation leading to an overall low level of hygiene. Moreover, there is inadequate food and water supply, beatings and sexual violence. This severe environment led to more than 10,000 deaths during custody period (Amnesty International 2020a). Despite the data might not be accurate, the number of deaths during custody appears to have reduced during the latest years (Amnesty International 2020a). Recently, Nigerian authorities collaborated in international agencies' programmes such as the Action Plan launched in 2017. This project was coordinated by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and the Civilian joint task force (CJTF) – a vigilante local group created in Maiduguri (Borno State in Northeastern Nigeria) to help the state's authorities in security operations against Boko Haram. It aims to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. The formal release of 883 children from the ranks of the CJTF in 2018 was the first sign of compliance with the Action Plan. UNICEF keeps working with local authorities, promoting reintegration programmes, but it is difficult to deliver aid in a country facing an internal conflict, when military authorities limit humanitarian agencies' actions, especially in the northeast regions (Human Rights Watch 2021). Notwithstanding international attempts, the conditions of child soldiers remain critical and their ambivalence as victims and offenders worsens their integration into society. They appear to suffer a second victimization when they manage to escape Boko Haram's atrocities and suffer detention. Their

childhood is assaulted and their rights violated: no freedom, no education and ill-treatment lead to experiences that are marking their lives forever.

2.2.2 Child soldiers as the ideal victims?

Acknowledging the warfare context which affects the youngest in Nigeria, the notion of the "ideal victim" by Christie (1986) highlights a rooted dichotomy that characterizes child soldiers as victims and perpetrators. Two factors outline the role of minors: their recruitment and actions. Regarding the first one, children enter armed groups in three main modalities: they are forced, through methods such as abduction, conscription or threats; they join voluntarily, entering recruitment programmes or they were born into the armed forces or groups (Drumbl 2012). This represents a watershed that shapes the conceptions of child soldiers as victims, if they undergo coercion, or offenders if they show volition. In the first case, they do not carry any responsibility such as participation or precipitation of the situation, as they were kidnapped and forced to fight, showing no previous personal relations with the Islamist group. In the second scenario, when analyzing why children join Boko Haram, scholars underline how "the local environment of deprivation and poverty provided fertile ground for an extremely radical narrative" (Ekhomu 2020: 41). The promise to tackle those impoverished environments with the Sharia law may have influenced the participation in the Islamist group. This approach shapes an image of child soldiers as "faultless passive victims" (Drumbl 2012: 7) that denies any responsibility of the youngest as compelled by contextual reasons to approach the armed group.

Their actions, however, decrease the "ideality" of the victims. Children "are among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society" (United Nations Global Compact n.d.). They represent the most defenseless subjects *par excellence* and compared to the "evil men" of Boko Haram they can be recognized as weak and, therefore, innocent and not expected to be involved in severe crimes. However, child soldiers often turn into perpetrators, committing "murder, rape, and torture" (Amnesty International 2020a: 27). As fighters, they also become killing tools such as suicide bombers. This factor affects the social recognition of child soldiers that may be seen as "evil", "barbarians" or "victims" (Peters and Richards 1998: 183), compromising their status of ideal victims and urging a case-by-case analysis.

Regarding the notion of the "ideal victim", child soldiers' duality differs from the straightforward conceptualization of Christie. The dichotomous attitude that arises from society toward the involvement of the youngest in armed conflicts shows a rooted complexity in which the "ideality" of victims or offenders lacks and a strong ambivalence prevails.

2.3 Elderly people

2.3.1 The situation of elderly people in Nigeria
According to the criteria established in the report by the UN Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019), old people can be considered those who are no longer of working age, persons aged 65 or more. However, additional socio-cultural indicators, such as familial status (grandparents), physical appearance, or age-related health issues are frequently used by families and communities to define age. In spite of the fact that senior persons are less likely to die or suffer major injuries in any individual attack of Boko Haram, they make up a disproportionately high share of the population in regions that Boko Haram either controls or disputes. Some people continue to stay in these regions because they lack the mobility to leave, while others do so out of strong ties and relationships. Indeed, they bear the risk of violation of their rights and structural stigmatization by the Nigerian authorities, such as unfair treatment and discriminatory attitudes.

Elderly people become victims of Boko Haram in numerous ways (Abba Zanna 2023). Boko Haram frequently kills older men who refuse to turn over their harvest; in better-case circumstances, they pillage or tax people for their cattle, money, and property. Because of the loss of a substantial amount of their harvest and livestock, it is difficult for elderly people to find appropriate food and survive. Their predicament is exacerbated by the fact that the younger generation who had previously supported, assisted, and cared for them have fled to government-controlled regions or, in the majority of cases, have been slain or kidnapped by terrorists, as Amnesty International reports (2020). Furthermore, according to this report, many elderly people were forced to watch their relatives and children being abducted or killed, resulting in serious physical and mental health issues. Not to mention the Nigerian military's operations against Boko Haram, which frequently kills civilians, either intentionally or inadvertently, mistaking them for supporters or just not making any distinctions. Furthermore, the Nigerian military has routinely burnt communities suspected of supporting Boko Haram, causing suffering to all people but especially the elderly, who frequently lose not just their homes but also the wealth and possessions they had accumulated over their lifetime.

2.3.2. Elderly people as the ideal victims?
There is a clear connection between the present life situation faced by old people and the characteristic of "weakness" mentioned by Christie, in his description of "ideal victim". Due to the evident physical vulnerability of people of certain age,

they are constantly exposed to possible violence coming from both parts, either from terrorists or the Nigerian soldiers, as well as having bigger threats in terms of survival, compared to younger people.

On the one hand, many older people, particularly those with restricted mobility and major ailments, perish while attempting to flee Boko Haram's controlled regions. Those who successfully enter government-controlled areas, on the other hand, face further dangers. Tens of thousands of elderly men and women are incarcerated by the Nigerian military in various detention centres in Northeast Nigeria. The rationale for this seemingly illegal practice is the application of counter-terrorism provisions outlined in the Terrorism (Prevention) Act of 2013, and following its amendments, the military authority is entitled to deprive of freedom all those who flee from regions under the control of terrorists, with the clause that they still or had collaborated with jihadists, without credible investigations and any legal support. No wonder that exactly people of an advanced age are under the magnifying glass, considering that they are the primary targets of suspicion in collaboration because of their seniority. Christie pointed out the difference between ideal and non-ideal victim, noting that the non-ideal one is distinguished by its potential interaction with the perpetrator. Certainly, the presumed victims' elderly age may create a number of concerns, including their potential cooperation with and sympathy for terrorists, and as a result, the reasons for their victimization would be distorted. However, according to Amnesty International (2020), a jail supervisor at Maiduguri Maximum Prison reported that only 30% of individuals jailed in connection with the war have any links to Boko Haram, much less have been implicated in crimes against civilians.

Another element that may make older persons more exposed to risks is that they also face greater challenges in reconstruction or in search of a change of accommodation. Forcing people to leave their homes has serious economic and psychological consequences, since it promotes a direct reliance on support supplies. Most displaced older persons reported to Amnesty that food availability is limited in the camps where Nigerian officials oversee food assistance, or that it is frequently delayed, sometimes by weeks. Same applies for medication distribution and access to essential health services, which the majority of people of an advanced age needed the most. Although the elderly may be deemed vulnerable, the government tends to divide society between those who are more and less worthy. Yet, several camp organizers noted in the report that it is highly unusual for humanitarian distribution to reach everyone, and that "vulnerability" is used as a basis for prioritization, with the greatest focus on children, families with young children and expectant or breastfeeding mothers. In this instance, there is a subdivision in the distribution of victims, with the old being placed last, in favor of

the young. As a result, certain victims are disguised by others, producing a system in which "ideal victims" are emphasized and "non-ideal" victims are marginalized.

An additional emphasis could be placed on the fact that the current situation in Nigeria can be seen as a result of prior actions made by individuals who are now deemed "old". Boko Haram was founded in the early 2000s, twenty years ago, and someone allowed the terrorist organization to be formed among those who did not protest and those who collaborated. Christie portrays such a situation as "precipitation", i.e., a fluidity of relationship between victims and offenders, which leads to a shift of positions between two categories: the perpetrator is a victim and vice versa. This perspective contends that elderly people cannot be viewed as "ideal victims" even if their current circumstances are marked by weakness and fragility, but possibly not innocence, and their present is influenced by their past decisions or mere carelessness. Moreover, they can be held accountable for what is happening now, turning them from victims into offenders.

It is almost certain that the Nigerian government is neglecting the rights of the older people in the Northeast. Hundreds of them are unlawfully incarcerated in precarious detention facilities, while others rely only on humanitarian help. Old people describe to Amnesty International feeling abandoned and ignored by everyone. As suggested by Tanyi et al. (2018), it is crucial that all government sectors adopt better policies, particularly those aimed at tackling the mounting issues brought on by aging, as previously mentioned. Yet, there are some struggles coming from the international community, such as financial and humanitarian assistance aimed specifically at the elderly, increasing pressure on Nigerian authorities, and urging the International Criminal Court to authorize an investigation into the detention of elderly people in Nigeria.

2.4 Young Christian and Muslim men

2.4.1 Situation of young Christian and Muslim men in Nigeria
The Nigerian conflict and the activities of Boko Haram are directly linked to a sectarian strife and politicization of religion which has a great influence on the local society and determines all spheres of life. This controversy divides the Nigerian society into separate communities: Christians in the southeast and Muslims in the north.[3] With the country ranking first place in Africa by population density, having the sixth-largest Christian population and fifth largest Muslim population in the world (*DFAT Country Information Report Nigeria*

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[3]   Map of predominant religions in the different regions of Nigeria according to the *World Christian Database*: https://cartomission.com/2021/08/12/christianity-islam-nigeria/

2020: 11), religious division becomes a major problem, potentially leading to never-ending civil tensions or division of the country along different confessional lines. To be more precise, Nigeria has one of the highest population growth rates in the world around 2.5% (The World Bank 2021), and according to resource scarcity model, rapid population growth is one of the major causes of scarcity of resources (Bingham Kennedy 2001), which creates highly conflicted environment additionally triggered by religiosity of society divided into two confessional camps (Bish 2020).

Moreover, Nigeria has been Christianized within just one generation and the percentage of Christians has doubled from 21% in 1952 after only half a century due to the missionary work of evangelical churches. At the same time, the proportion of the Muslim population has hardly changed during this period (Stonawski et al. 2016). Therefore, protest movements caused by unresolved socio-economic problems, took the form of Muslim-Christian confrontation and the already existing inter-communal tensions have drastically intensified with the growing influence of fundamentalist religious movements around the world. Afterwards, Boko Haram began its violent activities with accusations of Nigerian authorities for encouraging the Christianization of the country. The Boko Haram massacre of Christians began with a series of attacks in Yobe State at the end of 2011, where about 100 people were killed. As a result of a suicide bombing at the St. Teresa Catholic Church in Madalla 44 Christians were murdered. The terrorists also claimed responsibility for the 2011 Christmas Eve bombings in the vicinity of Jos, where about 80 people were killed, as well as for the murders of about 20 Christian students and a professor at Ado Bayero University in Kano, as well as parishioners and a priest during a Maiduguri church service.[4]

In the Western narrative the conflict is often portrayed as a religious war that confronts Christian communities with Islamic extremists, where the latter ones are seen as the "pure evil" and the former is closer to the concept of ideal victim. The killings of Christians were widely reported in both the Nigerian and international media. However, contrary to public perception the Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan emphasized in 2013 that Muslims are the most numerous victims of the ongoing struggle. This statement outraged the Nigerian Christian Association. Furthermore, there is evidence that in some states terrorists take advantage of inter-community conflicts to spread violence hijacking long-standing tensions that had built up more around land access rather than religious issues.

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[4]   The aftermath of another attack on a church in Kaduna, Nigeria, on Sunday June 17, 2012, left 19 dead and dozens wounded: https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/18/world/africa/3-churches-in-northern-nigeria-are-attacked.html.

Also, the rise of local dissidents who have blamed the leaders of Boko Haram for killing Muslims proves that this radical group is built upon a rather fuzzy and constantly evolving ideological substance (Chouin et al. 2014). Therefore, the distinction between Christian men as victims and Muslim men as offenders is a result of western assumptions based on post-colonial ideas of so-called "developing societies" together with Islamophobia, and the conceptualization of "ideal victim".

2.4.2. Men as the ideal victims?

As Christie pointed out, unlike women, children and the elderly, men are further away from the ideal victim status because in patriarchal societies they are often seen as the strongest, able and expected to defend themselves. Therefore, they do not satisfy the criterion of weakness and vulnerability. Indeed, being a more traditionalist society, Nigeria's main political, social and economic power is vested in men. They run Muslim and Christian structures, they are the heads of local communities and the government, and make up Boko Haram with few exceptions. Nonetheless, they also suffer from constant violence, participating directly in clashes, being kidnapped at an early age to be recruited by Boko Haram, experiencing secondary victimization with false accusations from the government like young men of villages Bukarti and Matiri who were taken to barracks by the Nigerian military for interrogation and torture solely because they had phones and are were, therefore, considered as potential collaborators (Amnesty International 2020c).

However, if this group is not compared on the basis of gender but religion, Christians have more chances to be recognized as victims. Taking the repeated bombing of Christian churches on Christmas Day for several years in a row (although not only men died there) as an example, it can be demonstrated that Christians are closer to the ideas of the ideal victim: they are not affiliated with Muslim suicide bombers while carrying out a respectable project, such as participating in a religious occasion, Christmas Eve, without anyhow precipitating the situation and contrasting with the "pure evil" suicide bombers. As a result, in the case of Muslim and Christian men, the latter have greater overlap with (Western aspired) ideas of the perfect victim since they are assaulted from the opposing side of "pure evil", in this case by Islamist terrorists.

3. Discussion and conclusion

Boko Haram deliberately inflicts harm on civilians as an instrument of terrorism. The chapter discussed four groups of victims that result from these activi-

ties: women, children, elderly people and Muslim and Christian men. Although each of the groups is exposed to the suffering caused by Boko Haram, it could be shown that their victimhood is not recognized in the same way. Therefore, a hierarchization of the analyzed victims can be concluded.

The case of the Chibok girls is an example of female victims who uncontestedly fulfill all the requirements of an ideal victim. The *#bringbackourgirls*-movements can serve as an example for how readily and fast they were granted social recognition nationally and internationally. At the same time, it has been shown that even such social recognition and empathy might easily be instrumentalized by activists to increase their self-esteem but is inadequate to produce concrete outcomes. While the Chibok girls can be regarded as the most ideal victims according to Nils Christie, the other cases are more complex and contested, thus no such clear conclusions can be drawn.

The following case of child soldiers represents a difficult category to analyze due to its ambivalence. Most often, children are placed in the highest level of the victim hierarchy, since they are perceived as vulnerable human beings due to their dependence on others: they are seen as fragile creatures that need the attention of adults to survive and grow. However, when child soldiers act like perpetrators in the role of fighters, the general opinion of innocent infants is threatened. Furthermore, our idea of childhood is sometimes different from the legal framework, for instance, the international law defines children under 18, but we could question ourselves if a 5-year-old boy is equal to a 16-year-old teenager and whether we perceive both of them as "ideal victims"? Public opinion prefers the youngest that are recognized as pure and blameless, but child soldiers offer a strong dichotomy between victims and perpetrators which is hard to fully separate. Furthermore, Nigeria mostly treats child soldiers as potential threats that deserve detentions, while international agencies regard them as full victims that need help and support. The case study thus outlines the fluidity of identity of those children that are perceived in two different ways by the African state and the international community.

The duality between innocence and guilt is further emphasized by the case of elderly people. Elderly people can be seen as innocent because of their perception as being powerless and weak, deeply dependent on their offsprings and humanitarian assistance. However, because of their past decisions of collaborating directly or indirectly with terrorists, some of them may, in fact, be seen as guilty of precipitating the current situation.

Lastly, young men may be placed in the lowest level of the victim hierarchy since they are perceived as strong and capable of their own defense. However, both Muslim and Christian men suffer from Boko Haram attacks with the dif-

ference that Christians are more recognized as victims. Muslim men, on the other side, suffer not only from terrorist violence but also from illegal torture and interrogation by the Nigerian military under suspicion of collaborating with terrorists.

These different findings show that the recognition of some groups of victims as ideal puts the other groups at risk of being disregarded and ignored. However, it seems important to make three final remarks. The research done has obvious limitations. The paper aimed to analyze conditions of victimhood in Nigeria through a Western criminologist lens. Although we tried to critically engage with shortcomings of this approach and criticized Western appropriations of the discourse, it must be acknowledged that our efforts, as Western researchers, remain limited. Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that analyzing the conditions of groups of victims over-simplifies complex realities. What has been said about women, men, children, and elderly people must not hold true for every single individual in one of those groups. To develop a deeper understanding of specific situations of victims, it remains crucial to undertake case-by-case assessments. Third, analyzing the conditions of suffering for victims in Nigeria must strongly take into account intersectional victimhood. The list of victims affected by the polarized situation in Nigeria is long and extends over not only persons exposed by Boko Haram's violent actions. It has to be acknowledged that the people in Nigeria, along with the threat of violence by Boko Haram, also face conditions of structural violence such as economic deprivation, poverty, lack of education and human rights violations. Such forms of violence usually receive less societal attention, but they can facilitate sympathy and support for terrorist groups that cause physical and psychological suffering. To find ways to end this cycle of violence complex and multi-level analyses of the situation must be employed by considering different forms of violence and types of victims.

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Chapter 4
The case of Stefano Cucchi

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Abstract

The chapter consists of an analysis of Stefano Cucchi's case. Specifically, the notion of ideal victims and the moral exclusion of non-ideal victims will be discussed, starting from the theoretical approach developed in the field of victimology. Then, the case and process of Stefano Cucchi will be retraced, from his arrest to his death. The political and mediatic reactions to the case will be discussed and their fundamental role in the relevance gained by the case itself. Through the analysis of political statements, we can observe forms of victim blaming and even dehumanization. On the other hand, we can remark how the role of the media and Stefano's family in the formation of public opinion on Stefano s status as a victim has been peculiar. Finally, some reflection will be dedicated to secondary victimization, to underline how the experience of becoming and being a victim is much more complex and how it can affect not only the direct victim. The focus is put on the experience lived by Cucchi's family to highlight the complexities embodied in victimization processes.

Keywords: Victimization – Stefano Cucchi – Police abuse – Ideal victim – Secondary victimization

1. Ideal victims and the moral exclusion of non-ideal victims

Becoming *a victim* can be considered, in contrast to the formal-positivist approach underlying public international law (UNGA 1985), the result of a social negotiation process rather than an objective phenomenon (Christie 1986). Within this social discourse, the role of the victim functions to serve particular socio-political purposes aiming at reinforcing existing power relations and social

hierarchies (Quinney 1972). The social construction of an *ideal victim* then acts as an abstract archetype to decide who is most deserving of social sympathy, recognition, support and even reparations when hit by crime – in short, who is almost ready to be "morally included" in the "scope of justice" (Opotow et al. 2005: 305). Consequently, however, this definition of an *ideal victim* produces by default and subsequently legitimizes the moral exclusion of other contenders, those in turn considered undeserving of public empathy. Five attributes distinguish the ideal victim from every other victim according to Christie (1986): weak, altruistic, and the offender has to be strong and unknown. Moreover, the ideal victim cannot be blamed for any circumstances surrounding the incident, meaning that his or her doing could not be considered irresponsible or naïve not to mention facilitating, precipitating, or provoking the crime – the ideal victim is completely innocent.

The ideal victim, meeting all of these five criteria, is then at the top of the hierarchy of all victims. The others, depending on their standing, are to a certain extent blamed for their victimization, robbing them of public sympathy, support and protection. This process of victim-blaming is rooted in the just-world belief, meaning that "the world is largely a safe and fair place in which to live" (Lerner in Johnson et al. 2002: 250). In this world, all actions consequently cause the appropriate and fair reactions, so people who experienced harm only did so because they must have brought it on to themselves, therefore "just getting what they righteously deserve." However, once a person is considered culpable for his or her suffering, he or she is no longer "morally included" in the "scope of justice." The process of *victim-blaming*, originating from the *just-world belief*, can therefore be considered a strategy of individuals and society at large to restore, protect and defend their idealized illusion of the world, meaning personal safety and immanent justice. Victim blaming is thus the failure to engage with a complex human and societal reality, denying the personal and social responsibilities for the world's larger structural injustices.

In addition, these processes of moral inclusion and exclusion of victims of crime are embedded in larger social dynamics concerning for example race and racism, class cleavages and gender roles. For example, as Bricknell (2016) describes, male-to-male violence has been normalized and is, therefore, more commonly accepted, helping the offender to downplay the harm done to the victim. At the same time, the male victim is more reluctant to correspond and respond to the victimization process, meaning preferring denial and silence to seek (in-) formal protection. This might be the tragic result of a process in which "[males] manage their membership in two culturally conflicting categories – males and victims – and by so doing, 'defend' one identity from the threat of another" (Burcar & Akerström 2016: 130).

2. The case of Stefano Cucchi

The case of Stefano Cucchi is important to demonstrate how complex is the definition and the recognition of the victim status.

When Stefano Cucchi was arrested on 15th October 2009 in Rome, he was 31 years old. That night he was stopped by five carabinieri, because they assumed that Cucchi had just sold drugs to his friend. Cucchi was immediately frisked and the agents found that he was in possession of 12 packs of various sizes of hashish – for a total of 20 grams –, 3 packets of cocaine and a medicine to treat epilepsy, as Cucchi suffered from this pathology. Stefano Cucchi already had criminal records, but not for drug-related offenses. On the other hand, Stefano had a drug addiction history, due to which he has been treated in the past by the local SERT – a service dedicated to the treatment of Addiction Diseases –, and by the CEIS community. After the agents arrested and took him to the police barracks, that night, a search was ordered in Cucchi's family home, which led to a negative result, no traces of drugs were found. On the morning of October 16, at the disposal of the Public Prosecutor of Rome, Stefano was taken to the Court of Piazzale Clodio, for the validation of the arrest and the contextual direct judgment, with the contestation of the crime referred to in art. 73 Presidential Decree 309/1990 – possession and transfer of narcotic substances for the purpose of dealing.[1] During the night, Cucchi was registered and interrogated. Until this moment Stefano was in good health, but when he finished the interrogation and he left the room his condition was completely different. In fact, from this episode, two police officers will be convicted for having beaten Cucchi in that room. Since that moment Cucchi complained of physical pain, above all severe pain in the chest and head, he also asked for medicines for epilepsy since he had not taken them for hours.

During the first trial necessary to classify the case, he had difficulty walking and speaking and showed evident bruises in his eyes. During the hearing, Stefano declared: "I plead innocent as regards the drug dealing, I plead guilty as regards the detention, for personal use" (Bonini 2016). In that context, he claimed to be suffering from epilepsy, celiac disease and anemia. The Public Prosecutor, even in front of Stefano's precarious health conditions, requested the validation of the arrest and the application of the measure of pre-trial detention in prison, based on the small precedents weighing, for the Prosecutor lighter measure would have not been effective to face the danger of reiteration of the crime of drug dealing. The first hearing of the trial was settled for the fol-

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[1]   Art. 73 D.P.R. 309/1990: *Testo Unico delle Leggi in Materia di Disciplina degli Stupefacenti e Sostanze Psicotrope, Prevenzione, Cura e Riabilitazione dei Relativi Stati di Tossicodipendenza*. www.gazzettaufficiale.it.

lowing November 13. During all that day, despite Stefano's illness, no one asked him what occurred.

On October 16, at 11 pm, he was taken to the emergency room of the Fatebenefratelli Hospital, as Cucchi's conditions had further worsened. Here, the doctors reported injuries and bruising to the legs; face – with fracture of the jaw; abdomen with hematuria, and chest – with fracture of the third lumbar vertebra and coccyx. Therefore hospitalization was recommended. However, the patient refused, and he was then returned to prison.

After the night in the police station, Cucchi asked again to have the possibility to meet his family, a request that would have been denied until the day of his death. In the same way, after the first hearing, the family members tried several times to see him, or at least know about his physical condition, but without success. Additionally, Stefano asked for the possibility to meet his lawyer, but he was never heard from.

In the following days, due to the worsening of his conditions, Stefano Cucchi was transferred to the prison ward of the Sandro Pertini Hospital. During these days Stefano was extremely weak, undernourished and dehydrated. He could not move due to the tremendous pain in his chest and back. Nevertheless, he decides not to accept the total care until the chance to meet his lawyer.

Hence, the doctor for the first time decided to prepare the letter for the magistrate for the following morning – the reason why the letter left only the next day is that Stefano's case wasn't classified as a severe clinical situation. However, the letter never left. Stefano died on 22 October; at the time of his death, he weighed 37 kilograms, and his face was completely marked with purple and blue bruises around the eyes.

2.1. *The process*

Stefano Cucchi's case has brought to a difficult judicial process with seven trials; three investigations; and two sentences from the Supreme Court. On 7 May 2021, two carabinieri were sentenced to 13 years for manslaughter murder, accused of beating Stefano Cucchi. In April 2022, the Court condemned the other carabinieri, that worked that night, to a sentence of 1 to 4 years of imprisonment, as they had never denounced what occurred to Stefano. Therefore, the final sentence, which recognized the responsibility of the state authorities who arrested and brought Cucchi to the police station that night, was concluded 13 years after the fact.

As introduced, the judicial process has been very extended. The cause is that for 13 years none of the carabinieri denounced what really occurred and due to

that they were always acquitted with the sentence. What emerges with Stefano Cuccchi's case is how the reach of justice – especially in Italy – can take a prolonged time and how the testimonies can be decisive for the final result. In particular, on January 25, 2011, six doctors and three nurses of Sandro Pertini and three prison guards were the first to be put on trial. On June 5, 2013, the third Court of Assisi acquitted the prison policemen accused of beating. Penalties of between 8 months and 2 years of imprisonment are imposed on the six Pertini doctors for abandonment of an incapable person. However, on January 20, 2014, the Fifth Criminal Section of the Supreme Court canceled the acquittal, for defects in the motivation, and ordered a new Appeal trial. On 31 October 2014, acquittal for all the defendants, including doctors, in the appeal judgment.

After the acquittals of the defendants, thanks to the denouncement of Ilaria Cucchi – Stefano's sister – the mediatic pressure grew and new investigations were opened. On 12 January 2015, the Court of Assise ordered the transmission of the documents to the prosecutor for new investigations on the work of some carabinieri and on the beating suffered by Cucchi. Again, On 15 December, the Supreme Court confirmed the acquittal of the prison police officers.

On 10 July 2017, a new indictment was opened, and the Court of Assise reexamined the five carabinieri. On March 19, 2019, the investigation was closed. The turning point of this judicial affair came in April 2019, when an agent, in a complaint, reconstructed the events of that night, indicating two carabinieri as responsible for the beating.

On this occasion, he admitted: "It was a combined action, first there was the kick of Xxx, then there was the violent push of Xxx that made Cucchi lose his balance causing a violent fall on the pelvis. Xxx then kicked Cucchi in the face while he was lying on the ground." From this moment on the trial started an investigation into the guilt of the two agents.

Hence, he told all the steps of Cucchi's beating in the courtroom and explicitly indicated as material authors the other two colleagues of manslaughter.

The next day, the prosecutor asked for the trial of eight carabinieri. Two of them were sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment for manslaughter. The military received 2 years and half of the imprisonment for forgery. Another was sentenced to 3 years and 8 months of imprisonment for forgery too.

3. The media and politics

Stefano Cucchi's case has undoubtedly had a national resonance and it had an important impact on Italian society. Especially thanks to the struggle of the

Cucchi's family, the case has obtained mediatic and political attention. The role of the media, the different stances adopted by Italian politicians and the reaction in public opinion which followed Stefano Cucchi's case allow stressing some important points concerning the concept of the ideal victim and victimization processes in general. Since the appearance of the occurrence in national news, public authorities have divided into those who condemned Stefano and blamed his lifestyle for his destiny and those who labeled him as a victim. For what concerns the former, part of the political arena refused to recognize Stefano as a victim of authorities' violence and in this sense, it is useful to provide some statements pronounced by politicians. An example is provided by a statement released by Carlo Giovanardi, a former member of the Deputy Chamber and affiliated with center-right parties. On one occasion the Italian politician noted that: "Cucchi led an unfortunate life, marked by drug abuse and drug dealing" (Il Fatto Quotidiano 2018). A defender of such an approach was also the leader of the Lega, Matteo Salvini, who, during the years of the judicial case, has underlined the culpability of Stefano Cucchi for the outcome of the events. As a matter of fact, after the sentence in 2019, the former Interior Minister declared: "I respect Cucchi's family but the case shows that drugs are bad" (Bonini 2019). Ilaria Cucchi replied to this statement with the following words: "Stefano did not die because of drugs. What do drugs have to do? (…) Me too, as a mother, I am against any type of drug, but Stefano did not die because of the drug" (Bonini 2019). She later sued Salvini. In addition to that, only a few days after the definitive trial against the two carabinieri involved in the misdirection of the investigations, the Italian politician was asked by a journalist about his opinion on the matter and he answered the following: "Were the two agents condemned? It means they did wrong." However, he immediately added: "I am always against any type of drug […] I am always against any type of drugs, without ifs and buts. And when we are in front of a dead person, we just have to pray" (L'Espresso 2022).

It is possible to affirm that what emerges from the cited statements is clearly the intention by part of the public authorities to present Stefano in a bad light and show his unstable and unethical lifestyle. This approach has an unequivocal aim, which is to blame him for his destiny. In fact, in this way, Stefano became actively involved in the outcome of the events. Behind the words expressed by part of the Italian politicians lies the following opinion: if Stefano had not been a drug addict and a drug dealer, he would have not ended up in the hands of police forces, so, in a way, he would not have died. In doing so, the attention is shifted from the real offender, in this case, the carabinieri, to the victim, Stefano. A process of blaming is recognizable. In addition to that, another consideration

can be made. Analyzing the attitude of some politicians, what comes to light is a lack of sympathy. As a matter of fact, public authorities not only struggled not to recognize Stefano Cucchi as a victim, but they also discredited him as a human being. The victim is put in a limbo of inferiority and diversity and, as explained by William Ryan (1971), this process has properly the intention to stress the differences which distinguish the victim from the others, in order to rationalize his or her victimization. The outcome is that the victim is rendered the only responsible for his or her destiny. Nevertheless, the examples cited above belong only to a part of the statements coming from the political arena. In fact, as previously anticipated, a different approach has been adopted by other members of the political sphere as it is possible to notice by the reactions to the final sentence on the case. Pietro Grasso, senator and member of the left party Liberi e Uguali stated in relation to the judgment that it: "brings justice to Stefano Cucchi, his relatives who had fought for the truth and justice, to the Arma dei Carabinieri and to the State" (VoceControCorrente 2019). Another example is provided by Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio who commented on the result as follows:

> Today the State hugs Cucchi's family. But it does it with delay, after years of silences and complications (...). What happened to Stefano is unacceptable in the State of Law. Today's judgment returns dignity to a family and its enormous suffering, which none of us can have the presumption to fully comprehend (VoceControCorrente 2019).

As it is possible to notice, the process of blaming is not present in the reported statements, since no mention is made of Stefano's lifestyle or the reasons which led him to the Caserma. On the contrary, the focus is set only on Stefano's status as a victim and the need for justice. More in-depth, not only Stefano is recognized as a victim, but also his family who has suffered and fought in order to obtain fair judgment and justice.

As mentioned before, Stefano Cucchi's case has been largely discussed not only among Italian politicians, but also by the Italian press and media. As a matter of fact, the case was granted with great attention by national tv news, tv programs and national newspapers, which contributed to shaping citizens' opinions on the matter. In this sense, the power of images covers a decisive importance. In particular, national media shared Stefano's photos in his last moments, in which his body appeared savagely beaten and emaciated. Thanks to the effort of Italian media, the images have become nationally recognized and they have become a symbol for Stefano Cucchi's case. As a matter of fact, they have been prominently and frequently displayed, have gained general recognition, and are

markers which stand for the event and generate an emotional reaction. This last aspect underlines an important point. That is to say, through their horrific realism, Stefano Cucchi's photos had the power to influence citizens' reactions and opinions: thanks to the photos employed by Italian media, a specific narrative on the case was imposed. Italian journalists have rendered certain photographs iconic. In particular, the images of Stefano Cucchi convey a sense of weakness and powerlessness and springs a sense of sympathy for Stefano, who is perceived first of all as a human.

The image of Ilaria Cucchi has also become a symbol. Stefano's sister has become the spokeswoman for Stefano's stances on justice and she has appeared on several occasions holding his brother's photos. During the years which followed Stefano's death, Ilaria gained national recognition and she often was guested by tv programs in order to keep the attention on his brother's case and ask for a fair outcome. Ilaria Cucchi's image was the symbol of Cucchi's family suffering and she surely contributed to the popularity that the case obtained. In this sense, it became immediately recognizable the image of Ilaria holding Stefano's photo outside the Courthouse of Rome in 2014, the day on which all the twelve defendants were discharged of the accusations.

To sum up, media and images had a relevant impact on the victimization process of Stefano. As a matter of fact, it is undeniable that Stefano was perceived by public opinion as the victim of police violence and the use of images had a great contribution in this sense. This perception was later reinforced by the release of the movie *Sulla mia pelle (On my skin)* in 2018,[2] which reconstructs the events in a truthful way and shows a defenseless Stefano. Many books have also been written about the case. Some examples are *Il corpo del reato (The body of crime)*, by the Italian journalist Carlo Bonini, *Non mi ha ucciso la morte (Death did not kill me)*, by Luca Moretti e Toni Bruno and *Vorrei dirti che non eri solo: storia di Stefano mio fratello (I would like to tell you that you weren't alone: history of my brother Stefano)* by Giovanni Bianconi and Ilaria Cucchi.

The unquestioned relevance gained by Stefano's case has contributed to rendering Stefano as a representative case for other similar trials, such as the ones of Giuseppe Uva, Riccardo Magherini, Michele Ferulli, Federico Aldrovandi and Stefano Cabiddu, who were all arrested by public forces and later killed. In this sense, Stefano's case has helped to give voice to victims who share common elements and experienced police brutality. A remarkable moment was the 15th of March 2016, when the relatives of the above-mentioned victims, among whom Ilaria Cucchi and some members of the "Associazione contro gli

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2   A. Cremonini, *Sulla mia pelle* (*On my skin*), Cinemaundici, Lucky Red, Netflix, 2018.

abusi in divisa - Acad" gathered at the headquarter of the European Parliament in Brussels in order to bring to the attention of the parliamentarians the abuses perpetrated by Italian police force and their impunity.

Moreover, in 2016 Ilaria Cucchi founded the "Associazione Stefano Cucchi." The organization is currently involved in a series of campaigns, which are related to victims of police brutality. First of all, the nonprofit organization promotes respect of human rights in general and, more in detail, its members fight in order to obtain a modification of the actual Italian law on the subject of torture. The organization also asks for the implementation of new reforms, which would guarantee better conditions in the Italian prison system.

4. Stefano Cucchi's case through the lens of victimology

As we can understand from the revision of Cucchi's story, victimhood is not an objective status, being recognized as a victim is not an automatic process and sometimes it can be indeed very difficult. In Stefano Cucchi's case, the recognition of his victimhood was a process that lasted for years, parallel to the family's search for the truth about his death. Victimology and, in particular, the ideal victim theory can offer us explanations of why this happened.

If we follow the characteristics Nils Christie (1986) attributes to the ideal victim, it can be seen that Cucchi does not meet most of them. The ideal victim is weak, associated with being old, very young, sick, or even a woman. Cucchi was none of those, as he was a male in his early 30s without any significant pathology that impaired his functioning. The perception of him by the public is of a perfectly strong individual. Nevertheless, after his death and throughout the following recognition process, the diffusion of the photographs of Stefano's body by the media and his family helped to change this perception. The image shows a severely ill individual, who weighed 37 kilograms and had severe bruises. This helped Cucchi to be perceived as weak, bringing his figure closer to that of an ideal victim and therefore more worthy of being recognized. The images have played a very important role in raising awareness about this case in public opinion.

Following the ideal victim's categories, we can underline that he was not carrying out a respectable project at the moment of the offense, as received a beating while being detained for drug possession and trafficking. While the ideal victim cannot be blamed for the circumstances surrounding the incident, as it is supposed to be completely innocent, it is easy to say that it was Cucchi's fault to end up in the police station. The fourth and fifth characteristics have to do

with the offender being big and bad and unknown to the victim. The figure of the offender, in this case, is complex, as it was policemen, the agents that are supposedly in charge of persecuting crime and protecting citizens from becoming victims. We can also highlight that, even if the offenders were unknown to the victim, their relationship (policemen-detained) is not arbitrary: an ideal victim should be a victim by coincidence as he/she is completely innocent, but in Cucchi's case there was a reason for him encountering the offenders. Not everyone could have been in his position, just someone who had been arrested. If we take into account this, it becomes clear that Stefano Cucchi is, in opposition to this concept, a non-ideal victim.

There is another issue that Nils Christie mentions regarding the ideal victim that has to do with power: an ideal victim has to be powerful enough to make his case known or not be opposed by counter-powers (Christie 1986: 14). In this, class, race, gender, and other social dynamics play an important role. Before being detained, Stefano Cucchi might have been a "powerful" enough individual, as he was a white, middle-aged Italian man from the middle class. However, prisoners are deprived of the ability to be heard in society due to their isolation and other factors, which might be one of the reasons that most of the violence and bad conditions in prisons are so difficult to denounce. "Their voice, as against that of those in authority over them, cannot make itself heard through the prison walls; their statements are often suspect," as expressed by Margery Fry (1947). Cucchi was in a very vulnerable position that did not allow him to claim his victim status. Moreover, the police acted as counter-powers that opposed his victimization: they had the ability to allow Cucchi to talk and be heard but they had no interest in doing so.

Even though the ideal victim is an abstract concept it has concrete consequences, which can be seen in Cucchi's case. The ideal victim category divides the victims between the innocent and the not so innocent; "the 'innocent' victim is placed at the apex of a hierarchy of victimhood" (McEvoy & McConnachie 2012: 532). This hierarchy designates which victims deserve attention and recognition and which do not. Cucchi is a non-ideal victim for several reasons and was certainly not considered innocent at all. In fact, he was detained for a drug-related crime and he could be blamed for the circumstances that made him end up in the police station. Is there anything more "guilty" than a criminal? Cucchi was the opposite of what a victim deserving of recognition and support is. In fact, it seems that he could not even be imagined as a victim at all and therefore, he was denied all support. His story shows how his condition was systematically overlooked by policemen and doctors and attributed to a falling down the stairs, although it might have been evident what had happened. Even after his death,

the autopsy was not conclusive about the cause. His history with drugs was used to dismiss the case and is one of the main arguments politicians used to justify his ending, as if a certain lifestyle could be incompatible with victimization. For a long time, there was no crime against Cucchi and therefore no offender. The judicial process shows that it took more than 10 years of trials and investigations to finally give him full recognition and punish the perpetrators.

These difficulties in considering or even imagining Cucchi as a victim also comes from the dichotomic construction of the victim and offender identities, where the innocence of the first is conceived in opposition to the guiltiness of the second. Therefore, "individuals are categorized into binary typologies as either victim (assumed to be non-offenders) or perpetrators (presumptuously non-victims) of criminal behavior" (Reingle 2014: 1). From the beginning, Cucchi was seen as a perpetrator. It did not matter that he had not been judged yet or what crime he had presumably committed. Being detained and later imprisoned was enough for assigning him the category of the perpetrator and therefore non-victim. This made it more difficult for the policemen, doctors, and other people he encountered to see him as a victim of beating and not only the perpetrator of a crime. As usual, the reality is complex and not dichotomic, and several studies have proved that there can be overlap between victims and offenders and that it is in fact a common phenomenon (Reingle 2014).

Imaging Cucchi as a victim was difficult, but it was also difficult to imagine the police officers as offenders. The common understanding is that policemen protect the rest of us from crime so it is not easy to perceive them in the opposite category, being criminals themselves. Moreover, they are backed by law and even the use of violence is supported in some cases. Politicians are very reluctant to criticize or accuse them, as they form part of the bodies of the State. Their image of protectors of the social order must be preserved. However, police brutality is not so uncommon. The cases of abuse of force have increased in Italy since the G8 in 2001 and the families of victims have created an organization dedicated to this, the "Associazione contro gli abusi in divisa" (Zamperini et al. 2017). More-over, prosecuting a police officer is not an easy task and happens infrequently (Miller 1998: 154), since victims of the police abuses are often criminals, who lack credibility before a judge. Also, the witnesses are usually other policemen and "the phenomenon of police officers covering for their colleagues through silence or prevarication is well documented and apparently widespread" (Miller 1998: 152). In Cucchi's case it took 10 years for the witness to talk and without his declaration, the policemen would not have been convicted.

At this point, we need to look into the dehumanizing detention process to which Stefano Cucchi was subjected. Law enforcement and penal mechanisms

are exclusionary practices by their nature. The act of crime provides law enforcement necessary ground to take extraordinary reactive measures against the offenders. Criminal justice, whether it be police or prosecution, legitimizes its activities (formal and informal) through the mantra of "securing justice" and "fighting against crime" for this noble cause. Although in the last few decades there has been a remarkable improvement in the legal sphere on behalf of the offenders' rights, there are still significant violations. The case of Stefano Cucchi was only a single example among them.

As emphasized above, Stefano Cucchi has not quite fit into the features of the "ideal victim" defined by Christie. Thus, from the first minute of his encounter with the carabinieri, Cucchi was judged merely by his looks and perceived as potential harm to society. He was systematically intimidated and later exposed to severe violence by the police officers. Though he insistently called for his attorney, police officers ignored his request. Hence, since Cucchi was no longer accepted as a law-abiding citizen, he was considered outside the law, he could be disregarded, beaten, tortured or even killed. He was no longer a human being, but a criminal. Once the line between the legal and illegal is crossed, a lawful citizen can be thrown away in the "zone of indistinction" (Agamben 1998), a "state of nature" (Hobbes 2008), outside the state's protection. Thus dehumanization does not only operate through physical violence but through a state of mind which serves to determine what is legal or legitimate and what is not. For those who are thrown away from the sphere of law, such as Stefano Cucchi, suffering becomes legitimized, if not a norm.

Thus, the perceived offender gets victimized. Yet, the perpetrator of this victimization is not quite clear as it was before. Obviously, police officers play a crucial role. Still, should we approach these people as independent individuals or as state officials that get strength from the uniforms they wear? Also, are policemen the only ones to blame? During the week between his arrest and death, Cucchi came across several government officials, the judge of the trial, prison guards and doctors. Even though the violence that he was exposed to was so self-explanatory, every single state officer from various ranks looked away from the apparent truth. Of course, there may be numerous reasons behind this willful ignorance.

"Just-world theory" (Lerner 1980) can offer us some explanations. Based on the assumption that people "get what they deserve" (Lerner 1980: 11), just world belief functions as a governance tool for the encouragement of "good citizenship." It creates a sense of delusion in the social realm that if you keep on the right side of the law, the state will protect you from the "bad guys" and the system will eventually award you. Looking into Cucchi's case, one would easily notice that the Cucchi family is a typical Italian middle-class family that

has no particular pattern of deviance or marginalization. Even after Stefano's arrest, the family tried to contact and assist him through legal means, but they had failed due to bureaucratic barriers they'd faced. The system let them down. On the other hand, the state officials and agents of bureaucracy disregarded the severe condition that Stefano suffered. They hold the belief that the "system somehow worked" and some degree of "casualties" were acceptable. In their eyes, "the criminal" was not someone to be treated right but instead someone to be punished. As Butler (2004) once distinguished correctly, there were some lives to be valued and mourned and some that are just disposable. While the life of the "monstrous criminal," as in the case of Stefano Cucchi, is disposable and expendable; the "ideal victim" constitutes a figure to be grieved and valued.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned above, after the death of her brother, Stefano's sister immediately started a campaign and a media report to highlight the truths of that night. Hence, the role of Ilaria has been fundamental for the mediatic coverage that also brought the recognition of Stefano first as a victim rather than a drug seller.

Starting from this framework we want to point out, in our analysis, how the experience of victimization is in reality much more complex. When a crime occurs, it undoubtedly affects directly a person – or a group of people – producing as a consequence a direct victim(s).

As a result of the crime, primary victims suffer physically, psychologically and financially, as violent crimes usually cause injuries that are physically painful, require medical treatment and frequently leave the victim unable to work or function after the crime is long over. Additionally, mental trauma causes fear and stress that can lead to sleeplessness, depression and even suicide. Obviously, personal crime takes a great toll on them.

However, in this part of the analysis of Stefano case, due to the important role that his sister has given to the reconstruction of the case and the reach of justice, we also want to bring to the fore what is defined as indirect victimization. The concept refers to a person who can live the experience of suffering as a result of a violent crime which has not directly affected them but someone familiar. Such indirect victimization is common and widespread, with different levels of severity.

Focusing on the case of Stefano Cucchi, we are analyzing a case in which a person died due to the action of the state authorities. The victim found his own justice thanks to the struggle faced mostly by his sister – and all the family.

As already introduced, looking at the case of Stefano Cucchi, for the conquest of justice, the family members' status of victimization was also exacerbated by the difficult judicial process. Contact with criminal justice agencies can further raise awareness of the trauma and interfere with the pain (Rock 1998). The starting point of this process is firstly the notification of the death, followed by the identification of the victim, the police investigation, and finally the trial and sentencing (Soham et al. 2010).

Moreover, the psychological stress of criminal proceedings is another crucial variable of the procedure. The testimony situation, the confrontation with the perpetrator.

The long delay between reporting a crime to the police and the beginning of the trial represents a

further source of psychological stress for crime victims (Orth 2002), who, in our case, Cucchi's family faced up. Moreover, the trial often doesn't bring the result desired by the victim. Instead, the sentence may be appraised as too lenient; the victims – or their relatives – have to face the acquittal of the criminals; or the proceedings may be dismissed. Of course, the outcome of the court decisions could trigger more intense negative feelings of disappointment and moral outrage, if they don't meet their expectations. Hence unfavorable outcomes in criminal proceedings have psychological effects that exceed the immediate emotional reactions (Orth 2002), as occurred in our case.

Again, the process of Stefano Cucchi is a clear example of how the judicial procedure can inflict pain on those that carry on the defense.

In this context, the recognition of the victim's status by society also becomes fundamental. As analyzed above, the political rhetoric has often marked Stefano first as a drug addict rather than as a person killed by police officers, thus detaching Stefano's condition as a victim. Despite this, the case has always touched the morality and empathy of the society which has also shown great support to the family. Undoubtedly, this support for the family is fundamental in recognizing the condition of victims also to relatives.

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Chapter 5
The case of Giulio Regeni

Sara Tanan

Abstract

This chapter explores the impact of power relations imbalances on the onset of political victimization. Firstly, it will examine Marxist theories on power and how these have inspired the introduction of a radical approach to the study of victimology as according to R. Quinney and R. Elias. Secondly, the main patters of political victimization will be applied to a specific case study – that of Giulio Regeni, the Italian researcher who was found dead in Cairo, Egypt, in 2016. The case will be analyzed by providing a short biography of Giulio Regeni, a detailed presentation of the facts, an overview of the socio-political background of the story and the latest updates on the investigations conducted by the Italian authorities. Thirdly, it will be discussed the role of media in shaping the public opinion with regards to legitimizing the perpetration and the promotion of political victimization processes. Specifically, such dynamics will be explored through and within the story of Giulio Regeni by comparing the versions of events provided by the Italian and the Egyptian media and their respective implications. Lastly, N. Christie's definition of ideal victim will be critically analyzed, contextualized within the frame of political victimization and applied to the case of Italian researcher in order to provide the elements that determine Giulio Regeni's ideal victim status.

Keywords: Political victimization – Giulio Regeni – Al-Sisi's Egypt – Victim blaming – Ideal victim

1. Introduction

Political victimization is strictly linked to power relations dynamics. In particular, power relations imbalances create the conditions in society for the forma-

tion of authoritarian regimes. The monopolization of power by one social class at the expenses of the others, ultimately results in abuse of power and, therefore, in oppression. To do so are the elites, which main purpose is to maintain the established status quo (Elias 1986). In this context fits the story of Giulio Regeni, the Italian researcher tortured and killed in Egypt in 2017. His victimization process emerges from dynamics of coercion and systematic violation of human rights perpetrated by Al-Sisi government since its raise to power in Egypt in 2013. Because of the brutality of the circumstances and the severe elements of political victimization that characterize his story, Giulio Regeni's death has quite readily become a case in Italy, Egypt and around the world. The details of his story have provoked deep sympathy in different societies around the globe and have united people in a common fight for freedom and justice. For this reason, Giulio Regeni represents an exemplum of "ideal victim." To provide evidence to this argument, this paper will firstly discuss the theoretical and factual background of the story. Then, it will explore the role of media in Giulio Regeni's case with regard to first and second victimization processes surrounding the story. Lastly, the case will be analyzed in order to provide the elements that determine Giulio Regeni's ideal victim status.

2. Power relations and political victimization: State oppression and the relationship between the powerful and the powerless

In social sciences, Power is conceived as the capacity of an individual or a group to influence the actions, beliefs, or behavior of others. Thus, Power entails an inter-personal or inter-group relationship which takes different forms depending on the kind of interaction, the given context and its purpose. Marxists theories on Power conceive power relations as the configuration of class domination – meaning, they focus on the inter-group social relationship as a phenomenon with deep-rooted foundations in the social structure. In particular, Marxists are mainly interested in the causal interconnections between the exercise of social power and the reproduction and/or transformation of class domination. According to their view, class domination is the result of economic unbalances, favoring one social class over the other and the maintenance of the elites' status quo. However, Marxists do not only focus on the economic factor with regards to power relations, rather they envision Power in its various forms and its dispersive nature in society and therefore also investigate political and ideological class domination. The Marxist-inspired elite theory even prioritizes the political factor over the economic one, especially with regards to the State and its role

in maintaining a certain political status quo. This is in fact the case of political elites which, in order to do so, may appeal to the use of coercive measures, sometimes resulting in abuse of power and, ultimately, in systematic forms of oppression including various crimes and human rights violations. Within this frame, the relationship between the dominant social class and the subordinated one becomes more appropriately the relationship between the oppressor – identified in the State and its leading political elite – and the oppressed – identified in the State's population or a minority group depending on the circumstances. This dichotomy can also be envisioned as the relationship between the powerful and the powerless; between those monopolizing and abusing power and the ones deprived of it. These are the foundations of political victimization, de facto emerging out of oppression and its profound roots in power relation imbalances. The Marxist approach in victimology was firstly introduced by R. Quinney in "Who is the victim?" (1972). R. Quinney claims that the notions of *victim* and *crime* are both a social construction, used as tools by the ruling class to protect their privileges and discriminate the lower classes. Particularly, he claims that the elites can construct or deconstruct the notions of victim and crime according to their interests. As long as the concept of victim is concerned, they can, for instance, label themselves as victims to justify repression. In order to do so, they can design an "enemy" and using language to shape the societal perception of an individual or a group. The vocabulary employed in these cases entails words such as "traitors", "parasites", "spies" etc. Also, they can develop a scapegoat strategy by using *blame* against an individual or a group with the scope to avoid being held accountable on their actions. This entails creating a negative narrative around the "other," so that it becomes gradually perceived as the embodiment of evil. Such dynamics of societal manipulation create the cognitive conditions amongst the masses for the implementation of a process of *dehumanization* of the "other" that makes acceptable – and therefore plausible – severe acts of violence (Hilberg 1985). Consequently, following this line of thought, the notions of *justice* and *injustice* are to be conceived as contingent and ideologically oriented. Against this background, a crucial role is played by *ideal* victims, both in protecting the structure of a given social order and in disrupting it. In fact, since the social rank represents a facilitating factor in receiving the attribution of the ideal victim status, by favoring a certain social class and dismissing the others, the elites justify political neglect and unequal social treatment in society. In the end, this guarantees the maintenance of the established social order and, therefore, the status quo of the dominant group. Moreover, the just mentioned dynamic is another form of societal manipulation which legitimates dehumanization. For example, by labelling victims belonging to a certain social group as less or even

undeserving of recognition, they are no longer seen as persons with feelings and concerns but just as sub-human objects (Bandura 2002). Conversely, R. Quinney also claims that ideal victims are a fundamental element for the dismantlement of an unjust social order. In fact, he argues that since ideal victims, by definition, receive validation and empathy by others and are hence considered to be deserving of recognition, victims of state oppression, by also falling into this category, are usually legitimized in their demand for justice. Daring to speak up would actually be considered an action bold enough to attract the sympathy of the collective other than an honorable contribution to raise awareness on the matter. Therefore, the existence of different interpretations of the same notion of victim, and consequently of ideal victim, confirms that the conceptualization of such notion is optional, discretional and instrumental; the viewpoint on the matter strictly depends on the kind of *just world* an individual or a group believes to live in. Thereby, the victim, especially the ideal victim, can be defined, within this interpretative framework, as a social construction having clear political ends (Quinney 1972). This definition also applies to the notion of crime. R. Quinney indeed affirms that the conception of a victim precedes the definition of an act as criminal. In fact, a criminal act is legally considered as such because it produces one or more victims. However, not all acts causing harm are defined as crimes – only those criminal acts causing harm to the ruling class are. This is because it is the ruling class that controls the criminal justice system and makes use of it to arbitrarily decide which harmful act comprises a crime and which one does not. Therefore, according to R. Quinney, crime is a social construction as well – used by the ruling class to maintain its power in society. In his work *The politics of victimization: Victims, victimology and human rights* (1986), R. Elias builds on the theoretical frame provided by R. Quinney. In his work, he argues that a radical approach to the study of victimology would contribute to a better understanding of victims, victimization and even victimology in a more comprehensive way. Furthermore, he claims that radical victimology can bring the discipline back to its primal purpose – namely, addressing and denouncing the social impact of victimization; particularly in the case of political victimization which creates communities of victims if not an entire victim population. For this sake, R. Elias claims that it is of fundamental importance to widen both the definition of victim and that of crime: the definition of victim by including also those who are victimized by being denied human rights protection covering cultural, religious, economic, political and civil rights; the definition of crime by encompassing unphysical, yet equally impactful, forms of harm – such as verbal, emotional and psychological abuse. Such approach represents a pioneering paradigm aiming at making out of victimology a discipline that can provide the

civil society and the existing literature on human rights with the conceptual and practical tools necessary to understand and tackle various forms of victimization and their implications – be it at the local, national or international level.

3. Political victimization in Egypt: The case of Giulio Regeni

Born in a small village near Trieste (Italy), Giulio Regeni was a 28-year-old Italian student with an extremely brilliant and curious mind.[1] As he had always been enthralled by the Arabic culture and deeply passionate about researching, he moved to Egypt in 2012 to work as a researcher for the UN Industrial Development Organizations (UNIDO) after earning a Bachelor of Art degree in Arabic and Political Science from Leeds University. In 2013, a wave of protests led by the military flooded Egypt and ultimately resulted in a coup d'état against the fist-time-in-history democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's party "Freedom and Justice." Morsi was arrested and jailed while the General who led the protests and carried out the golpe, Al-Sisi, was put in charge of the government. Meanwhile, a sort of hysteria spread among the Egyptians, fueled by rumors on a thick presence of foreign spies in the country. As news about citizens detaining suspected foreigners became widespread, Regeni left the country and went back to Europe. Soon after, he started to work at Oxford Analytica for nearly a year. In 2014, he began his PhD in Economic and Social Development in the Middle East at the University of Cambridge. From afar, Regeni followed Al-Sisi's rise to power closely. His PhD research focused on Egypt's independent unions, whose series of unprecedented strikes had inspired a large segment of the population to protest against President Mubarak in 2006. Guided by his supervisor, a noted Egyptian academic at Cambridge who had written critically of Al-Sisi, Regeni chose to study the street vendors – young men from distant villages who scratched out a living on the sidewalks of Cairo. Regeni plunged into their world, hoping to assess their union's potential to drive political and social change. In fact, he saw the unions as a fragile hope for Egypt's battered democracy, especially when the aspirations surrounding the Arab Spring fell in tatters. Not by chance, after 2011 their numbers exploded, multiplying from four to thousands. Yet, by 2015 that kind of cultural immersion was no longer easy. A pall of further suspicion had fallen over Cairo. The press had been muzzled, lawyers and journalists were regularly harassed, and

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[1]   Giulio Regeni, https://images.agi.it/pictures/agi/agi/2021/10/14/170553364-085800ee-0752-4280-9e57-d58eaca56a5d.jpg.

informants filled Cairo's downtown cafes; wild tales of foreign conspiracies were even more often aired on government TV channels. Regeni's academic advisers warned him to avoid contact with some unions' members who were affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood, as the organization was targeted by the political establishment. But on the whole, Regeni believed that he was safe enough. He saw himself simply as who he was: a researcher; he also believed his EU passport would have protected him. His abiding fear was that he would be sent back to Cambridge before he could finish his research. It was the January 25, 2016 when Regeni went lost. Some days later, his friends began to quietly publicize his disappearance. The news spread quickly, and a hashtag began to circulate (#where_is_giulio). The last place where Regeni is believed to have passed from is Dokki station, in downtown Cairo, as the last signal from his phone came from the street between his home and the subway. In fact, at the time of his disappearance he was on his way to Bab al-Louq Square to meet a friend, a professor at the British University in Egypt. A notice was sent to the Italian Ambassy some hours after Regeni was no longer contactable and the fact was reported to the Dokki police station. The police filed the papers but claimed to have no information on the matter. Regeni's body will be found a week later into a ditch on the side of a road in the Alexandria Desert Highway – western Cairo. After the discovery, General Khaled Shalabi, in charge of the investigation, had declared to the government newspaper *Youm7* that there was no suspected crime behind the death of the young Italian. The first track beaten by the Egyptian investigators was hence that of the road accident. Yet, on Regeni's body were found clear signs of widespread torture. The Italian autopsy will confirm the extent of the injuries: he had been beaten, burned, stabbed and probably flogged on the soles of his feet over a period of four days – definitely not a scenario that suggests a car accident (Walsh 2017).

Later on, some Italian media began to claim a possible involvement of the secret services, since the signs on Regeni's body evidently suggested an act of torture. Actually, the researcher would not be the first to be tortured by the police. In Egypt, since the settlement of Al-Sisi in 2013, thousands of Egyptians and foreigners have been subjected to forced disappearances and torture other than mass arrests, unfair trials, arbitrary executions. Among the targeted civilians, many are scholars, activists and journalists. UN experts jointly with international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have condemned Egypt for the systemic violation of human rights perpetrated by Al-Sisi government (Transparency International 2018). Nevertheless, the Egyptian Interior Minister, Magdi Abdel Ghaffar, negated any involvement of the secret services and denied the claims made by the Italian press of a possible act of torture

committed by the police. Also, he clearly stated that Regeni was unknown to the police. It would take an international letter rogatory and more than nine months of waiting to find out that the Cairo police, unlike what was said by the Interior Minister, *had* investigated Regeni. It would take more than a year instead to learn that the civilian intelligence services had been actually following Regeni for at least a month before his disappearance. Syndicalist Mohamed Abdallah would later admit publicly that he had reported Regeni to the intelligence services and recorded a conversation with the researcher, which he would later turn over to National Security. For several days after finding the body, government officials hypothesized various versions, all lacking evidence: from the car accident, to the homosexual murder, to the criminal act, to the killing at the hands of spies of the Muslim Brotherhood made to create embarrassment to the government of Al Sisi. In March 2016, the Egyptian Interior Minister announced on Facebook that Giulio Regeni's murder finally has culprits. It is a gang of thugs – five men already known to the authorities for kidnapping foreign nationals and stealing their money, in whose lair Regeni's alleged personal belongings were found: his passport, his university badge, ATM card, wallet, sunglasses, a red fanny pack, a cell phone, a watch, two black purses, and a pellet of hashish. According to this version Regeni was involved in some kind of drug dealing and had a relationship with the gang members, who probably killed him as a result of a settling of accounts.

Claudio Regeni and Paola Deffendi, Regeni's parents, have repeatedly declared that they do not recognize the objects except for the documents, while the autopsy has excluded that the researcher used drugs. Also, from the analysis of the cells hooked up to his phone, it turns out indeed that the leader of the gang, on January 25, 2016 was 100 kilometers distant from the place of Giulio's disappearance. As for the alleged kidnappers of Regeni, they will not be able to answer the charges, since the Egyptian police killed them in a gunfight (Fontana 2020). In December 2018, the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office entered five officers of the National Security and Investigation Office in Cairo in the register of suspects on various charges of aggravated kidnapping, conspiracy to commit aggravated bodily harm and murder. In April 2019, the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office sent its Egyptian counterparts a rogatory to locate the domiciles of the five agents suspected of Regeni's death (Fontana 2020). Finally, in November 2020, a solid turning point: according to the investigation of the Italian deputy prosecutor, Sergio Colaiocco, there are some testimonies, precise and concordant, of men who say they saw Regeni being kidnapped near Dokki subway by agents of the National Security to be later taken to two different barracks – firstly Dokki police station and then Lazougly building, where foreigners are usually taken by the law enforcement (Foschini 2020). He was then tortured and killed by the in-

telligence agents. These testimonials would confirm the confidential information given to the Italian government by the United States some weeks after Regeni's death claiming that the Egyptian security officials had abducted, tortured and killed Regeni. At the recommendation of the State Department and the White House, the United States passed this conclusion to the, at that time, Renzi government. But to avoid identifying the source, the Americans did not share the raw intelligence, nor did they say which security agency they believed was behind Regeni's death. What the Americans knew for certain was that Egypt's leadership was fully aware of the circumstances around Regeni's death (Walsh 2017). The Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, in his speech at the EU Foreign Affairs Council held on January 25, 2021 – exactly five years since Regeni's disappearance – said that Italy is committed to ensure that justice is served. He also added that the investigations carried out by the Rome Public Prosecutor has identified serious responsibilities, which will soon be put on trial (Follis 2021).

According to his colleagues, friends and family, Giulio Regeni was an utterly smart, insatiably curious and gifted young man with a low-intensity charm that inevitably attracted people towards him. Around 3000 people attended his funeral in his home village, Fiumicello, in February 2016 (Pertici 2016); across Italy, grief turned to outrage as details emerged of his agonizing torture. In Egypt, a crowd of people gathered outside the Italian Embassy few days after the news on his death spread in all the streets of the city, as evidence of the fact that he was one of them too.

In a graffiti found in the streets of Berlin, Giulio Regeni's softly smiling face is drawn with an Arabic line " تلو ه كما لو كان مصريا " on the top of it, which translated means "they killed him as if he was Egyptian."[2] On his left, there's a winged cat portrait while tapping Giulio's head with its feathers; it is wounded – so much that has some patches and bandages on. Also, it seems to be looking at Giulio. In the Egyptian mythology cats are sacred. Several ancient Egyptian deities were sculptured with cat-like heads – such as Mafdet, the cat goddess of justice and judgement. To the balance of this preamble, one interpretation of this graffiti might be Justice, here weak and beaten, watching powerless over Giulio. This reading of the image is strengthened by the myth of the winged lion (or cat) representing Power in ancient oriental cultures. Finally, as wings usually symbolize freedom, an additional interpretation could be Freedom – particularly freedom of expression – caressing his head to comfort him about that constantly seeking for knowledge which unfortunately costed him his own life.

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2   Giulio Regeni's graffiti in Berlin, https://www.dire.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Giulio-Regeni-by-El-Teneenedited.jpg.

4. Media, victimization and victim blaming: The case of Giulio Regeni

Media play a primary role in shaping the public opinion. This is particularly pertinent in the case of authoritarian regimes perpetrating political victimization. In fact, the way media portray a crime within a context highly characterized by oppression and abuse of power has generally determining effects upon people's perceptions both of the severity of the crime and the probability of the victim's victimization. In particular, as media convey information almost entirely through the official law enforcement statements – not necessarily an unbiased source – they might select a version of the problem and the perpetrators on the basis of the main interests of those in power. Media therefore can be considered as a socialization force that over time considerably affects our attitude towards society, its people, its institutions and generally the events that occur. The notions of justice, freedom, equality but even of crime, victim, penalty – they can all be shaped, modified, adjusted according to the culture, the locality, the historical moment and the political system (Borer 2003). Particularly, these notions are socially constructed by the elites in order to maintain an established status quo, as explained in the first paragraph. In this frame, mainstream news organizations are the machine that continually creates labels and images to feed a predominant narrative which reflects the interests and the aims of those in power. The less a state is democratic, the more this is probable (Elias 1986). Since the coup d'état carried out by General Al-Sisi in 2013, a process of a "Sisification" has been under way in the Egyptian media. The Egyptian government have tried seizing total control over them and have been using coercive measures against journalists to the point of awakening the reaction of international organizations such as Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders which reported that "the situation of media freedom is extremely worrying" (Reporters Without Borders 2016). Since 2015, journalists are obliged on national security grounds to report only the official version of the news – namely, the one chosen by the government. The Internet is the only place left where independently reported information can circulate, but more than 500 websites have been blocked since the summer of 2017, including many news sites, and more and more people are being arrested because of their social media posts. In 2018, Egypt's parliament passed the Law Regulating the Press and Media, the law grants the authorities total coercive control on the state media, making it very clear that anyone who challenges the official narrative will be severely punished (Amnesty International 2020). Therefore, the political role of media in a country like Egypt where media are *de facto* controlled by the State, provides an interesting framework of analysis on the way media can be used, and *are* used,

to shape the public opinion on social and political matters. This has been particularly evident with reference to the murder of Giulio Regeni whose death has been associated to the recent prosecution carried out by the Egyptian Intelligence of thousands of scholars, activists and journalists. In fact, the Regeni case in Egypt have not been covered by the official press unless to mention the governmental various, unfounded, versions on the incident. Firstly, the version of the car accident, denied by the clear signs of torture found on the body at the time of its discovery and by the confirmation given by the autopsy. Then, that of the killing at the hands of spies of the Muslim Brotherhood, made to create embarrassment to the government of Al Sisi which lacked evidence. To follow, the version of the crime of passion according to which Regeni had an alleged homosexual relationship; Regeni's family and friends denied such allegations: he not only was heterosexual but did also have a girlfriend during his stay in Egypt. In addition to the latter, another version which was given by the Egyptian authorities, and was backed by the media, is that Regeni was involved in drug dealing and was murdered by a local gang which he had some relationships with. Both Giulio's parents first and the autopsy later denied that Regeni was using drugs. Newspapers also have claimed that there was a witness affirming that Regeni had a heated argument with another foreigner behind the Italian consulate building in Cairo. According to the Egyptian media, there was a video about the argument in possession of the Italian consulate, but this too was another red herring. This version will be disproven by the fact that the cameras of the diplomatic office were found to be deactivated since July 2015 – around six months before the death of the young researcher. Regeni has been even accused of being a "spy" working for the AISE, the external intelligence service of the Italian government (il Post 2016). A rumor among the many, which have never been confirmed; an attempt to make of Giulio "a foreign enemy of the State" so that his death could be justified. In general, media versions in support of Egyptian investigative forces have been mainly speaking of a "life full of ambiguities" led by Regeni. None of these allegations have ever been verified by solid evidence (Ansa 2018). Yet, such negative narrative around the figure of the young researcher represents an attempt to "scapegoat" him in order for the State authorities to avoid taking responsibility on the fact. In fact, by accusing him of having a "life full of ambiguities" – meaning, not really honest and characterized by bad habits – the media have tried to create an image of Regeni that would legitimize, and even provoke, in the public opinion, blaming as natural reaction to the facts. It is a common strategy in undemocratic regimes perpetrating state oppression and committing human rights violations. Therefore, the manipulation of the information, the false leads, the mangling of Regeni's image constitute parts of

a political strategy perpetrated by the State via the media aimed at depriving Regeni of the worth of receiving empathy, recognition and ultimately justice. In this regard, R. Elias (1986) identifies a series of strategies used by the media to shape the public opinion vis-à-vis a crime. One of the strategies discussed by R. Elias in his work is the use of "entertainment stereotypes" – meaning, the creation and diffusion by the media of distorted images of a targeted individual or group (Elias 1986). We can notice this in the way Egyptian media portrayed Regeni as "the western foreigner with a promiscuous and immoral lifestyle." According to Sherine Tadros, Middle East correspondent for UK Sky News, this overall pattern shows the level of control to which Egyptian media are subjected to, especially when they deal with matters that have the Security Services involved. If they are not among those broadcasters evidently complicit with the government, they usually tend to negligently muddle the water rather than sharing transparent information for fear of being the next target of the intelligence (Al Jazeera English 2016). However, there are some newspapers which have not played ball with the government reporting the news sometimes even criticizing the way the Egyptian government has been handling the investigations. This is the case of independent online newspapers and freelance journalists to which are added articles of the international press, such as the *New York Times Office in Cairo* and *Al Jazera English*.

In Italy, the media initially decided to keep a low profile on the tragic end of the young researcher, giving credit more to rumors than to facts and getting lost in a spiral of news and denials that shifted the focus from the main objective: the search for truth. Until the publication of an interview made by the newspaper *La Repubblica* – chosen as the newspaper of reference for the case – with the Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. As the interview left unchecked many crucial issues – such as systemic violence and oppression happening in Egypt – two weeks later Regeni's family held a press conference to raise awareness on the systemic abuse of human rights in Egypt and to make clear that what happened to Giulio was not "an accident." Conversely from what was stated by Al-Sisi during his interview with La Repubblica, Giulio Regeni's case was one among the thousands (Adly et al. 2016). This press conference changed the entire storytelling paradigm around the case. In fact, after that, more and more media in Italy started to focus more committedly on human rights violations in Egypt. To introduce the turning point was the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera* published a list of 735 Egyptians gone missing presumed to be in jail or dead over the year 2016 (Adly et al. 2016). By breaking the silence on Al-Sisi government and the consequences of the military coup of 2013, it inspired the international press to follow suit. R. Elias would describe this "move" by the

Italian media as "sensationalist." In fact, newspapers can intentionally report crime in a sensational manner, using harsh and brutal images to both increase the sympathy of the public opinion and the rest of the media towards the victim and/or to critically convince it that the response to the crime, given its brutality, is not effective enough. Surely, the article published by *Corriere della Sera* has shaken consciences, even the Egyptians'. Soon after its publication the newspaper *Al-Ahram*, very close to Al-Sisi government, changed its stands by publishing an editorial critical of the State handling of the case, the negligence showed in the investigations and the misleading versions on the events. Subsequently, some well-known voices of the Egyptian air waves followed the suit. Some populist pro-Sisi television channels such as *Al-Yawm* started to reflect the public anger breaking up the standardized image of Al-Sisi as the savior of the country (Al Jazeera English 2016). In last few years, Giulio Regeni's story has been left out from media coverage in Italy partly probably due to lack of developments on the matter and partly as a result of it being progressively replaced by latest issues. However, the campaign #VeritàperGiulioRegeni (Truth for Giulio Regeni) – created by Giulio Regeni's family together with Amnesty International some weeks after the funeral of young the researcher – is keeping the memory of the young researcher alive.[3] It represents a call for truth and justice that continues to echo, from Italy to the rest of the world – for Giulio and for the thousands of civilians being victim of brutal and undemocratic regimes across the world.

5. The analysis of the case: Can Giulio Regeni be considered an "ideal victim" as according to N. Christie's definition?

N. Christie identifies the *ideal victim* as a "person or category of individuals, who, when hit by crime, most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim" (Christie 1986). This definition implies the existence of a hierarchy of victims – at the top of it there are those who are considered most deserving of the victim status; as one moves down the hierarchy, victims become less and less deserving of receiving it until they become completely undeserving. This pattern is problematic for mainly two reasons. Firstly, the denial of victim status may have severe and long-term consequences as it creates a background for additional trauma, discrimination and even marginalization – this can nega-

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[3]   Giulio Regeni's family: his two parents and his sister, https://www.ansa.it/webimages/img_457x /2021/9/30/60837ccaca268ad5ea20e7c4ca4a064e.jpg.

tively impact victims' mental health by encouraging feelings of unworthiness, shame, self-blame etc. Secondly, not receiving the victim status can deny access to many actual benefits and resources such as legal aid and compensation, access to justice, medical care, counselling. A crucial role in such dynamic is played by the social status of the victims: those who belong to upper social classes not only are more likely to receive societal recognition, but also to have the resources to successfully claim their (ideal) victim status. The former condition is due to the fact that individuals belonging to upper classes are usually perceived as "good"; a common belief in society in fact is that if these people happen to be enough wealthy, successful and live a "good" life, that must be because they themselves are "good" and hence deserving of their blessings. These people enforce the rooted belief that the world live in is "just" and hence provides for people on the basis meritocracy (Lerner 1980). In other words, poor and marginalized people are seen as deserving of the misery as their opposites are of their fortune. If they claim their victim status this is not given to them as they are not recognized by society as worthy of it; they can even be blamed for asking for it (Viano 1990). Therefore, the process of defining the (ideal) victim status depends on a variety of factors: the victim status in society, the political and economic circumstances surrounding the accident and, finally, the social and cultural norms and beliefs in a given context. This is why some societies are more prone to create ideal victims than others. Particular is the case of victims of international crimes or crimes that draw international concern as they can be seen as ideal in some societies and not as ideal in others. Given this theoretical and circumstantial context, is Giulio Regeni an "ideal victim"? The first attribute of the ideal victim according to N. Christie is that the victim has to be weak. Sick, old or very young people usually instantly suit this requirement. Regeni was neither sick, nor old, nor very young. He was a man in his late twenties and physically healthy. However, if not properly weak he was still vulnerable. His foreigner status and his searching for knowledge in the streets of Cairo, made him a potential target of the Egyptian law enforcement. Moreover, although he knew many people he was actually alone. Having a good network of local acquaintances in a foreign country can be helpful but does not guarantee protection. Also, from the case it emerges that Regeni was quite unconscious of the brutal circumstances he could be involved in by dealing with independent unions, even though he had been warned by his academic advisers to be careful; he was fully tuned in his PhD research, eager to complete it. The second requisite of the ideal victim is to be carrying out a respectable project at the time of the accident. Regeni totally fits this criterion as he was conducting a research for a renowned university. In this view, being a researcher makes his attitude undoubtedly worthy of respect and

honor. The third requirement is that the victim at the time of the accident is in a place where he cannot be blamed for being. When Regeni disappeared, he was heading to the subway station, on his way to meeting a friend. This is obviously a circumstance he cannot be blamed for, rather it is such a routinely action that naturally inspires sympathy. The fourth element necessary for the designation of the ideal victim status is that the offender has to be big and bad. In the case of Giulio Regeni, the offender is the entire system of oppression and coercion Egypt represents. In this context, the offender is profoundly evil and corrupted. It is a complex and powerful entity that creates profound fear and anxiety. The systematic oppression and violation of human rights creates a pattern of continuity that confirms the pure evil nature of the offender. Regeni was completely powerless compared to it; he could have never faced it, as David could never face Goliath. The fifth element for the attribution of the ideal victim status is that the offender has to be unknown to the victim and in no personal relationship with him. As regards to Regeni, the researcher had no relationship with his offender – namely, the Egyptian establishment. As confirmed by the facts, he was conducting a quite ordinary life in Cairo. Even just conceptually, Regeni represents the very opposite of his offender. He symbolizes freedom, while Al-Sisi government exemplifies coercion. The last condition is that the victim has to be powerful enough to make his case known and claims the ideal victim status from society. In the case of Giulio Regeni, the victim is the researcher as well as its own closest network of people. As stated in the UN resolution 40/34 of 1985, in scenarios of state repression and abuse of power the victimization is extended to the family of the actual casualty (United Nations 1985). The family consequently becomes *the* victim, the one de facto exposed to the different victimization processes as well as the one in charge of claiming the ideal victim status *in the name of* the actual casualty. In his work *Victim's rights and legal reforms: International perspectives* (1990), E. Viano identifies different stages that define the process towards the obtainment of the (ideal) victim status. Firstly, assessing the nature of the harm and relative causes; secondly, perceiving and showing oneself up as a victim; thirdly, claiming the victim status in front of the society and its institutions both formally and informally; lastly, receiving validation, recognition and full support by society. Giulio Regeni's family has gone through all these various stages. In fact, his family has launched the campaign #VeritàperGiulioRegeni along with Amnesty International. The campaign has been useful to publicly assess the nature of the harm and give people access to the agonizing details of the cruelty manifested against Giulio. As his mother declared, at the time of the identification, she could recognize his son only by the tip of the nose since the rest of his face had been smashed as well as the rest of his body. She said

she saw the "the evil of the world on his face" (Frequente 2016). The sharing of this information confirmed firstly the existence of solid elements of victimization; secondly it permitted Giulio Regeni's family to go public with the story and show up as victims; thirdly, it gave legitimacy to their claim for the (ideal) victim status. Also, the campaign was useful to connect people to Giulio's life before he met his cruel fate; to get people to know how successful, well-respected and loved he was and that he belonged to an honest middle-class family. Each one of us could have been Giulio or even would wish to be him – as smart, as accomplished, as passionate. His life remains an exemplum and he a symbol of rightfulness, service, humanity. All these specifics have eased the process of identification and emphasizing with Giulio. They have created a belief in society that indeed Giulio deserves to be recognized and validated and his family supported in its search for justice. Ultimately, it created the belief according to which Giulio is and should be seen as an ideal victim. Against this background, it can be therefore affirmed that Giulio Regeni *is* an ideal victim. The wide popularity of his case is evidence of how much not just the Italians and the Egyptians, but the rest of the world itself has been contributing in this to happen.[4]

6. Conclusion

To conclude, a radical approach to victimology is key to understand peculiar forms of victimization such as the political one. However, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of various victimization processes, victimology needs a "new perspective" (Elias 1986). It needs to broaden the definition of victim and crime in order to look beyond the traditional theoretical pattern. In a context of state oppression, abuse of power and human rights violations, such "new perspective" can be useful to fully grasp the roots and implications of these phenomena. Also, it can help analyze stories of victimization through more suiting lengths. The story of Giulio Regeni fits into a context of political victimization and needs a radical approach to be fully understood. The Italian researcher was in fact victim of an entire system of oppression, abuse of power and human rights violations. His victimization has raised awareness on the brutality of the Egyptian regime and has inspired sympathy in the public opinion worldwide, especially in Italy and Egypt. The details of his story – the international context, the brutality of the crime, the corruption of Egyptian establishment and the

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[4]   A manifestation in solidarity with the campaign #VeritàperGiulioRegeni, https://www.globalist.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/torino-la-fiaccolata-in-ricordo-di-giulio-regeni.jpg.

media which emerged in all the various attempts to cover up the investigations – have made of the Italian researcher a symbol of freedom and justice, and of the case itself a common cause to jointly fight for. Giulio Regeni, therefore, fits the requirements for the attribution of the ideal victim status according to N. Christie's definition. His vulnerability, his innocent imprudence, his honorable conduct, his giant offender, his family's ultimate claim for justice – these are all elements that legitimize and recognize him as an ideal victim in the eyes of society. But, what about all those who share a similar fate but whose story have not received the same resonance? What about all the crimes and victimization processes which are not officially recognized as such? N. Christie's definition of ideal victim leaves us with problematic yet relevant enigmas which need to be addressed to effectively dismantle structures of inequality and discrimination existing in our today's societies.

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Chapter 6

"Comfort women": A tragic story during the World War II

Nine van Eerde, Alexandra Faur

Abstract

During the World War II, "comfort stations" were set up by the Imperial Army of Japan to effectively function as brothels for their soldiers. To find the "comfort women" that were to live in these stations, (mostly underaged) girls from southeast Asia were abducted by the military and the government of Japan. At the end of the war, a significant percentage of them was executed. Decades after the war, about the physical abuse and rape that the women had experienced there began to be publicized to the rest of the world and a legal battle for justice and recognition commenced. The case of "comfort women" raises two critical questions: Can the case of "comfort women" be categorized and framed into the theoretical concepts of "ideal victims"? And what was the degree of the public awareness regarding this issue? A comparative literature review and news coverage analysis have been carried out. The findings suggest that comfort women can be seen as ideal victims, as they were described as innocent, and due to the fact that there was a typical asymmetrical power relation between the offenders and victims. However, the institutional response over time has shown that "comfort women" have become a pivot in the international political arena in terms of political leverage. The role of the media coverage was greatly emphasized thorough its international echo.

Keywords: Comfort women – World War II – Ideal victim – Japan – Sexual abuse

1. Introduction

In the context of World War II, The Imperial Army of Japan had built "comfort stations" for deployed soldiers, i.e., places which effectively acted as brothels. The women working in these brothels were mostly underaged girls from south-

east Asia who were abducted by the military personnel itself or members of the government of the Empire of Japan. The women suffered from physical abuse and rape, and at the end of the war a significant percentage of them was executed. The remaining survivors have started one of the longest battles for justice in history, a battle filled with various impediments to achieving proper justice such as debates on the definitions and conceptualization of "victim", "perpetrator", "power abuse", discrimination for the victims from both the oppressor and the general population, imbalanced power dynamics and the list goes on. This chapter aims to analyze the case of "comfort women" from a multifaceted perspective on the concepts employed and their meanings, the chapter will also delve deeper into the exploration of the power relations, the improvements that have been made on war crime legislation and the analysis of the local, regional and international response and media coverage.

First of all, the case of "comfort women" has been viewed as controversial and taboo because of the oppressor's refusal to redress the issue and give proper acknowledgement, compensation, and commemoration. When speaking about crime, talking about criminals is a necessary first step, therefore it is clear that the oppressor plays a fundamental role in the development of a case. In fact, a common way to approach the discussion about a crime is from the perspective of the offender. Which, at first glance, makes perfect sense considering that with no offender, there is no crime. But there is another side of this discussion that might be much more crucial for "crime" to exist: the one of the victims. Although not all crimes have an evident victim, it is the victim that makes the effect of the crime visible. The crime can have an impact on someone's belongings, beloved ones or psychological health so we can affirm that a crime affects the victims on all sectors of life, namely the effects are visible on social, economic, and psychologic dimensions. It is the victim that enlarges the necessity to fight crimes and injustices in our society. But the concept of what a victim entails is not set in stone as there is a large variety of different writings and interpretations that have been done by scholars from different fields. Thus, the concept is dynamical in time, space, culture. Van Dijk, Winkel and Letschert (2008) described the etymology of the word "victim." From a western perspective, this origin lays in the Christian ritual of sacrificing a slaughtered animal. The victim is therefore someone who is helpless and innocent, sacrificed by others for various purposes. From a historical perspective, the victim is a scapegoat. When looking at the dictionary, one can describe a victim as "a person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action" (Cambridge Dictionary 2021). Apparently, in order to have a victim, there must be a form of harm and an event that has caused that harm to happen. When looking at the

criminal law, the victim is the person who suffers. For instance, in Dutch criminal law, the victim is defined as a person "directly affected by financial loss or other disadvantages." These definitions can give us a broad image of what kind of meaning is employed when talking about victims. And perhaps the concept is even more difficult to analyze because there is not one 'right' definition to widely accept. Even categorizing victims (by type of crime, context, victim characteristics, number of victims, proximity to the crime or frequency of victimhood, etc.) one cannot include all of them. The concept is strongly influenced by our context, culture, media and how all of these variables have built and shaped our world perceptions. As the cultivation hypothesis teaches us, there is a significant relationship between TV consumption and fear of becoming a victim of crime. News can influence one's perception of high criminal activity. In this way TV works as some sort of substitution hypothesis: people who haven't experienced victimhood yet base their view on crime on information coming from other people's experiences, seen in the media. You could also pose an affinity hypothesis: some people think they have a bigger risk of becoming a victim, and see this image confirmed through images in the media.

However, not only our fear of crime is being influenced, but our holistic image of 'the victim' has been shaped by the construct of an ideal picture of what a victim is. This construct of the "ideal victim" is not to be regarded as more than a construct. The real ideal victim does not exist in real-life situations, it is simply an unrealistic image created by certain narrations of what a victim should look like. This has a lot to do with the "hierarchy of suffering." One could say that some people "deserve" the label of the victim and are, therefore "worthy." Others do not and are "unworthy." Not only the victim can be regarded as "ideal." This can go hand in hand with the offender. The more ideal the victim, the more ideal the offender and vice versa. The concept doesn't lack the public opinion, the reaction of society to the victim is crucial for the image of the ideal victim. In order to further identify the definition of the "ideal victim," a theoretical framework can be helpful. With regards to the victim, the offender and the attitude of the society, many different authors have shed their light on this concept, which will now be discussed.

2. The ideal victim: A historical understanding of the concept and its applicability

The first scholar to introduce the concept of the ideal victim was Nils Christie (1986). The exact definition of the ideal victim can be found in the first chap-

ter of this book. Christie states that the ideal victim and the ideal offender are mutually dependent. The more ideal the victim is, the more ideal the perpetrator becomes and vice versa. However, most perpetrators are not so ideal in reality.

The first generation of victimology writers such as Mendelsohn, Von Hentig, Schafer, Nagel and Fattah wrote about criminal or interactionist victimology, with the victim's main role in the commission of the crime. Wolfgang (1967) summarized the different forms of involvement under the term victim precipitation. Mendelsohn (1956) was initially interested in the possible incitement of victims to sexual violence, which is now seen as a form of victim-blaming (Cortina, Rabelo & Holland 2018). Von Hentig (1940) was also interested in the role of the victim through his own experiences in World War I. The first writers on victimology therefore hardly spoke of a victim-friendly approach. Both Mendelsohn and Von Hentig drew up typologies of victims that indicated the extent to which the victim was guilty of what had happened to them. Now, it is important to notice that the founders of victimology discussed here were all shaped by World War II, sometimes in a very direct and personal manner. In this perspective, the earliest victimology can be described as an attempt to analyze and normatively interpret crimes as interpersonal conflict, with all its ambivalences. Subsequently, victimology also focused on the traumatic consequences of the Holocaust for survivors and the need for evidence-based care. In the last quarter of the last century, the systematic scientific study of victimization has taken off.

As the "ideal victim" has its origins in the context of World War II, it is interesting to look further into victims of that time period. Building on Christie's theory of the ideal victim, you could say people often do not want to see that perpetrators are just 'normal persons' when they are not committing a crime (Christie, 1986). This can result in cognitive dissonance: the reality that a 'normal person' committed a crime is not consistent with people's view on the world, so most of them try to look for other explanations of the crime. Victim blaming or even denial of the victim can be a result of this. An example can be found in the issue of the "comfort women" during WWII. After the war, the events have been denied and covered up and the victims have not been granted with the status of "victim." Sexual assault was seen as an inevitable consequence of war, something that has always been present in armed conflicts (Durham & Loff 2001). Nowadays, there are still countries that do not totally recognize this part of history. In the next part, this topic will be further analyzed in a case study on Japanese "comfort women" during World War II.

3. "Comfort women"

In the context of World War II, the Japanese Imperial Army deemed necessary the establishment of so-called comfort stations for the deployed soldiers (Nishino et al. 2018; Tanaka 2001; Durham & Loff 2001). These stations, which were in fact brothels, were situated in the vicinity of the battlefields and these became operational once underage girls from South Korea, the Republic of China, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and other countries from the Southeast Asia were forcefully brought by the military personnel. In most cases, these young girls were abducted from their homes or they were lured in with sweet promises of better jobs made by members of the Imperial government of Japan. Many victims were not even old enough to understand the meaning of the sex enslavement that they had endure as the age ranged from 11 to 20 years old.

Statistics have concluded that fewer than 30 percent of the victims have survived throughout the whole ordeal towards the end of the war since the conditions were precarious, with no regard to any basic human rights for the victims (Asian Women's Fund n.d.; Zhiliang 2020). They had to suffer through being raped repeatedly by multiple soldiers, they endured physical pain, unwanted pregnancies, dangerous miscarriages or unsupervised births, sexually transmitted diseases and no medical attention. Furthermore, the end of the war put the Japanese soldiers in the posture of having to cover up the remains of these brothels which led to a significant percentage of the "comfort women" being either executed or ordered to commit suicide according to the Japanese traditions (Nishino et al. 2018).

There were plenty of controversies over the issues of "comfort women", some of which will be discussed in the following chapter. Nonetheless, the topic is broad and it leaves an open door for future analysis and interpretations. Nowadays various countries have officially recognized their existence, hereby including not only Asian countries such as China and Taiwan but also the US, Germany and Australia.

4. A discussion of the case

The end of one of the most disastrous wars in humankind brought about a series of newly-emergent and urgent problems such as dealing with war casualties, collapsed economies, destroyed cities, the aftermath of the genocide, international imbalance of power, displaced people, and many more. These atrocities virtually threw the world into overdrive in order to attempt to reconstruct life as it used to be before the war. Thus, in the context of all of these issues that took the fore-

front stage on European soil, the case of "comfort women" was left out of the spotlight and an almost tacit agreement took place between the victims and the perpetrators to not disclose the tragic events that had happened. Whereas the perpetrators wished to escape punishment by not confessing, the victims were overwhelmed by the psychological toll that would install by undergoing a full legal and political investigation immediately after experiencing such traumatic events. General fear regarding the reaction of others, mistrust, physical and psychological confinement are some of the classic fears of victims of sex trafficking that tend to hinder victims from seeking justice. (Gonzalez, Spencer & Smith 2017). Unfortunately, these fears far exceeded the victims' need for restorative justice, so most victims choose to suffer in silence; silence which benefits the perpetrator.

In the case of the "comfort women," there is an atypical disproportionate power relation between the two sides involved that has persisted all throughout this long-lasting struggle for justice. In the first stage, which is the time of the crime, the asymmetry of power in the fight for justice was accentuated by the conditions of World War II which left unarmed, underaged girls face-to-face with the opposition of armed, mature men. The historical context also played a major role because of the discrepancy of rights between men and women; and the cultural setting of hierarchical Asian societies also heightened gender inequality. In the second stage, which is the post-war timeframe, the asymmetrical fight for justice is represented by the two sides: the victims which are now aged individuals and the perpetrators which are now represented by the Japanese Government. In addition, gender inequality is still persistent worldwide and Asian countries, in particular, encounter more troubles in tackling such problems.

Despite the fact that throughout the 1990s the question of sexual violence and rape of women during wars was revisited and the new wave of feminism was requesting the reviewing of laws against gender-based violence that takes place during wars, while also demanding the implementation of new mechanisms to aid victims overcome the trauma and receive compensation, the power structure was still asymmetrical and disproportionate. Even with the unprecedented support gathered during the 1990s, "social and gender justice for the survivors of this type of violence were still without reach" (Korac 2018: 2) and the asymmetrical and disproportionate power structure has continued to hinder this judicial and political fight ever since.

In an ideal world, a victim would have the right to demand reparations as well as to demand the right to memory and to social recognition without encountering any hindrances. Nonetheless, in the real world, victims are oftentimes subdued not only by their offenders but also by the non-supporting legal system

and the overly censorious population which requests evidence in order to confer credibility and legitimacy to the victims. In cases of sex-related violence, there is a low probability of collecting physical evidence because the only plausible evidence results from undergoing medical evaluations and investigation i.e., "rape kit" immediately after the crime has taken place (Gaensslen, Henry & Lee 2002). In the case of "comfort women" no physical evidence could have been forwarded. Thereby, the official labels of "victim" and "offender" were not universally accepted. In order to achieve justice for victims and punishment for the offender, these labels must be unanimously accepted which meant that the ambiguity of the definitions has rendered the case of "comfort women" unsolved in its entirety. One of the most powerful tools of our society is conferring labels and labelling someone basically translates to associating opinions, behaviors, and social statuses to other people. The process of labelling can be performed by one individual to another or by one community towards a single individual or towards more individuals. The associated labels for victims are influencing how victims behave, adjust and take on new identities (Kenney 2002).

Having recognized the influential power of labels, it is obvious that it implies a huge sense of responsibility and commitment to decide the exact label suitable for an individual. When discussing life-altering labels such as "innocent" or "guilty" in crimes, the accountability doubles exponentially as this also involves legal, economic, social, and political sanctions. In the case study of "comfort women," the most important part after establishing a label for the "victims" was to determine the right verdict for the "offender," with the options being either innocent or guilty. The process of giving a verdict for war crimes is more troublesome as the lines become blurred and the differentiation between following orders and giving order is hard to prove, individuals become difficult to identify and to prosecute as time passes, and so on. A grey area cannot exist in the case of crimes since the two-fold process of victimization is disrupted. First, the "victim" ought to receive the verdict of innocence and second, the "offender" ought to receive the verdict of guilt. This is the standard procedure for individual trials, nonetheless in this case, "comfort women" are confronting against Japan, which is an entire nation that has become an important regional and international actor, hence the difficulty to conclude the case.

Japan has not displayed any willingness to either compensate or to take legal responsibility for "comfort women" (Wang 2019). There are various reasons for which Japan has refused to acknowledge the existence of "comfort women" as the rightful victims of the crimes committed under the powerful Imperial army during the war but neither of them absolves Japan from their guilt. One of the most invoked reasons is related to the Japanese construction of the concept of

victimhood. After World War II, the public consciousness in Japan started to promote and adhere to a discourse that placed "Japanese people as war victims" (Orr 2001: 12). Thereby, it was almost impossible to accept "comfort women" as victims because this acceptance would entail that Japanese soldiers are to be held accountable as offenders. To admit and to permit the international community to view you as an ideal offender is not a scenario that many countries would be pleased to be placed into. Taking responsibility would entail political, social, and economic sanctions, and most importantly the brand of Japan as a "peace-loving country" could be affected and their soft power would diminish as a direct consequence. The acknowledgement of "comfort women" as victims of war crimes would impact Japan's well-cultivated cultural attraction (Heng 2014).

There are multiple explanations as to why the issue of "comfort women" has been forsaken. First of all, Japan has taken a leadership role in East Asia and it also exerts tremendous power at the global level, therefore the topic has been kept under control through the dominance that Japan bears on the international arena. Second of all, the clear-cut separation between the Western societies and the Eastern ones serves as the main reason as to why the issue of "comfort women" has not been a topic of concern for important international actors. The Western forces decided that the issue ought to be tackled by the states involved and that it should be dealt with at the regional level.

"Where do I place myself in relation to the conflict?" is an extraordinarily powerful question that allows people to distance themselves physically and emotionally from the victims. The rest of the world is a simple spectator, far away from the persecutions that "comfort women" had to face. The blame is shifted towards the environment and this can be linked to Melvin J. Lerner's theory (Lerner 1980) of the "just world" which explains that people tend to subconsciously blame the poor and the weak for their fate; bad events happen to them because they are poor, because they are weak and because they are easy to subdue.

5. Is it possible to identify ideal victims?

In order to delve deeper into the concept of ideal victims and its applicability to the case study, the understanding of victims through the political discourse logic has to be underscored. In the world of politics, victims are only those people who are innocent.

Beside South Korea, some other countries such as China (CNS 2015), The Republic of Philippines (Roces 2021), Taiwan (Katz 2018), The United States of America (Semple 2012), Germany (Associated Press 2017), Australia (Dun-

lop 2016) have recognized "comfort women" as victims of the horrors of the war and they have been officialized through commemorative memorials aimed at bringing a soothing sense of social respect not only to the victims but to their families, as well. Despite this symbolic gesture, the struggle for recognition cannot be finalized before Japan will officially assume responsibility as the offender. Thus, in South Korea a movement has started on January 8, 1992 referred to as the "Wednesday Demonstration demanding Japan to redress the Comfort Women problems." The 8th of January 2020 marked the 1421st demonstration in 28 years and it has been listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest movement demonstration on the same topic. The "Wednesday Demonstration demanding Japan to redress the Comfort Women problems" is taking place in front of the Japanese Embassy in the capital of South Korea, the city of Seoul. On the 28th year as much as 43 organizations from South Korea, New Zealand, US, Canada, UK, Ireland, Australia, China, Germany, Japan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda announced their solidarity for the persistence of the continuous demonstrations and showed their support for the cause of "comfort women" (womenandwar.net 2020).

Victims are deeply influenced by the others' perception of them and their struggles. When the environment is accepting and recognizing the traumatic experiences of victims without excluding them from social life, the victims are encouraged to share their memories and feelings. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the victims of the "comfort stations" since only recently have some of the women accepted to film documentaries[1] as they have gradually started to gain more allies. Their communities, especially in South Korea, have accepted them as the "suffering part" of their society and "comfort women" are generally referred to as the drafted women who served in the war (PSPD 2001).

Narrating the story as a victim is an incredibly powerful move for the overall development of a modern society. Thereby, the international community has made some improvements such as adopting new legislations stating that rape is officially recognized as an international war crime and it can be punished outside the border by the international community. This was adopted at the Rome Diplomatic Conference in 1998 under the form of the charter of the In-

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[1]   Kim Jun Ki, *Herstory*, Animation, English, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nUpuVL5Uyw. Tiffany Dixon, *Butterfly Women*, 2014. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-hFwCYNeX4cunytv75. *Asian American Life*, February 2016. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh0s6j5l8ZE. *Yongsoo Lee. Debunking "Comfort Women" Agreement between Japan and S. Korea*, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhDPlq7iYUw. RememberComfortWomen (CWJC), *Inside a sex slave operation: "The Comfort Station"*, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9zRHB_MsB4.

ternational Criminal Court (ICC) in the Article 7 Crimes Against Humanity (United Nations 2002) as a melioration of the issue of "comfort women" on the international arena and it represents a small step in this broader movement.

It is clear that the "comfort women" can be classified as victims due to their so-called "innocence", but can we talk about "ideal victims" as they are conceptualized? Analyzing from a simply theoretical framework, "comfort women" would be placed on top of the "hierarchy of suffering" as they were defenseless underaged girls, removed from their dignity as human beings, abducted from their homes and families. The perpetrator, on the other hand is the male counterpart, he is the powerful, mature, entitled by his position to inflict pain to the victims, he is the stranger that overpowers the victims. There is a perfect antithesis of the two sides.

Nils Christie presented the necessary criteria that differentiate victims from ideal victims from a societal point of view: "ideal victim is weak compared to the unrelated offender, as well as having put a reasonable energy into protecting herself" (Christie 1986: 13). This definition would not include "comfort women" because a significant part of them went willingly as they were promised good opportunities for jobs that would help them escape poverty. Moreover, some of these women did not hold highly-esteemed positions in society nor were they carrying out respectable activities at the time, so their struggle was and to some extent still continues to be neglected, especially by the powerful offenders that hold a powerful position on the international arena. Furthermore, soldiers are typically not associated with the social construct of "offender" nor with the concept of the "ideal offender." Soldiers are narrated as national heroes, politically involved civilians that are deemed to be the protectors of the nation. Soldiers are the embodiment of nationalism and they possess all the qualities that are praised by the hegemonic patriarchy. The peak of militarism is strongly linked with institutions, practices, values so it is really difficult to view them as a possible "offender." Only in recent history has this image of soldiers suffered some rigorous reconstruction. From the Vietnam war onwards, war veterans began to be perceived as "damaged goods" (MacLean, 2016). Nonetheless, for the majority of the history of mankind, during times of war, all crimes were permitted and accepted as acts of sacrifice from the soldiers to the country's interest.

6. The impact of power dynamics on the institutional response across time

As Erica Bouris (Bouris 2007) claimed, the concept of ideal victim can be useful for the analysis of how international agencies and governments operate in a

complex context such as aftermath of the World War II. By looking at analyses done by Smyth (2003) and Thomas (1999), Bouris completes four compulsory criteria for victims that wish to find recognition. Bouris argues that victims can be seen as "legitimate moral beacons" (Bouris 2007: 32) if they possess: innocence, purity, moral superiority and lack of responsibility. Innocence is the most important one, but also the most difficult one to define because it cannot be seen out of the context of the political approach of the agencies and therefore it has to do with a moral aspect. Innocence and purity are not neutral. These criteria lead to an important debate. We have a double scheme of interpretation towards our victims. On the one hand, victims are represented as ideal, because they are viewed as innocent, they lack responsibility and they are deserving of help. On the other hand, there are other victims which cannot be perceived through the lens of the ideal victim, and this would result in them not being totally deserving of help. This construction explains why some genocides are recognized whereas others are not.

In Japan, there have been plenty of issues with the recognition of the victims of 'comfort stations' from the World War II and this has caused tense diplomatic relations between Japan and the most affected countries, specifically The Republic of Korea, country in which the movement has been the most potent. Other countries that have recognized and have tried to commemorate the victims of "comfort stations" have also had strained their relations with Japan. A suggestive example would be the 2015 incident in which Osaka and San Francisco ended the 60 years old relationship of "sister cities" because of a commemorative statue in the name of "comfort women" (McCurry 2018).

Despite the testimonies of the "comfort women," some Japanese officials (Tabuchi 2007) claimed that the comfort brothels were regular prostitution brothels and that there was no military coercion involved. Hence, the complexity of the situation has required a long-standing legal battle as Japan has deliberately attempted to erase the unfavorable parts of their history. For example, the issue of "comfort women" along with the Nanjing Massacre have been removed from the Japanese curricula in multiple schools. Moreover, Japan has a history attempting to influence scholars to not make reference to these issues as their acknowledgement would cause harm to Japan's image. In fact, former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has stated that revisiting these acts has "robbed post-war Japanese of their pride" (Onishi 2007).

A major point of interest to analyze would be the investigation conducted by The Asahi Shimbun Co. Third-Party Committee in 2014. This investigation was conducted in Japan after a newspaper faced extreme backlash from both the political class and the Japanese society after having published a series of articles

throughout the 1980s and 1990s about the confessions of a former Imperial Japanese officer of the war. The newspaper did not want to retract the articles, fact which stirred a lot of controversies within Japan. In the articles, the officer Seiji Yoshida willingly admitted to having abducted numerous Korean women for the purpose of using them as "comfort women" (The Asahi Shimbun 2014). The commission established that there was "no evidence that any adequate attempts were made to confirm the accuracy of the testimony beyond re-interviewing Yoshida himself" (Okamoto & Okamoto 2014). The commission greatly emphasized the lack of evidence of these confessions and highlighted how Japan would have to suffer from these kinds of statements. The Japanese Commission made statements such as: "the word 'coercion' is extremely vague" (Nakagome 2014) when addressing the confessions of Japanese army officials having coerced women to comply with the sexual activities.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the issue has been disputed for so long without a definitive answer, improvements have been made and the case of "comfort women" has found some support. An important example of positive institutional response to the issue of "comfort women" is the creation of memorials and commemorative spaces for the historical, emotional, financial and political support of the right of the victims of the "comfort stations." These newly-build institutions vary greatly in purposes from support groups to officially recognized historic sites for recognizing and bringing support to the victims called "support women." Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Philippines, and Taiwan have built domestic memorials. Moreover, the case has also gathered some Western support from the United States of America, Germany, as well as by Australia. Most notably would be to recognize the fact that even nowadays, this fight for justice is still on-going since demonstrations are still being held in South Korea. The statue of a young woman erected in 2011 in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul is still a matter of debate. The Japanese government has repeatedly requested South Korea to have the statue removed, but the statue can still be seen to this day. In 2017, the local government even enacted the legal foundation to protect the statue by issuing an ordinance. One year later, in 2018, the first official "comfort women" Memorial Day was held. Similar events have shortly appeared not only in Asian countries, but also in the US, Germany and Australia.

Associations such as Amnesty International have campaigned in countries where governments had not supported the cause. In 2007, the European Parliament passed a resolution that asked the Japanese government to rectify the situation of "comfort women," specifically Japan was requested to "acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical and legal responsibility, in a clear and unequivocal manner, for its Imperial Armed Force's coercion of young women into sexual

slavery" (European Parliament 2021). The resolution represents a cornerstone in this case as it also warned against the denial of 'comfort stations' and it encouraged Japan to invest in the education of the population with regards to the events surrounding World War II.

7. The role played by media: A compact analysis on mass media reportage

Mass media represents a powerful tool meant to reproduces realities and to bring awareness to global issues. Nonetheless, media is rarely an objective portal of transmitting information as it is heavily influenced by politics, a factor that ultimately shapes the narrative that is to be presented to the public. In the world of mass media reports, the continuous thirst for the sensational is often creating problems for victims in the sense that they are misrepresented and this is harmful on the long-term, considering that the media's way of portraying the victims is the image that will prevail within local communities.

To understand the necessity for the recognition of the "comfort women," a brief summary of the case can be helpful. "Comfort women" were sex slaves, mostly Korean ("the euphemistic term "comfort women" is widely known and more commonly used even in mass media, not only in The Republic of Korea but also in Japan; the English term translates 위안부 (weanbu) in Korean and 慰安婦 (ianfu) in Japanese") (Pak 2016). These women were held captive at Japanese military bases during the World War II. Despite numerous attempts to settle the dispute, the issue still presents a sensitive topic as "there has been a number of lawsuits against the Japanese government, demanding both a formal apology and compensation" (Wang 2020). But the issue is multifaceted and it is generally hard to find a solution and it is especially disheartening to see many victims of the 'comfort stations' pass away without achieving proper justice (Wang 2020). And this is also the case of the late Kim Hak-sun, the woman considered to be the whistle-blower in terms of lawsuits against the Japanese government in hopes of obtaining some form of reparation (Asian Women's Fund 2021).

The major fact that needs to be addressed is that not only has the case of "comfort women" belatedly appeared in the spotlight, but the term itself and the media reportages on the topic were rather misleading. The term "comfort women" is a euphemism and it "covers a dirty and hidden secret in the operation of the Japanese army in the wars" (Wang 2020). However, this hidden part is yet to be uncovered.

Following the structural timeline, after the conclusion of the World War II, the issue found itself to be deeply buried by other urgent matters such as

recovering economies, the rebuilding and restructuring political systems and dealing with the prospect of a new war that loomed over as a possible scenario throughout the Cold War. The topic of claiming justice and reparations remained untouched for decades and it was resurrected in the mainstream media and brought to the attention of the public authorities only in the 1990s. The first cases were sent to courts in an almost urgent manner and the situation gained traction in the international arena. Media was frenzied with the prospect of putting forward articles, declarations and commentaries on the subject, but mass media only followed the stories for short periods of time and it was never a goal to present facts in order to help the victims gain justice. Some studies on the subject concluded that periods of attention that the case got in the media never exceeded more than a year.

Furthermore, there is a strong dichotomy present in mass media in terms of portraying the narrative of "comfort women" and the division could be condensed and explained as an on-going battle between the victims and their legal representants and the state apparatus of Japan which has been in a relentless collaborative attempt to erase and re-tell historic events. Further expanding on this polarity, it would be indispensable to assert that the event of "comfort women" has appeared in the media only in highly politicized periods and only to serve certain narratives rather than to properly seek justice for the victims. Chinese "comfort women" are amongst the "underrepresented margin of women to come out of the World War II era" (Rodriguez 2014). Therefore, the case was publicly addressed only to further antagonize the Chinese population against Japanese aggressors and the victims did not actually receive proper justice as none of the Chinese "comfort women" has won a legal case (Wang 2020). In the instances where "comfort women" were brought to attention, the victims were idealized excessively so as to accentuate them as symbols of injustices that Japan had done to the Republic of China. The "comfort women" fell prey to the concept of objectification of women by producing a strong form of instrumentality and ownership of the victims in the country's best interests. The individual fight for justice of each victim was never a priority and it was never chased with much yearning after the narrative of "comfort women" had been used up during the anti-Japanese movement. Particularly, the public outcry was visibly noticeable in China in 2015 when the Japanese government approved the publishing of textbooks that attempted historical revisionism by referring to the horrific events that took place during the Second Sino-Japanese War as simple one-liners such as "Japanese forces invaded Nanjing," "comfort women – a prostitution corps created by the Imperial Army of Japan" (Oi 2013). Professors were actively encouraged not to focus their teaching on these historical

events that were viewed as "masochistic" (Coleman 1997) and any decision that allowed textbooks to relay the crimes committed by the Imperial Army were deeply contested inside Japan.

In addition, the existing dichotomy in media articles, newspapers or even websites can be noticed through the fact that for every positive article in favor of the issue of "comfort women," there were approximately three articles written in a negative way: "The number of articles written on comfort women during favourable eras was 47 for Period 1 and 23 for Period 3, whereas the number of articles during combative eras was 140 for Period 2 and 174 for Period 4–at least triple the number during favourable eras" (Pak 2016: 10). This fact clearly showcases how the issue of "comfort women" became political leverage for the countries involved against one another and the victims were only remembered in times of political instability and bilateral tensions.

Delving deeper into content analysis about media reportage, a few different "frames" can be depicted. For instance, (Lee & Min 2011) did a content analysis of articles on this topic in South Korean newspapers. According to them, between 2000 and 2010, the tendency towards the frames of "Japanese sexual slavery" and "Japanese apology and compensation" (Pak 2016: 4) can be spotted. Another ground-breaking analysis conducted by Pak (2016) on the news framing in Japanese and Korean newspapers showcases how all the newspapers he studied used the 'responsibility frame' the most frequently, both in South Korea and Japan. The second most used frame differed, in Korean newspapers this was the "human interest frame," whereas in a striking contrast, in Japan it was the "conflict frame." Nevertheless, the morality frame was rarely adopted in both countries. In this analysis, frames were defined as the selection of the aspects of reality that would be of utmost importance in getting a message across to the population: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993: 52).

The case of "comfort women" has been approached as an exclusive event in which the tone of the articles was mostly mixed, neutral or negative, with a big difference between Japan and South Korea. The proportion of articles with a negative tone was only 10% in Japan, whereas in South Korea this was around 50%. As Pak (2016: 15) concluded his analysis, "it seems plausible that the prevalence of episodic frame and negative tone in comfort women articles in South Korean newspapers may lead readers to have a more negative perception of the Japanese government and politicians." It is significant to note that whereas the topic did not really receive much media coverage in the Western societies, nev-

ertheless, the topic has been addressed by international organizations such as United Nations and it is an issue that has been stressed by U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, as recent as August of 2014: "This is not an issue relegated to history. It is a current issue, as human rights violations against these women continue to occur as long as their rights to justice and reparation are not realised" (United Nations 2019).

8. Conclusion

In light of all of these issues, it can be said that the topic did not receive sufficient media coverage, especially if we take into consideration the fact that the only attention it garnered was for one state or another's political interests. The fight is still on-going as the Japanese official apparatus has not passed any resolutions that would acknowledge full responsibility for the case of "comfort women" or any other atrocities committed under the Imperial Military Army during World War II. And this is especially pressuring considering the fact that there are only few victims alive and they are over the age of 85, thus is highly possible that they will not live to see the situation change for the better. Even in the international context, this is a serious problem that goes unnoticed taking into account that sexual trafficking is a global problem. Living in a society that vows to fight such crimes that are occurring in present times is not encouraging when there are historic events such as this that are still immersed into the battle of justice (Comfort Women Justice Coalition 2017).

All in all, the case of "comfort women" is a sensitive issue that still needs to be addressed and remembered and most importantly it should be recognized as part of the history that transpired during World War II. As South Koreans refer to the "comfort women" as the "drafted women," the global society should also acknowledge their struggle and their important contribution to the events during the war. This case study is an important matter because it perfectly depicts how power relations can play a major role into conflict management and why it is vital for victims to receive external help in order to achieve restorative justice.

The case of "comfort women" still stands against time and it is not definitively compensated for but is a precious memory of how women decided to fight against their offenders. It can be considered as a truly empowering event. It also shows how complex the concepts of victim and ideal victim are. While victimhood was a "hot topic" after the World War II, the actual victims from that time might never get the recognition that they need. We have a blind spot for

victims that do not fit into the widely accepted concept image of an ideal victim. Nevertheless, memorials are being erected and international legislation has been revisited. The fight for justice for the "comfort women" has made important advancements for fighting gender inequality, addressing power relations, understanding war crimes.

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Chapter 7
The concept of ideal victim and the Rohingya issue

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Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how can the concept of Nils Christie's *ideal victim* be applied in the context of international crimes such as genocide, within the case study of the Rohingya minority genocide in Myanmar. The Rohingya, a Muslim minority which resides in the Rakhine region, have been described by several accounts as the most persecuted and poorest minorities in the world. Moreover, the chapter aims to examine the international and local media reactions to the issue, as well as how social media such as Facebook and Twitter impact the perceptions of locals in Myanmar. The chapter concludes that the Rohingya fail to fit the concept of "ideal victim," as the ruling class has kept denying the genocide in order to protect their status. Furthermore, the role of traditional media as well as social media is significant, with differences in reporting the genocide between Western media and local media. Additionally, the employment of social media by the Myanmar government, especially Facebook, to push their propaganda painting the Rohingya not as victims but as offenders, as well as controlling much of local media to report their narrative on the issue, has been a significant factor in the perception of the minority group as victims.

Keywords: Stateless – Minority – Victimization – Rohingya – Media mobilization

1. Introduction

The roles of a victim and offender have often been juxtaposed against each other, seen as two clear-cut, separate static categories. In reality, the two concepts are fluid and rarely there are cases of ideal victims, or offenders who are pure evil.

Moreover, they are culturally and historically relative. The concept centering this chapter has been derived from the theorization of victimhood by Nils Christie (1986), and his concept of an *ideal victim*. Christie's theorization of victimization and victimhood were drawn from the application of the concept to a case study, namely the Rohingya genocide perpetrated by the Myanmar government. The applicability of the ideal victim concept to international crimes and the extent within which the Rohingya fit this category was considered, as well as the reactions by the international agencies and community. Additionally, impact of media was examined due to their significant influence on the construction of image about the victims as well as the crime. Media can, however, be very biased in their portrayals of the events and victimhood, which can lead to distorted depiction of the crime. Understanding the role of media in constructing images of the crime was then vital in the case of Rohingya, as it can strongly influence the perceptions of people (McCann 2016).

2. The historical background

Aiming at analyzing the genocide being in place against the Rohignya, tracing the historical roots of the origins of this minority is pivotal. The historical analysis presented in this paragraph will develop three different levels, these being the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. The Burmese government has denied the Rohingya minority the right of citizenship, leaving them without state protection and, as stateless, they lack the capacity of being heard by the International Community. This paragraph will refer to Burma up until the year 1989, when the country took its current name of Myanmar.

Myanmar counts 135 different ethnic indigenous groups and it is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world (Smith, 2007). The ethnic majority is the Burma Buddhist population, which has dominated the country since the 1948's independence. Even if the central Burmese government is engaged in different conflicts with certain minority groups, the one being in place against the Rohingya is unique in their treatment as stateless (Kipgen 2013). Rohingya Muslim minority reside in the Rakhine Region, former Arakan, a coastal region in Southeast Asia bordering the Bay of Bengal, the Indian subcontinent and Burma. Due to its peculiar geographical position, this region has been land of economic exchanges since the 8th century, when Arab merchants arrived in Arakan, setting their communities there (Roy 2020). Sharing a long border with today's Bangladesh, the Rakhine region has also welcomed Indians, thus being a place where different religions were

practiced.[1] Specifically, the Rohingya are the descendants of Arab Muslims, as it can be understandable due to the similarities in terms of culture, language, and physical appearance to South Asians, especially to Bengali people (Parnini 2013). Due to this multiethnic past, Arakan's history is made of different periods and saw the succession of numerous rulers up until 1784, when the Burmese Empire won against the Mrauk U Kingdom, which lasted 300 years and under which Muslim and Buddhist tradition co-existed within the same space. The foreign conquest of the region in 1784 brought the imposition of Theravada Buddhism which lasted also during the British Rule. The colonial period, which only ended in 1948 with Burma gaining independence and formally adding the Arakan region to its territory, posed an important stone in terms of discrimination against ethnic minorities. This territory was administered under the divide and rule principle imposed by the British empire: the idea under this policy was to maintain and to foster the already existing diversities and divisions to avoid any type of solidarity among people (Christopher 1988). This colonial policy aids the explanation the long-existing frictions between the Buddhist majority and the Muslim minority in Arakan Region. By applying divide and rule policy, the British favored the Rohingya minority, sharpening the rift between the two ethnic communities and, due to this, "Buddhism became the surrogate indicator of Burmese nationalism when political activity was banned by the British, and monks were martyrs to the nationalist movement and often led it," as argued by David Steinberg (2013). The British governed Burma as a province of India until 1937, dividing the territory between the northern and southern part, the latter being the Ministerial Burma administered as a part of India (Gravers 1999), while the former was directly administered by the British, here applying the indirect rule and so exacerbating the complex relations between ethnic groups in Myanmar.

Given the strained relations between the Indian "rulers" and the Burma Buddhist population, at the beginning of the 20th century, Buddhist leaders begun to integrate xenophobic slogans while waving their nationalist flag against the British rule and the presence of Indian people within their homeland.

World War II, along with the Japanese occupation during the conflict, have been a watershed moment for Myanmar and Rohingya Muslims. While the Burmese population gave its support to the Japanese forces, many ethnic minorities sided with Allies, including the Rohingya (Steinberg 2013). During the

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[1]   To view a map of the region, visit: CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University, available at: https://asiapacific-archive.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/myanmar-statesregions [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

conflict, Rohingya and Rakhine minorities violently faced each other in the bat-tlefield, with both sides committing atrocities against the civilians pertaining to the opposite community (Ibid). After four years, with the Japanese first winning over the Allies, at the end of the war the British prevailed on the Asian Empire, reoccupying Burma until the year 1948. The United Kingdom had been aided during the entireness of the conflict by the Burma Independence Army, whose leader was Aung San – father of the former Myanmar's Prime Minister and 1991 Nobel for Peace Aung San Suu Kyi. He had cooperated with the minorities liv-ing within Burmese borders in the name of country's unification but did not reach to see his country independent as it was killed just few months before. The first government of independent Burma was given in the hands of U Nu, under whom the ethnic minorities were treated equally, aided by the presence of two Muslim members in the Parliament (Parnini 2013). Nevertheless, Rohingyas asked to be part of the near Pakistan, but the country refused this proposal. At this point, the Muslim minority asked for the creation of the Islamic Republic of Rohingyas facing the rejection of Burmese central government and giving birth to the armed struggle.

Relations between the two sides were already tense when a law that banned Rohingyas from returning to Myanmar was issued, fostering for the first time the so-called ideology of illegal immigrants (Anwari 2020). In 1951 the govern-ment approved the White Card, allowing individuals to stay in Burma but only after an examination process. A decade later, a military coup led by General Ne Win brought to the establishment of an authoritarian regime whose main goal was to create a unitary state under Buddhism. The military regime eliminated the two Muslim representatives in the Parliament – a decision that persists till nowadays. (Parnini 2013). In 1962 the Rakhine state's autonomy was abolished and Rohingyas started to be deprived of their political rights (Khin 2017). The military junta begun to use xenophobic slogan against the minority, recalling the nationalist sentiment that brought the country out of the British Empire and saw the Rohingyas being labelled as Bengali immigrants. The situation worsened in 1964 when General Ne Win made the taking-yin-tha (national races) the core of his policies by allowing all citizens to receive the national reg-istration cards, except for Rohingyas, who instead were given foreign identities cards (Ty 2019). This political propaganda reached its peak in 1978 when the first massacre against the Rohingya took place in Burma. The outcome was a large migration flow to the bordering Bangladesh (Pernini 2013). However, it is with the Citizenship Law of 1984 that the ideology of illegal immigrants gained more field: the law permitted the gain of Burmese citizenship if an individual was able to speak at least one of the official languages of Myanmar and could

provide proof that his or her family had lived in the country before 1823. Many Rohingya applied to receive citizenship but most of them failed in proving both requirements: Rohingya were deprived of their right of citizenship with a "key strategy to justify arbitrary treatment and discriminatory policies" (Staples 2012). As a result, Rohingya became stateless overnight, and the Burmese had a justification for their human rights violation against the Muslim minority. In 1991, more than 250,000 Rohingya flew to Bangladesh trying to escape systematic mass violence and deportation. In the same year, the UN General Assembly condemned Burmese actions against Rohingya, and a Special Rapporteur was appointed to Burma (Smith 1999).

With the aim of fighting what it can be defined as an ethnic cleansing, in 1998 Rohingya rebels organized themselves in the Arakan National Organization but as soon as they started to be active, local police fought them back, forcing the survivors to migrate towards the near Bangladesh. From 2001 till 2009, tensions between the Rohingya minority and the Burmese majority spread all over the country, producing hundreds of deaths on both sides. With 2010 multiparty elections, the situation got even worse as some of the ethnic political parties were allowed to take part, among which appeared the ethnic Rakhine political party, which incited fear and hate against the Rohingya (Khin 2017). Moreover, during a public speech president Thein Sein defined Rohingyas as a national threat, and, after the publication of a news according to which a Rohingya had raped and killed a Burmese woman, a second mass killing operation started in Myanmar.

Furthermore, in 2015, just before the elections, a birth control law was approved, depriving the Rohingya minority of another fundamental right. Nobel Prize for Peace (1991) Aung San Suu Kyi was elected President heading the National League for Democratic (NLD) behind which Rohingya had rallied as the party opposed to military rule (Khin 2017). Human rights activists launched in 2016 a governmental committee and an international commission to address the Rohingya issue, but this attempt failed soon. With the creation of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in 2016, small-scale attacks against the local police started near the border with Bangladesh for a "national cause" but the situation got even worse. ARSA's was not meant to be a political movement, rather a new effort to gain acceptance (Leider 2018). By manipulating news media and journals, the central government portrayed Rohingya as criminals who wanted to overthrow the government which led to the perception of them as a threat to national security by the Burmese population. By doing so, the genocide against Rohingyas was tangible, even if Suu Kyi denied this accuse. ARSA is recognized by the central government as a terroristic organization with an Islamist

jihadist agenda, even if scholars have proven that it is not true. Since 2017, almost a million of Rohingyas have migrated towards Bangladesh, where – however – they do not find peace. In fact, the Bangladesh government is worried about these huge amounts of migratory flows: refugee camps are overcrowded and there's a risk of terrorist radicalization of Rohingyas.

On February 1, 2021, a coup d'état occurred in Myanmar, resulting in the establishment of a military government and thousands of deaths. Former national President Aung San Su Kyi has been arrested by the military junta and is kept under custody being accused of corruption. Since the establishment of the military dictatorship, thousands of Burmese people have fled the country trying to escape from the violence of the non-elected government. For what concerns Rohingya minority, their situation has even worsened since 2021. The country, which economy was harshly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, have imposed new movement restrictions and aid blockages against the Muslim minority, thus increasing malnutrition and scarce conditions of life (Human Rights Watch 2022).

3. *Ideal victims* in the context of international crime

The process of victimization, identification with the victim status, and the categorization of individuals as victims and perpetrators are rarely clear-cut processes nor definitions, as argued by Borer (2003). In reality, these categories rarely are static or homogeneous. Categorization into neither victim or offender is fixed, and there can be overlaps between the two as well as high levels of ambiguousness (McEvoy & McConnachie 2012). Moreover, both labels carry implicit implications to them. Often, assigning this status of a perpetrator and victim to individuals causes "dramatization of innocence and evil" (Holstein & Miller 1990: 110). Positing the victim as innocent often paints a picture of them as helpless and passive. However, this status does grant the individual certain benefits which they would not otherwise have been given, such as emotional support and financial compensation, making this definition often necessary for those who need support (Jägervi 2013). Moreover, there often exists a disconnect between an individual's narrative and the narrative of the society. Simplified narratives are often mainstreamed, while individual constructions of the events can be ambiguous and veer on the side of dramatization. Thus, the narratives of the dominant groups within a society are the narratives which get broadly accepted, termed as the master narratives. In contrast, counter-narratives offer an opposing view, and alternative narratives posit alternatives to the dominant master narrative (Nelson 2001). Social norms and the society's narrative of un-

derstanding victimhood can then alter the depiction of crimes greatly in, for example, the mainstream media.

These different narratives can be perceived in Christie's theory of ideal victim, arguing that the master narrative within most society is that of a good victim. The phenomenon of being a victim, however, changes depending on the individual personal interpretation of the concept and situation (Jägervi 2013). The ideal victim, as defined by Christie (1986), refers to an individual who as a target of a crime, is assigned the legitimate and complete status of a victim. This ideal victim possesses some defining characteristics. These attributes include the individual being weak and the offence occurring while the person was carrying out a task which can be seen as respectable. Furthermore, the victim is not to be blamed, and should be a victim of an unknown offender who can be characterized as big and bad. The individual, however, should also be strong enough to speak out and make a case for themselves (Christie 1986). Given the aim of this chapter, the question that arises is if this concept can be applicable in the cases of international crimes where the violence occurring is often structural and happens at a large scale, such as war crimes or crimes against humanity.

To an extent, Christie's theorization of the ideal victim can be argued to apply to victims of crimes on an international scale, such as genocide and war crimes. This is especially applicable to children, who often tend to get portrayed as the ideal victims, and used by, for example, by NGOs to ask for donations. The same often happens with women. The dominant understanding in most societies about men and masculinity is not compatible with the victimization of men in the context of international crimes, such as war (Van Wijk 2013). Schwöbel-Patel (2018) identifies three attributes of an ideal victim in an international crime. These are weakness and vulnerability, dependency and grotesqueness, which often fuse into a stereotypical depiction of victimhood where the victim is infantilized, racialized and feminized. Thus: in the terms of international crime, the weakness and vulnerability of the ideal victim are often assigned to children and women. Women and children who are amidst an armed conflict, are the likeliest individuals to be fitted into the image of authentic and deserving victim (Schwöbel-Patel 2018). Moreover, in context of international crimes arises the issue of hidden conflicts, as the potential victims can only a claim this status when the crimes are known to those outside of the crime. This implies that when a crime occurs in isolated regions and receive little to no media attention due to it, they tend to stay unidentified by those who can assign them the label of a victim. This implied the necessity of media and outsider presence for the application of the status ideal victim (Van Wijk 2013). These conflicts can be termed as stealth conflicts, where in the altercation goes undetected and

remains absent from the policy agenda as well as media and public, in which case the victims are unable to claim the status of a victim (Hawkins 2004). Attracting the attention of media and the public, especially internationally, can be challenging due to high competition from other news, and should they get the attention, often international crimes need to "sell" their case to the media. If they fail to receive international media attention, as argued by Van Wijk, the individuals of the conflict can be considered as the victims of our indifference, being unable to compete with other news for the attention of the media. The role of media attention in the application of the victim label is especially applicable in the case study of the Rohingya, as both the traditional media as well as social media platforms have played an integral part in not only masking the extent of the crisis, but also promoting propaganda against the minority group.

4. The case study of Rohingya and victimhood

Rohingya, an ethno-religious term, refers to the Muslim people who reside and perceive the Rakhine region of Myanmar as their ancestral home. It is estimated that over one million Rohingyas are stateless, and since 2012, many remained displaced in camps across the Rakhine State (Zarni & Cowley 2014).[2] Considered one of the poorest ethnic groups in the world, the Rohingya issue has always been very complex. They are not recognized as Burmese citizens, and the central government does not allow them to move freely within the country. As argued in the previous paragraphs, the violation of fundamental rights against the Rohingya is a process that has deep historical roots within the Burmese society. Freedom House (2022) defines Myanmar as a "not free" country, with an overall score of 9/100, being assigned 0/40 in terms of Political Rights and 9/60 for what concerns Civil Liberties.[3] Since the 1962 military coup, the Southeast Asian country has been ruled under a military dictatorship and after five decades, Myanmar is undergoing a slow democratization process fitting boundary of Hungtington's third wave of democratization (Ruzza, Gabusi, Pellegrino 2019). This process has been characterized by the systematic use of vio-

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[2]   In 2018, Mehdi Chowdhury spent some time in a Rohingya camp observing the lives of the refugees. See some pictures at Bournemouth University website: https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/research-action/life-refugee-camp-rohingya-refugees#article [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

[3]   It must be noticed that the analysis pursued by Freedom House and here cited is the result of the developments of 2021 and the coup d'état of February 1st of the same year. However, in 2020 the overall score of Myanmar was of 30/100, being assigned 14/40 in terms of Political Rights and 16/60 for what concerns Civil Liberties, being labelled as a "not free" country also the previous year.

lence against the Rohingya Muslims by the Burmese government. As argued by scholars Ruzza, Gabusi and Pellegrino (2019), Myanmar's former regime had the traits of competitive authoritarianism that, for the case study here under analysis, have tough implications. The former leader of the country, Aung San Suu Kyi is known to have never used the term "Rohingya" publicly (Lee 2014) and as reported by the news, during the 2017 visit, Pope Francis never addressed them using the word Rohingya (Islam 2018). The term itself is controversial as the Burmese government refers to them as illegal Bengali migrants, depriving them of any recognition as citizens of Myanmar and thus labelling the minority as unrightfully occupying Burmese national territories. Rohingya are considered by the United Nations as the most persecuted ethnic group in the world (Khin 2017). This statement had important implications regarding Myanmar's foreign policies and its relations with the People Republic of China (PRC) in particular. Bilateral relations between Myanmar and the PRC are due to different actors: geographical proximity, ethnicity, and culture. The two countries share a land border which has been crossed during the last centuries by Sino-Thai migrants (Park 2020). In a 2011 visit, They Sein promised PRC's support to the new Burmese government, which has been expressed within the UN's framework. At the 66th session of the United Nation General Assembly (UNGA), the PRC opposed international interference within internal policies of Myanmar. This renewed friendship between the two Asian countries brought the PRC to be Myanmar's first economic partner (Ruzza, Gabusi, Pellegrino 2019). With Washington pursuing sanctions against Myanmar and the international community negative perceiving of Aung San Suu Kyi's government, the PRC has taken advantage of this situation. Given its permanent membership within the United Nations Security Council and its veto power, the PRC has often prevented the UN from submitting a resolution to Myanmar on human rights abuses against ethnic minorities, especially Rohingya, justifying Burmese actions as an act to preserve its sovereignty, said Murray Hiebert (2017). While in the Northeast Myanmar borders with the PRC, in northwest – including the Rakhine region – former Burma borders with Bangladesh. The Rohingya issue has labelled the relations between the two countries, as many of them have fled to Bangladesh trying to escape government atrocities (Parini 2011; Khin 2017; and others).[4]

The bilateral relationship between the two bordering countries saw an easing in 2010 regarding the pending Rohingya repatriation issue, when Myanmar's

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[4]   Rohingya refugees resorting to increasingly desperate measures to cross the Naf River to Bangladesh. UNHCR/Andrew McConnell: https://www.unhcr.ca/news/desperate-rohingyas-flee/ [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

government committed itself to take back 9,000 Rohingya at that time staying in Cox's Bazaar (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Even if it can be considered a diplomatic success, optimism over this formal agreement should be contained. Moreover, Rohingya have suffered discrimination also from Bangladeshi government which implemented a policy of policing over them (Parnini, 2013). Art. 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) says:

> [...] genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or
> in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
> A. Killing members of the group;
> B. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
> C. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its
> physical destruction in whole or in part;
> D. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
> E. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Furthermore, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), "human security means that people can exercise their choices safely and freely" (2006). The former concept assumes that security occurs when people are included in a country's development, thus not being included results into a violation of human rights. A massive military offensive was launched against Rohingya at the end of 2017: homes were destroyed, women were raped and then killed, and the national police shoot toward people, killing hundreds of civilians and forcing the survivors to migrate to Bangladesh (Park 2020). It has been proved that this massive offensive has been well prepared by national forces to pressure Rohingya out of the country. Since the military operations began, international agencies and NGOs have been forced out of the country with the international community frozen in front of the ongoing genocide (Khin 2017). The Rohingya issue has gained international attention in 2012 when massive killings were discovered but, even this, few actions have been taken against the Burma government (Khin 2014). Rohingya and the international community saw in the elections of 2015 and in Aung San Suu Kyi a possibility to gain more freedom but, as soon as the NLD took power, few things changed or even got worse. There are enough proofs to demonstrate that nowadays a genocide is going on in Myanmar and, as every definition of a crime implies, also genocide has victims. A victim is a person who suffers harm and injury from an adverse or hostile force (Leider 2018). By only looking at this definition, the Rohingya should be defined as vic-

tims of a crime, in this case of a genocide. However, victimhood or victim status of Rohingya has in a certain way worsened their political struggle (Leider 2018). Even if, since the 1990s UN and other international agencies has begun to define Rohingya as victims of an oppressive State, not much has been achieved to preserve the minority. An ideal victim, in the perspective of Quinney (1972), is defined by the society: the same crime – he argues – can be perceived in different ways, and so have different outcomes, depending on the individual that was directly affected by it. By using everyday examples, Quinney (Ibid) showed that society and public opinion are deeply influenced by how the fact is described. Thus, it can be said, that an ideal victim is someone who can gain empathy and sympathy for its social status and for its characteristics. By applying this view to a wider crime, such as a genocide, it can be affirmed that, even if everyone can recognize that a serious violation of human rights is going on somewhere against someone, the attention and the empathy given to these victims also depends on how the international community address the case (Staples 2012).

The genocide is, a part of a grave violation for Rohingya rights itself, also an issue for bordering countries that have received thousands of refugees since the beginning of violence. This situation creates a dual outcome: with the genocide being pursued against the Rohingya, the minority must be understood as a victim of it, while implying the perception of a security threat for other actors as a consequence of this crime. Not only the Rohingya are challenged, but also the security of a State – mostly Bangladesh in this specific case. Quinney (1972) argued that a crime, and so a victim, is really existing only if the ruling class label it as so and by recognizing it, the ruling class is admitting that something is not working. By choosing the Rohingya issue as the case study for this chapter, it can be proved that Quinney's idea not only can be applied to major crimes, but also that, in this specific case, the ruling class does not want to admit that its own security has been challenged. In fact, as argued before, the international community – which is, in this case, the ruling class – is, in a certain way, preserving itself from critiques and consequences of admitting that a genocide is going on. For this reason, the Muslim minority cannot be understood as an ideal victim and consequently, Myanmar cannot be understood as an ideal offender. Even if the Burma government is the perpetrator of mass violence, Rohingya are still fighting for receiving real help to end these atrocities. The admission by the international community of the genocide would demonstrate the failure of the "on-the-ground" capacities of UN and other international agencies, not to mention the fact that there are economic ties with Myanmar that could be challenged by a real action against the Burma government. More than this, by recognizing officially the status of the victim, the international community should

also intervene in Bangladesh which is suffering a major crisis in its border with Myanmar due to the migration flows from the neighboring country.

Paraphrasing the words of Quinney, the ruling class is not ready to label a victim because it would be too dangerous. Further, it must be said that with the ideology of illegal migrants launched by the Burma government, the situation cannot result clearly from a victimology point of view because the ruling class has an enemy, which is the victim in reality, that has to be fought. Within this ideology, the Rohingya are asked to fight back to gain their vital rights, and – also by engaging in violent actions at times – they might result able to regain their autonomy at one point. Thus, while the Rohingya seem to be able to stand out and make a case for themselves, they do not fit into the category of a weak victim in Christie's theory.

5. International response

The reactions by international agencies to the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar have varied. The response of a United Nations top official was to call it a "text-book example of ethnic cleansing," and to ask Myanmar to stop pretending that what is happening with the Rohingyas is of their own doing (Nebehay & Lewis 2017). Furthermore, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in 2017, after some 8000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants were left for stranded in overcrowded boats at sea, described what had happened as "unprecedented level of violence," condemning the actions done by the Myanmar security forces (Lego 2017). UN International Court of Justice ruled in January 2020 that Myanmar is required to take strong action to protect the Rohingya, calling them to take "all measures within its power" in order to stop the military, or anyone else carrying out the genocide against them. The UN essentially placed Myanmar under court oversight, with expectations on Myanmar to provide regularly reports to the tribunal detailing all the initiatives taken. While the court has no enforcement power, it is the first international court ruling against the country and any UN member can if needed request action from the Security Council (Paddock 2020). Still, there has been reports of UN officials trying to prevent human rights advocates from visiting Rohingya areas, and that there has been attempts inside the organization to stop public advocacy on the topic (Fisher 2017). In terms of reactions from individual nations, Gambia brought the case to the tribunal on the behalf of Organization of Islamic Cooperation. There it asked for a condemnation for Myanmar for breaching the Genocide convention, but a conviction on this case is not expected to be made anytime soon, and could be years away

(Paddock 2020). Thus, while on the part of UN there has been condemnation, there has been a lack of concrete action. This could be due to the Rohingya not fitting the model of an ideal victim, and that a strong action against Myanmar could lead to retribution, for example in terms of trade agreements.

The member states of Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, officially upheld a non-interference principle as a guideline in intra-ASEAN relations. The issue of Rohingya genocide was not raised in the 30th ASEAN Summit's official agenda, even though international attention and criticism had been increasing. Instead, in an statement released at the summit, the ASEAN intergovernmental commission on Human rights was condemned for their promotion of human right. The statement did not include a mention of the violence faced by the Rohingya (Lego 2017). However, there have been leaders from ASEAN countries which have publicly criticized and denounced the treatment toward the Rohingya, including Malaysian Prime Minister, and the Indonesian president (Lego 2017). Other agencies have reacted as well to the actions by the Myanmar government. The EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy visited refugee camps set up in Bangladesh for the Rohingya and vowed continued support from the European Union, while at the Commonwealth, a joint communique was released where the member states expressed full solidarity with the government and people of Bangladesh and commended them for helping the Rohingya. Furthermore, they called for a halt in the violence against them (The Commonwealth 2018).[5]

5.1 The role of the media and the Rohingya issue

The main focus of the media is often on those who fit the concept of ideal victim: these being children, women and the elderly. Race and class, however, can also have a significant impact to the way a conflict is framed within mainstream media. In the case of Rohingya, which, as has been argued to not fit the society's concept of ideal victim due to the ruling class being reluctant to admit that a genocide is occurring, the media attention has reflected this, at least in Western countries. The crisis has been framed in several different perspectives: including as a refugee crisis, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and as a citizenship war (Afzal Awan 2016). There has also been heavy propaganda from some sections of media labelling the Rohingya a danger to national security, creating a panic among

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[5] "Rohingya crisis: A firsthand look into the world's largest refugee camp", *World Food Program USA*, December 8, 2020, https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/rohingya-crisis-a-firsthand-look-into-the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp/ [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

the refugees (Pandow & Koyye 2019). In Indian media, the quick rise in migration of the Rohingya towards the country made local and national headlines. In a content analysis of four newspapers, counting two local newspapers and two international, one local newspaper depicted the crisis neutrally, while the other – this being the Global News Light of Myanmar, a state-owned media – portrayed it negatively. The two international newspapers saw the Rohingya issue as a humanitarian crisis (Nalabolu et al. 2018, as cited in Pandow & Koyye 2019). Thus, it can be argued that there is a gap in the illustration of the crisis in international and local media outlets in representing them as victims, or as causes of conflict. In a study by Afzal Awan (2016), where he investigated how media framing of the Rohingya crisis differentiated in Western and non-Western countries, he found that there were clear similarities in their portrayal. The newspapers that reported on the crisis, both Western and not, have adopted a stance of pro-Rohingya and anti-Myanmar ruling elite, which consisted of criticism of the Myanmar elite for their treatment of the Muslim minority. Furthermore, newspapers were found to appeal to the readers emotions in order to hold their attention in their reporting (Afzal Awan 2016). In contrast, local medias generally were found to not address the Rohingya issue and if they do, it is to enlighten a crime made by a Rohingya against the Burmese population. Medias are directly controlled by the government and those journalists who – especially since 2017 – have tried to support the Rohingya cause, where fired or, in the worst cases, kidnapped and killed (Khadimul 2018). Moreover, the general sentiment within the Burmese population is one of hate-sentiment, as Rohingya are perceived as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh that are threatening the security of Myanmar. This perception of Rohingya is supported by a propaganda carried out by the government, that is saliently used by newspaper and media TV channels (Khadimul 2018).

Moreover, in local media coverage, the issue is heavily restricted within Burmese borders due to the limitations on press freedom by the government. As a result of this heavily limited context of the media in Myanmar, the reporting on the Rohingya is challenging, and uncovering the context needed to understand events is difficult (Brickey et al. 2018). The former government has restricted the national and international media coverage on the Rohingya, and have continuously denied access to the Rakhine state. Further cloaking the true picture of the crisis are the barriers to independent media and the over reliance on knowledge gained from social and state-run media/ journalism, which even has led to the arrest of two Reuters journalists, due to finding evidence about a mass grave (Brickey et al. 2018). Foreign journalists who have worked in Myanmar, over the past years have tried to interview Generals or governmental workers, thus not succeeding and without getting any explanations, being sometimes even threat-

ened of being labeled as traitors. Some of these foreign journalists, in order to investigate over the Rohingya issue, have flown to Bangladesh where getting information is easier and less dangerous. But the Rohingya in Bangladesh are living in refugee camps, and as they were forced to leave their homes and their properties behind, Rohingya refugees often had no physical proof of the crimes committed against them, other than bruises or scars. While these can tell a story, they are not enough to prove an international crime. Thus, while the presence of journalists is vital in producing a correct and whole picture of the situation, to actually do so is difficult. Language barriers, government restrictions to outright hostility and relying on the local population to gain information on a polarized situation has proved to be insufficient (Brooten & Verbruggen 2017).

Additionally, the denial of a citizenship for the Rohingyas has far reaching consequences. They are not allowed to legally own SIM cards for purposes of communication, or even have radio stations or local newspapers. This means not only mobilizing the media to turn against the Rohingya, but also the systematic exclusion from any participation in it (Elsayed 2019). Social media has had a significant impact on the progression of the discrimination of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The combination of ethnic tensions in the country mixed with the introduction of social media has led to the rise in inflammatory posts about the Rohingya minorities, especially on Facebook. According to a Reuters investigation into the use of social media in the spreading of discriminatory posts about the Rohingya, they found over a thousand Burmese posts, comments as well as pictures, some pornographic, attacking the Rohingya and other Muslims (Subedar 2018). Thus, Facebook seems to have played an integral part in the denial of Rohingya genocide. From posts of posing Islam as a threat to Buddhism, to false accounts about a Muslim man raping a Buddhist woman, these accounts were not reported to be from just any internet users, but rather from Myanmar military personnel. Using social media as a tool to further ethnic cleansing, members of the military orchestrated a systematic campaign on Facebook targeting Muslim minorities (Mozur 2018). Traditional media has lost authority over knowledge production to platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and in the case of the Rohingya, people spreading false information through Facebook were not concerned with fact-checking. This indifference has created a new form of knowledge, one based on beliefs and opinions, as well as often their own personal experiences (Farago 2019). This allows for two separate dynamics. On one hand, there are the individual Facebook users who are in denial about the genocide happening, who operate social media within their bubble of like-minded people who collaborate on their beliefs and opinions. On the other, is the military officials, whose tactic is organized and systematic in using Facebook

as a governmental instrument in spreading propaganda in order to justify their actions against the Rohingya.

Both have then, with varying motivations, used Facebook to present their opinions to the public as facts (Farago 2019). Despite this wide use of social media in contemporary times to spread opinions and beliefs as factual, international law, however, has not even started to figure out how to take into account this role social media plays in the imposition of responsibility and unravelling international crimes (Douek 2018).

6. Conclusion

The lines between being a victim and an offender can at times be blurred. In the specificity of this case study, when looking at Bangladesh, the argument could be made that the Rohingya are – in respect to the country – the offender, forcing the neighboring country to develop migration policies. Nonetheless, the Rohingya should be defined as victims of genocide, but this would be too dangerous as, then, the international community would have a duty to intervene against Burma government, who is a strategic partner for Eastern-Asian policies. While international agencies have issued their condemnation of the violence, there has been a lack of concrete action in their part to rectify the situation. This has led to the Rohingyan genocide being a process spanning over thirty-five years, perpetrated by the state actors and institutions as well as the civilian population with the support from the state. Furthermore, different types of medias are a powerful tool to shape groups with certain constrictions and representations but, more importantly, they can influence the perceptions of the public over a certain issue. Regarding this case, studies have demonstrated that there were other representations that could be more objective and comprehensive for the public: Rohingya should not be only depicted as desperate and helpless, they had their faith for the future, so the people around the globe would understand their perseverance and determination for gaining the recognition of the others and identity for themselves (Ma Y et al. 2018).

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Chapter 8

Latin American migrants as offenders and victims: Rethinking the binomial

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Abstract

In the chapter, the theoretical approach of Nils Christie's term of the ideal victim is applied to the context of Latin American migration to the United States, a phenomenon that has occurred in increasing numbers since the turn of the century. In that regard, the chapter provides a background outline of Latin American migration to the US and questions whether these subjects fit Christie's narrative. From the viewpoint of victimology, this case study becomes interesting because it questions the binary opposition between victims and offenders. The study highlights that Latin American migrants can be both perceived as ideal victims and ideal offenders, which is emphasized by multiple external actors like the former US-president Donald Trump or migration NGOs, which use different strategies to either underline the vulnerable or the deviant side of the migrants. Most importantly, the final part of the chapter focuses on the media reactions to the argument of Latin American migration, primarily concerning the situation of migrant children in detention camps at the US-border separated from their parents, and how different media outlet frame migration discourse for their own ideological purpose, finding significant differences in the portrayal of this population.

Keywords: Latin American migration – United States – Ideal victim – Media portrayal – Stereotypes

1. Introduction

Latin American migration is one of the most relevant topics on the current political agenda of the United States of America. The subject has transformed

into a central issue in the 2016 and 2020 electoral debates (Winders 2016), where the attention around the Latin American population was monopolized and contextualized around the migratory problem. This was exemplified by the proposal to build a wall on the border between the US and Mexico by the then-Presidential candidate for the Republican party in 2016, Donald Trump (Wallace & Zepeda-Millán 2020). In recent decades, the population of Latin Americans within the country has grown dramatically. Yet, the negative stereotypes surrounding this group remain relatively stable. In fact, these populations are often described as violent or criminal, which represent powerful negative stereotypes that are capable of influencing social opinion about racial groups (Baranauskas 2018). Latin Americans have been playing very specific roles in the media and film industry. In fact, they commonly interpret the roles of criminals, but also comical and excessively sexualized characters, composing a marginalized group in the social imagery of American society. In this sense, the intensification of the image related to illegality stands out (Berg 2002). The Latin Americans migrants have always been associated with criminal, dishonest, aggressive, lazy and unintelligent connotations that cause social damage to the maintenance of the US legal and juridical order (Diekman 2005). The media, in this context, have been instrumental in building a public enemy and collectivizing fear around the Latin American population. Racial stereotypes are simplified and often false explanations that summarize the characteristics of an ethnic community. They are part of the public imagination and reproduced by the media, often created by it (Dixon & Williams 2015). Therefore, there exists an affinity between racial stereotypes cited by the media and the tagging of victim and perpetrator that affects an ethnic population.

    This chapter analyzes the relationship between Latin American migrants and their representation, sometimes as victims, sometimes as perpetrators, in the current political context of American society and focuses on the role of the media in this process. Hereby, this contribution will firstly provide a short overview on the concept of "ideal victims" in the definition by Nils Christie as a basis for this qualitative analysis to then try to identify these specific roles that diverse actors have in portraying and framing Latin American migrants in the US as victims or perpetrators of crime. For this aim, current political discourses and media narratives will be analyzed. This chapter is divided into four parts. After identifying Christie's contribution to the identification of the categories of victim and perpetrator, we identified how Latin American migrants in the United States can simultaneously occupy both of these spaces. In the end, we will bring a specific approach on the role of the media in the construction of

these figures and we will seek to describe how media outlets play an important role in the dissemination of stereotypes around the Latin American population. The idea is to demonstrate how media stereotypes are fundamental to compose and influence public opinion regarding the judgment of Latin Americans as perpetrators.

2. The "ideal victim" in Christie's production

Although establishing objective parameters for the identification of a victim may be difficult, there exists an extended field of research trying to define the concept's meanings and to differentiate "real victims" from "ideal victims." The most important contribution in this regard derives from Nils Christie, a Norwegian sociologist and criminologist (Christie 2018). In his definition, the societal imaginary identifies crime victims as *ideal* when they embrace the connotations of being weak, passive, fragile and self-righteous (Christie 2018: 11). When a real person corresponds to this model of victimhood, he or she becomes the personification of sacrificed holiness (Van Dijk 2009). In this process, the subjects' feelings such as pain become legitimized and are responded to with compassion by the general public, which arouses public sympathy and social commotion (Christie 2018: 15-21). Accordingly, the ideal victim generates the willingness of repaying its suffering through revenge, demanding for the state to intervene through public policies in criminal law and through police apparatus. An ideal victim demands an ideal perpetrator, which contrarily represents a naturally evil human being that is described as distant, unknown and whose objective is only to carry out the crime against the ideal victim (Christie 2018: 11).

However, in reality, most victims and perpetrators are not ideal (Christie 2018: 15-19). In everyday life, a large share of the crimes occurs with people escaping these stereotypes. This occurs for instance when the roles of victim and offender merge into one person, which demonstrates a practical difficulty of placing these poles so far apart (Christie 2018: 18). Ideal victims and ideal perpetrators are social constructions based on a cultural vision at a specific time. This means that these concepts may change over the years (Christie 2018: 15-17). In this sense, the media, with their power of influence, are relevant agents in these narratives, since the manipulation of knowledge can produce ideal victims and ideal perpetrators through a simplified explanatory system that arouses extreme feelings in society such as fear or compassion.

3. Case study: Latin American migration to the United States

The migration flow from Latin America to the United States is a well-studied and striking phenomenon because of its extension through time, the extremely high number of individuals involved and the relevance of the political debate that has been created around the issue (Jones 1982). The reaction to these migrants has varied significantly over time, from periods of welcoming approaches when these foreign people were needed as workforces for the labor market to isolationist tendencies in times of economic hardship (Garip 2012). After the end of the Second World War, the priorly unrestricted and circular movements became increasingly a focus for both policymakers and the civil society in trying to establish laws to restrict migration from the Global South to the United States (Tienda & Sanchez 2013). But if the goal of these strategies were to diminish the migration streams into the country, it has to be judged as non-successful: since then, migration has – with its ups and downs – remained relatively stable and migrants continue to cross the border as they did decades ago (Massey & Pren 2012). Because in the 21st century the revenues for lawful entry are severely limited, most of these migrants are forced to enter the country illegally.

In particular, between 2011 and 2017, the already present migrant flow from Latin American countries towards the US saw an increase in the number of border arrivals (Hayes 2015). Most migrants originate from the Northern Triangle, the Central American region compromising the states of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (O'Connor et al. 2019), where many individuals, including an unprecedented number of women and unaccompanied minors, left their home countries with the aim to enter the US to gain protection and ask for asylum to escape violence in civil war settings, high crime contexts or poverty (Cardoletti-Carroll, Farmer, Vélez 2015). Of these, around 300,000 try to enter the United States illegally per year and are being caught by the US Border Patrol, but the dark numbers are said to be significantly higher (Leutert 2018). This emergency created by the massive number of refugee seekers, added to the already existent problematics of the Latin American communities settled in the US territory, contributed to the adoption of exclusionary political rhetoric and the establishment of border policies that are gathered around the securitization concept since, as Huntington puts it, "no other first world country has such an extensive land frontier with a third world country" like the United States (Oppenheimer et al. 2016: 43). However, this is a paradox, since, in the past, harsher migrant enforcement has never led to lower migration rates, but only different – and more dangerous – migration strategies and routes (Heyer 2018).

4. Migrants: Ideal victims or ideal offenders?

The case of Latin America migration towards the United States is particularly interesting when addressing the concept of the ideal victim and the ideal offender. Thus, in this specific context, it is possible to identify two parallel discourses. To both of them, specific representations of migration apply: either as victimized subject or as perpetrators of crimes. The high complexity of the situation as well as its interaction produces a variety of different scenarios, challenging the binomial relationship between victims and offenders. In this outline, the roles of the victim and the offender overlap and interchange.

4.1 Latin American migrants as victims

Migrants from Latin America can be considered victims under numerous aspects and through different stages of their journey. Firstly, the decision to migrate can in itself be caused by the desire to escape dreadful situations of war, poverty and violence in several states in Central and South America (Wood et al. 2010). This means that due to the situation in their home countries, migrants can be seen as victims even before leaving their country of origin, but they become even more victimized once their journey begins: the travel is often dangerous and frequently relies on dangerous networks of human trafficking (International Crisis Group 2019). Consequently, the risk of being exploited, to live under slavery-like conditions, to be forced to engage in prostitution or to become a victim of abuse are high, since migrants cannot rely on any formal network and are not granted the state's protection (David et al. 2019). This dangerous reality of the border is highlighted by the high number of fatalities of people dying in trying to cross the border, where from 2014 to 2019 2,243 people have lost their lives (Migration Data Portal 2020).

Additionally, migrants can become victims under the enforcement of border control: here, migrants are subjected to police violence and may end up in so-called detention centers at the border, where they are forced to live in inhuman conditions and without any legal guarantees for an underdetermined time frame (Martin 2011). In recent years, especially family separations at the border, where minors are held in structures isolated from their parents, have been able to attract the attention of the international community (Rabin 2018). But even those subjects, who are able to cross the border and enter onto the US territory, can find themselves in victimhood situations if they are subjected to racial or xenophobic attacks, labor exploitation or because of their inability to denounce the mistreatment they suffer because of their illegal sta-

tus (Stumpf 2013). Migrants can therefore easily fall into the victimhood status, as the different scenarios for victimization presented above demonstrate. But real victims, unlike ideal victims, are not automatically granted compassion and are recognized in their status by society (Christie 2018). These divergencies can be illustrated based on a hypothetical example, in which a migrant becomes recognized as an ideal victim: a migrant mother that had to leave her home country to provide for her family and who has become an innocent victim of human traffickers during her journey. In this case, we can see how the criteria delineating an ideal victim in Christie's theory become concrete in the application of these subject (Christie 2018): the woman is *weak* because she has been unable to protect herself from the human traffickers, she was engaged in a *respectable project* before her victimization because she provided for her underage children, she is *innocent* and cannot be blamed for her victimhood because she had no other possibilities to gain money than to migrate, while the offenders are *unknown* and due to the organized network they are in a more *powerful* position than her. In this case, the protagonist would fall into the category of an ideal victim, because the criteria identified by Christie are all satisfied, which means that the general public would be sympathetic to her situation.

However, this does not directly imply a complete and flawless identification between Latin American migrants and the exemplification of the ideal victim. In most cases of victimization of Latin American migrants, the migrant does not become an ideal victim because of missing attributes, for example when the offenders are co-nationals and known to the victim, or because no ideal offender can be individuated as a counterpart to the ideal victim. Most importantly, however, these migrants are closely connected to the concept of illegality, because their victimization is a consequence of them having crossed the US-border illegally. In that case, this attribute of illegality gets applied to their whole personhood and, consequently, there grows the consent that an illegal person cannot be an innocent victim. Therefore, the average migrant victim is a non-ideal one (Christie 2018).

4.2 Latin American migrants as offenders

On the other hand, however, it is possible to recognize the general societal conception of migrants as falling perfectly into the archetype of an ideal offender who, by crossing the border, threatens the American citizens. Historically, periods with increasing migration rates have always been linked to the perception of an external threat (Van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999). This type of

discourse is often at the center of populist political debates that often generalizes stereotypical characteristics, defining migrants as criminals (Massey & Riosmena 2010). Xenophobia, racialization and dehumanization support the identification by the American society of the Latin American migrant as the living representation of the ideal offender and result in conservative reactions by the general public (Massey & Pren 2012). The discourse becomes increasingly realistic when followed by the adoption of restrictive migration policies and the enforcement of particular laws that implicate an association between migration and the term of "illegality" (Zedner 2016). The rhetoric of a Latin American invasion is emphasized by the former President Donald Trump affirming that the Mexican government is sending "rapists" (Kocher 2019) with a lot of problems, that bring drugs and crime to the US (Perez Huber 2016), underlining the type of laws that these people have violated to reach the US, most importantly having crossed a border illegally (Scott 2019). The solution to this problem, in the strategy of Trump, becomes the only possible one: a wall, which is both a political plan and a rhetorical strategy to keep these offenders outside the national territory (Johnson 2017). This argument can even be extended on a macro-sectional level, in which the Latin "race" threatens the American society, its values and its cohesion (Barker 2013) because of some characteristics that all migrants share.

Referring again to Christie's theory, we can demonstrate this rhetoric reconstructing the migrant as the criminal "other" in another hypothetical situation: an American old lady that gets attacked by a young migrant in the daytime after she cared for her sick sister. In this case, it is clear that the characteristics describing the violent migrant apply perfectly to the ideal offender in Christie's theory, who "is morally speaking, black against the white victim. He is a dangerous man coming from away" (Christie 2018: 19). In this case, the migrant is an ideal offender because he is *stronger* than the old lady, because there exists *no prior relationship* between the two and because he attacked his victim at *daytime* because of pure *entertainment* to harm others (Christie 2018). In this situation, the offender would therefore be an ideal one, but again, this is not always the case. A migrant that steals food for his hungry family, for example, is an offender but because of its altruistic aim, it is not an ideal one. Also, the protagonist could even be seen as a victim because of his unprivileged status that forces him to steal food to survive. This shows that in this situation again, migrants can become ideal offenders, but the reality is so complex that most of the time migrants as offenders are not complementary and opposite to the victim, therefore not becoming an ideal offender.

4.3 What does that mean?

In sum, this representation showcases that Latin American migrants who enter the territory of the United States are in a constant limbo between vulnerability, on one hand, and otherness, on the other hand. In that regard, this case selection challenges the traditional view of the ideal victim coined by Christie (Christie 2018), who believed that ideal victims and ideal offenders are homogenous groups of people, but which never mix and remain separate. This case shows that the (ideal) victim does not always differ from the (ideal) offender: both migrants and the US as a nation can be seen as victims and offenders alike, depending on the background situation, on individual stories and the political standpoints. Since migration is a delicate and complex issue, it makes sense for all parties involved to try to paint the reality in strictly black and white colors (Pemberton 2016) and use the concepts of vulnerability and innocence as a proxy for measuring how ideal victims are (Furusho 2018). This facilitates understanding, but in real life, these categories are overlapping and blurred (Borer 2003): Latin American migrants powerfully show this gray zone.

5. The reaction

To further discuss the concept of "ideal victim" in the context of Latin American migration, it is essential to consider the implications of different actors both at the local and international level. The different reactions to this phenomenon influence the perception of migrants, supporting their identification as either victims or as offenders. It is possible to individuate three main actors with a major influence on the reaction to the case: the former US-President Donald Trump, migration-NGOs and the ruling class of the United States. What is important to notice is that all three actors perceive migrants as a "whole," not distinguishing between individuals and their background stories (Mears 2011: 21) even if migrants are not a monolithic group. This results in a discourse in which all migrants are either perceived as victims or offenders (Chavez & Griffiths 2009: 270).

As the former President, Donald Trump can be considered one of the most important stakeholders in the political landscape of the United States in the past years that has influenced the perception of migration not only at the national level but also internationally. Migration reforms have been a focus point of the political agenda of President Trump, who did not hesitate to assign a negative connotation to the phenomenon of migration, often applying a binary opposition between the "good" American citizen and the "bad" migrant (Bar-

tolucci 2019: 130). In his discourses, Trump portrayed all migrants as a general group of ideal offenders, the violator of an ideal victim: the United States. This rhetoric has been exemplified through slogans, like "*Make America great again*" (Young 2017: 218), that emphasizes this otherness. In his speeches, migrants have been labeled as "animals" (Rucker 2019) that come from "shithole countries" (Hing 2018: 317) and he affirmed that Mexico was sending "rapists" that bring drugs and crime to the US (Perez Huber 2016: 216). The identification of this rhetoric with Christie's theory of the ideal victim is quite immediate: an evil and foreign being who puts himself and others at risk (Christie 2018: 21). Migrants become convenient scapegoats and therefore enemies of the American people. By identifying migrants with a general "they," Trump constructs an undetermined deviant mass of people and at the same time, sets a distance between himself and the US-public and this group of individuals. The victim, the American society threatened by this migrant crisis, becomes then a justification for a more corrective response to migration (McEvoy & McConnachie 2012: 529). An example of this punitive turn is the 38% increase of the United States immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) since the beginning of the presidency of Trump and the introduction of harsher migration laws, for example, the possibility to deport migrants without any hearing before the judge (Reich 2018: 380-381).

Considering non-governmental organizations instead, the discourse portrayed is entirely different. In opposition to media reports, where the focus is mostly on migration numbers, NGOs feel the need to use an individual narrative to capture the audience attention with dramatic personal stories of people who, despite all the differences, are "similar to us" (Ihlen et al. 2015: 823-831). Therefore, they present a counter-narrative, establishing that all migrants are good people to whom bad things have happened: they are all victims. However, considering migrants as victims as a whole does not take the unequal distribution of suffering between different individuals into consideration (Borer 2003: 1110). Besides, this approach underlines the aspect of vulnerability in the migrant discourse (Furusho 2018: 123). NGOs pick only certain types of migrants for their news stories, selecting ideal victims among the masses as, for example, women and children, especially those with grotesque features (Schwobel-Patel 2018: 703). Recurrent cases are minors separated from their parents who live in migrant detention camps at the borders (Wadhia 2017: 674-676) or young migrant women who fall into the hands of human trafficking networks and are forced to perform sexual labor (Marmo & Chazal 2010: 126). These "ideal migrants" get most of the media attention, generate collective mourning and acquire the legitimate status of victimhood (Greer 2007: 22). But migrants who

are not considered ideal, for example those with previous convictions, are completely ignored and are not accepted to be part of the category of victims.

A third actor, whose reaction to the phenomenon of migration is of great importance, is the opinion perpetuated by the ruling class. The attitude of the US-public toward migration is heavily influenced by the media coverage, as we will discuss in the next section, but can be even more significantly predicted by the party affiliation. Supporters of the Democratic Party are more likely to see migration as a humanitarian issue, while sustainers of the Republicans perceive it more as a security threat (Mayda et al. 2016): Trump's supporters are four times more likely to think that immigration was a problem (Donovan & Redlawsk 2018: 193). Since the presidency of Trump, the issue has been increasingly polarized and no middle-of-the-road-positions seem to be allowed: migrants are either seen as victims or as offenders, they cannot be both or neither of them. Migrants who want to get the recognition and acceptance of society need to exhibit the right amount of power: enough to be heard and to gather sympathy, but not enough to become a threat (Furusho 2018: 127). What is new is that over the last years, victim movements of citizens together with celebrities have started to get involved in migration issues and have openly denounced human rights violations at the border. Unfortunately, victim movements still focus on the implication that a victim needs to be innocent to be "deserving" (McEvoy & McConnachie 2012: 531) which excludes a big portion of the migrant population from this status.

6. The role of the media in the construction of Latin American stereotypes

Ideal victims and perpetrators are sets of stereotyped roles made in the public imagination. Stereotypes are structures in communication that are based on two components, one evaluative and the other descriptive (Seiter 1992). The evaluation component corresponds to a process of selection of characteristics of a population and connotes it with positive or negative values. The descriptive component, on the other hand, aims to synthesize these assessments and discriminate this set of characteristics to people as if they were common to all people of the assessed population. Stereotypes flatten, homogenize and generalize individuals within a group, emphasizing sameness and ignoring individual agency and variety (Luther et al. 2012). These "images in our heads" are formulations that emerge from our experiences associated with what we learn from external information units (Lippmann 1922). This is how stereotypes are products of social relationships and interactions (Devine et al. 1991), but are often not associated with personal experiences.

6.1 How does the media formulate stereotypes? Understanding the method

In the United States, the Latin American population suffers from multiple racial stereotypes that portrays this group as perpetrators (Dixon & Williams 2015). The media have great responsibility in this process (Babbie 1992; Mastro & Greenberg 2000). Considering in particular the relationship between victims and perpetrators, the role played by media can be analyzed from two main perspectives. The first is related to the formation of opinion: media influence the population and impact beliefs or assumptions, shape public ideologies and transform social experiences (Baran & Davis 1995). The second concerns the dissemination of content to the masses. The media inform, report and narrate. These reports, however, are not neutral narratives, often causing distortions in the images and scenarios informed, impacting social perception about classes of people and their stories (Baran & Davis 1995). The media offers selected information on contexts and facts to mobilize public opinion. Any group of people can control the image of themselves (Barlow 2011). It is precisely this control of the public image that allows the creation of stereotypes of people or classes of people. The proportion and consequences in the formation and dissemination of stereotypes by the media generate impacts on entire generations of people, which requires greater responsibility regimes (Happer & Philo 2013).

In the early twentieth century, most media content in the United States was produced by whites and intended for this audience (Luther et al. 2012). Only a few advertisements marketed to black Americans included black actors (Luther et al. 2012). Communication and journalism companies, advertising agencies and the film industry seek to convey the image of impartiality in their productions (Pan & Kosicki 1996). However, criminal news coverage in the United States often and pejoratively highlights the relationship between racial issues and crime. It is a phenomenon understood as "ethnic emphasis," which represents a strategy that consists of an indirectly correlating set of facts to a specific race or ethnicity.[1] As Entman's (1992) research indicates, it is not possible to say for instance that journalists support racist processes. But the practices generate visual and sound messages that are transmitted to the public.

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[1]   According to Pressler's (2019) analysis, throughout history the roles of Latin Americans in films, "Hispanics" are represented mainly by five basic and simplistic types: (i) criminal; (ii) sexpot; (iii) clown; (iv) servant; (v) immigrant. The researcher also reports that in terms of identifying the country, the US film industry is obsessed with Mexico to which all the culture of the Latin American continent is associated (Pressler 2019). To a certain extent, this relationship can be observed between stereotypes from cultural film production and the common associations made in the political world, including by ex-President Donald Trump, who often reduces the migratory issue to Mexican immigration.

6.2 Relationship between stereotypes, the victim and the perpetrator

6.2.1 The Latin American as the perpetrator

The repetition of negative racial stereotypes through the media systems transforms heterogeneous portraits of minorities, as if they were a synthesis of the entire ethnic group (Logan 1988). In most of the media, Latin Americans appear persistently as criminals. This trait becomes associated with the whole community. With the widening of the media's focus to the context of illegal immigration and its association with high crime rates, the public comes to believe that this ethnic group is associated with such characteristics. For conservative nationalism, immigrants are increasingly reported as ideal perpetrators. This sophisticated simplification creates the characteristics of "suspect", "enemy" or "perpetrator." On the other hand, they also provide the conditions for identifying the "defenseless," the "ally" and the "victim." These individual judgments, when shared, can have dangerous consequences like collective fears (Grant 2012). Collective fears based on stereotypes generate reactions of defenses that in many scenarios cause irreparable damage, often irreversible, to the communities of people affected by prejudice.[2]

In a way, media illustrations cooperate to build national values. In the United States, the scheme of local values suggests that race determines abilities and indicates that whites are superior to others, fueling processes of exclusion and inequality (Day 2009: 20). At the same level, the media frequently make false generalizations about historically oppressed groups. This is not a novelty, since in the historical process, mass media were supported by a dominant group. This is how the public is presented with data and information that evoke negative images of minority groups (Luther et al. 2012). The mass exposure of racial myths causes the population to consider and judge Latin Americans negatively. It is a structural reinforcement of the figure of the enemy, the villain and the perpetrator. These facts have lasting effects on the viewers (Fiske 1990). The prevalence of stereotypes in the representation of Latin Americans is especially dangerous because they feed collective actions and social fears through explicit components. These include subtle actions that cause behavioral changes within the

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2   The concept of collective enemy was fundamental to the political legitimacy that supported the legal theories of Nazi jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt. For Schmitt (1998: 26-28), political actions and motives can be reduced to the distinction between friend and enemy. It is up to the political and governmental entities to define the sovereignty of a nation from the identification of the friend / enemy ambiguity. Enemies for Schmitt do not represent private enemies, but public enemies. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity (Schmitt, 1998: 28). The distinction between friend / enemy is the aesthetic distinction between the beautiful / ugly, religious between Christian / non-Christian, existentially between we / the other.

collective and that effectively prepare negative attitudes of the public towards a group.

Research by Dixon and Williams (2015) indicates that in the criminal scene, Latin Americans were represented as perpetrators but underrepresented as victims. In the first surveys on the appearance of Latin American people in the American media, Navarrette and Kamasaki (1994) pointed out that these populations were underrepresented in coverage of civil rights. When they appeared, in general, they were represented as objects of the news and commented on by other people from outside the community. Latin Americans hardly ever appeared photographed as artists, successful people or sportsmen. According to Stewart, Pitts & Osborne (2011), Latin Americans are almost absent in primetime broadcast news and mainstream online and print outlets. When Latin Americans appear, normally it is as criminal or comic characters. Negative stereotypes around the Latin American population appear on social networks, in the electoral and party media and in the entertainment world. In the local media, this sense is further enhanced. The leaner the budget, the greater the reactionary nature of the reports. In this dichotomy between victim and perpetrator, ethnic minorities, blacks and Latin Americans, are more related to violent criminals than defenders.

Although more recently the American film industry has been trying to pass the inclusive and open image to different cultures, for a long time, cinema was responsible for the consolidation of striking stereotypes that help in the construction of the image of the Latin Americans as a perpetrator. For almost every twentieth century, Mexicans, and by extension all Latin Americans, were stereotyped as lazy, dirty, dishonest, immoral and unconcerned with life. Within this pattern, there was still a very particular type: *El bandido*.[3] A character associated with all the negative characteristics added to ignorance, ugliness, criminality and violence. For decades, *El bandido* played a role in signifying the figure of an enemy Latin American in the North American imagination. In a connotative sense, the figure of *El bandido* was constructed to clearly differentiate him from the North American, white, racially pure, middle-class and predominant popu-

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[3]   Etymologically, the word Bandido is derived from the Italian verb *bandire* (to banish). In the legal context, the term bandit was associated with Spanish from Italian to designate someone who, within the legal framework, was a fugitive. Someone who made a mistake, committed a crime and deviated from the laws, and for that reason was banished (bandido [SPA] / bandito [ITA]) from the society he was part of. Often, because it was banned, he was hiding outside its community. Over time, the word bandido [SPA] (bandito [ITA] / banished [ENG]) separated from the verb bandir [ESP] (bandire [ITA] / to banish [ING]) becoming a noun and losing its participle value. "Tu estás bandido [SPA] (Sei bandito [ITA] / You are banished)" has become "Tu és (un) bandido [SPA] (Sei (un) bandito [ITA] / You are (a) bandit [ENG])" (Álvarez & García 1986: 11-14).

lation. It was a character from another country (preferably played by a foreign actor or even a descendant of a Latin American), a foreign villain, non-white with derogatory social characteristics and a bias towards crime (Berg 2002). Psychologically, the Hollywood narrative was that *El bandido* was a being with a predisposition to social psychopathy, evil, unstable and addicted to alcohol (Berg 2002), which included a succession of abusive stereotypes and distortions (Treviño 1985). The figure *of El bandido* also reflected the type of Mexican bandit (members of young Latin gangs appeared in the cinema as updates, modern variants of the type of Mexican bandit).

6.2.2 The Latin American as the victim

The figure of Latin Americans around stereotypes has become more complex with the nationalist wave that affected the US under the leadership of the former President Donald Trump. For Trump, the Latin American population embodies exactly the figure of *El bandido* that feeds the collective fear. Gradually, Donald Trump uses Latin Americans stereotypes to fabricate an ideal perpetrator, an ideal enemy, through false misrepresentation and fake news (Lischka 2019). Trump has stated on his personal Twitter account several times that Mexico – and by extension Latino migrants – were associated with drug trafficking, violence and death.[4] These facts would justify the construction of a wall on the border in order to contain enemies and protect American citizens. What we can observe here is the manipulation and incidence of the rhetoric of fear and the formation of ideal enemies.[5]

In contrast to this attitude, there has been another conception: that of Latin Americans as victims. Nationalist attacks have sparked a wave of compassion towards Latin Americans. Left-wing media came to understand Latin Americans as victims of racist attitudes and ultra-right movements specially sponsored by Trump and the most radical wing of the Republican Party, which are fueled by his posture and statements in official speeches and on his social networks. This linguistic method, intended to ignite public opinion against minority social sectors such as blacks, Latin Americans and Arabs and based on nation-

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[4]   One of the techniques most used by former President Donald Trump is a dialogue through tweets. Often fake news and information without reliable sources were fired to cause controversy over sensitive political issues, especially immigration. Several checking agencies denied the claim that Mexico would be the most violent country in the world (Factcheck, https://www.factcheck.org/2018/01/trumps-false-claim-mexicos-violence).

[5]   Tweets by Donald Trump justifying the construction of the wall on the border with Mexico as a measure to contain immigration (*Daily Mail*, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4630856/Trump-says-build-wall-Mexico-2nd-deadliest.html).

alism and anti-globalism, has been considered a fundamental mark of Trump-ism.[6] One of the basic operational issues of Trumpism is the spread of fake news through social media in order to reach the mass of radical supporters (Embrick et al. 2020). This became more evident when, during a migration policy, the Federal Government started a strategic offensive in which it separated children and their parents when they were seized in an attempt to enter the US illegally (Finley & Esposito 2020). When President Trump announced a "Zero Toler-ance Policy" in 2018, under which adult asylum-seeking guardians entering the country would be criminally prosecuted and the children would be separated from their guardians, this trend intensified. "The 'Zero Tolerance Policy' refers to the Trump administration's policy of prosecuting migrants apprehended at the United States–Mexico border (including asylum seekers) for unlawful en-try, with a focus on the prosecution of parents arriving with children" (Kan-del 2018). Especially the media progressively began to portray these children as victims. The idea that innocent children were being forcibly separated from their guardians and taken to detention quickly, took the agenda of several tab-loids for months and sparked discussions after years.[7] Representatives of human rights organizations began to publicly contradict the arguments of the federal administration, as well as to position themselves contrary to the measures of the former president.[8]

The immigrant child largely represents the victim's idealization, suggested by Christie (2018). A fragile being, who is not to blame for the social and politi-cal problems of his country and cannot answer for the actions or choices of his parents. Weak and passive, the immigrant child appears as someone who does not have the strength to fight or protect himself from the powerful police ap-paratus of the United States federal administration. Children are still develop-ing physically and psychologically, just as Christie's old lady represents a human being who does not have all of its potential to oppose its attackers (or perpetra-tors). Even more precisely, children can even be seen as a sacrifice: a human be-ing without guilt, but who suffers the consequences of government measures to control illegal immigration. In 2018, the popular *Time* magazine brought on its

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[6]   The term Trumpism refers to a political movement based on speeches, doctrine and behavior of the former president Trump, with a far-right bias. One of the pillars of Trumpism is exaggerated nationalism and, consequently, segregation and racism against immigrants.

[7]   Media that are associated with the political left have systematically criticized the Donald Trump administration's immigration policy, emphasizing children as victims in this process (*Intercept*, https://theintercept.com/2019/12/09/family-separation-policy-lawsuit/).

[8]   One of the most frequent arguments was that immigrants were victims of human rights violations (*Conversation*, https://theconversation.com/us-zero-tolerance-immigration-policy-still-violating-funda-mental-human-rights-laws-98615).

cover a montage in which it united a giant figure of Donald Trump contrasted with a real image of a crying Latino child. This represents the most important aspects of Christie's victim concept: the difference in strength between victim and perpetrator, as well as her fragility.[9] This point becomes even more evident when the prisons where Latin American children were housed were compared with "Concentration Camps", referring to one of the most relevant victimized figures in history, the Jews during World War II.[10]

On the issue of the immigration and refuge, children often appear as the most affected. Even though there are thousands of kilometers of difference, immigration to the USA and the conflicts in Syria – which also generates thousands of refugees – show children as victims. These images end up generating strong international compassion and commotion.[11]

In fact, this approach has had great repercussions in the political and social fields. American citizens and activists have engaged in protests against government measures, showing compassion for the victims, regardless of their status as an illegal immigrant. The restrictive immigration policy has, during the Trump administration, sparked protests across the country. On signs at the demonstrations, phrases such as "Save the Children" and "Cage the Nazis, Free the Children," or even Donald Trump's cartoon with a Nazi swastika in the center appeared in the crowd.[12] In the same vein, leftist media criticized the president's immigration policy, emphasizing children as victims.[13]

In this sense, the media seem to draw on a new reality. But this specific point alone does not guarantee a change in the view of Latin Americans as perpetrators. This image comes from decades of negative advertising. However, a news coverage showing Latin Americans as victims of the "Zero Tolerance Policy," instead of stressing the point of being in the country illegally is an important step, especially in the political context. It remains to be seen whether other media outlets, especially dramaturgy, will adopt similar measures.

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9   The cover of *Time* magazine from 2 July 2019 represents one of the most important aspects of Christie's victim concept: the difference in strength between victim and perpetrator, as well as her fragility (*Time*, https://time.com/5317522/donald-trump-border-cover/).

10   A portion of the media started to publish opinions that compared the shelters of immigrant children with concentration camps, referring to the terrors of II World War (*Pacific Standard*, https://psmag.com/ideas/yes-trumps-detention-centers-are-concentration-camps).

11   Photos by Edgard Garrido/Reuters (https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/reuters-wins-pulitzer-prize-for-migrant-idUSRTX6RS1A) and HuffPost/Reuters (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/syria-war-children_n_6854612).

12   *NPR* (https://www.npr.org/2018/06/30/624950726/protesters-across-the-country-rally-against-trumps-immigration-policies).

13   *US Today* (https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/05/07/migrant-family-separation-under-zero-tolerance-protested-activists-immigration-policy/1132932001/).

7. A new role for the media

For a long time, Latinos have been associated with violent crimes, disasters and accidents. Simple and cheap stories were established to meet deadlines. This was definitive for the creation of myths, since a fundamental component for the formation of racial myths, consequently of racial stereotypes, is the absence of investigation on the verification of the facts. The arguments behind the formation of the myth are the lack of confrontation with reality. Simplified reporting is limited in terms of coverage and does not offer comprehensive points of view with alternative points of view (Hardt 2008).

The loss of prestige of traditional media in the face of the proliferation of fake news and populist movement attacks seems to reorient the conception that the free press guarantees democracies. Tocqueville (1835: 94-95) argued that the free media

> causes political life to circulate through all the parts of that vast territory. Its eye is constantly open to detect the secret springs of political designs and to summon the leaders of all parties in turn to the bar of public opinion. It rallies the interests of the community around certain principles and draws up the creed of every party; for it affords a means of intercourse between those who hear and address each other without ever coming into immediate contact.

In a sense, for decades, the media has fed the preferences of political elites and the establishment during most of Western democratic life. Now, in a scenario where populist political figures emerge, traditional media must find new roles and functions. This includes the need to look for real facts to support stories and contexts without abusing stereotypes that are harmful to the entire population. In this scenario, professional media need to continuously check fake news to avoid spreading more racial myths, as they are responsible for the emergence of new stereotypes.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Latin American migrants in the United States are in a constant limbo between vulnerability, on the one hand, and otherness, on the other. In this regard, the selected case study demonstrates an empirical alternative to the traditional view of the ideal victim coined by Nils Christie (Christie 2018: 19). In his theory, Christie emphasized that ideal victims and ideal offenders were homogeneous groups of people, but that they never mixed and remained sepa-

rate. But in the study of Latin American migrants to the United States, the ideal victim does not always differ from the ideal offender: both migrants and the United States as a nation can be seen as victims and criminals depending on the situation, individual histories and points of view. The media has an important role in the construction of these roles, in view of their influence on the formation of public opinion and the information of the local population.

The case study demonstrates that many of Nils Christie's elements of the ideal types can be identified: the evil, ugly, illegal Latin American with a bias towards crime on the one hand, but the fragile, innocent and pure Latin American on the other hand. Christie's approach is thus a fundamental counterfactual starting point for understanding how this binomial occurs in reality. The ambiguity between victims and criminals in real life remains nonetheless: migrants can be victims and criminals, but they are rarely ideal. One question raised was the role played by the media in this process, which have promoted the figure of the Latin American as an enemy, especially the Mexicans and the Hispanic biotype. In addition, the chapter sought to demonstrate that more recently, especially considering the migration policy during the Donald Trump administration and the arrest of migrant children, the media has come to view a portion of Latin Americans as victims. This does not mean that Latin Americans will be treated as a good part of society, but it does demonstrate that it is possible to think about new ways of information.

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Chapter 9
Alan Kurdi and the refugees of Calais: The duality of a portrayal

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Abstract

Building on the ideal victim categories, this chapter analyses two inter-related case-studies, that of two-year-old Alan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee whose body was found life-less on a Turkish beach, and that of refugee groups in general. These two supposedly very similar cases belong in the refugee category, but, as we shall see, are treated from political, social and media perspectives in divergent ways. Alan Kurdi had a face, a family and a story and his photographs shocked the international system, waking up governments to the migrant issue at the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. Meanwhile, refugees escaping wars, oppressive regimes, economic difficulties, or humanitarian crises are labelled as a collective cluster and not as individuals, preventing the formation of sympathetic and solidarity attitudes towards them in neo-liberal societies. Instead, a process of de-humanization is established that identifies them as scapegoats, politically exploits their suffering, while categorizing them as real victims. The Calais refugee situation reflects the ambivalence in the perception and treatment of ideal refugees compared to racialised, extra-European real refugees. The case of Calais witnesses the reality of migration perceptions also exemplifying how belonging to a particular country can make a significant difference to people's lives.

Keywords: Alan Kurdi – War – Scapegoat – Refugees in Calais

1. Introduction

Photographs have different meanings depending on the context in which they are inserted and the distance between the audience and the subject represented. Their symbolic content in some cases generates awareness and worldwide soli-

darity which can lead to social change. This has been the case of Alan Kurdi as well as that of thousands of children killed by the failure of the international system.

The current neo-liberal international system promotes a view of human attention as a scarce commodity. Alan Kurdi's photograph was able to saturate the refugee discourse and grab the attention of millions of viewers, which in turn resulted in a catalyzation of the transnational discourse on refugee deaths, incorporating new insight into the already existing public discourses on refugees. This victimhood analysis must be inserted into a bigger context of competition for resources (in this case, attention) inside the market of a global justice system.

In this context, international humanitarian actors must fight for the spotlight in the "attention economy" (Simon 1971). In such a condensed time and space our attention as viewers (and consumers) has to be won over. Crises are particularly profitable in such an economy: catastrophic images of distant crises grasp the attention of people worldwide and mobilize the international community. This attention is ephemeral: as soon as a bigger crisis appears, the attention to one particular story starts fading. Attention is catalyzed by "attention merchants": with this term, Tim Whu (2016) underlines the necessity of economic actors to commodify attention, canalizing the public's interests in a profitable way. International human rights actors (NGOs, criminal courts, and transnational activism groups to name a few) all employ stereotypical images to add urgency to their message and appeal to international charitable figures. This view of pain as something far from our daily life, to be consumed at one's will, is rooted in religious morals which still pervade our society, linking the victims' suffering to a precise meaning: that of the sacrificial, expiatory act.

Through this process, victims of international crime become symbols of a global humanitarian market and therefore must conform to neo-liberal society's standards for an ideal victim to attract sympathy, support and, ultimately, more funds. Such a simplistic view of human suffering is rooted in our fascination with sensational stories, which enable spectators to empathize, even if just for one moment, with victims far from us and our Western way of life.

The attention economy can also be defined in terms of *distraction*. Being exposed to a non-stop flow of anguish without the opportunity, the knowledge, or the means to intervene makes it unjust to generalize the public's condition by denouncing their inactivity (Sontag 2004). With the commodification of human suffering and the implicit call to action to the civil population, powerful branches of society indirectly put the responsibility of resolving such complex crises on ordinary people with limited (monetary and practical) means, and at the same time manage to conceal the structural power imbalances at play.

2. Alan Kurdi as an ideal victim

In George Orwell's *Animal Farm* all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others. In the victimization process, there are "more equal" victims as well. If victims were to be represented hierarchically through a pyramid, at the top we would find the Ideal Victim, the archetypal pure and innocent person or group that receives "the complete and legitimate status of being a victim and receives a public status of a hero" (Christie 1986), while for "the others" this kind of recognition is difficult to obtain. On the other hand, there are the non-ideal victims who are instead those exploited by (Western) governments to maintain the *status quo* and let tragedies happen again and again.

Alan Kurdi[1] came from Kobane, southwest of Syria, and he was born during the civil war. The ongoing Syrian conflict, beginning in 2011, triggered an unprecedented refugee crisis in Europe. In the summer of 2015, the crisis reached a further peak and an increasing number of Syrians had to abandon their country by taking dangerous and illegal journeys. This was also the case of Alan Kurdi's family,[2] who had to flee to the north of the country and then to Turkey. There, they were given the surname "Kurdi" due to their ethnicity, but their real name was Shenu. This shows the process of dehumanization that affects refugees upon their arrival in a new country, where they lose their individual identity. In September, because of the refusal of the Canadian government to give asylum to the Shenu family, they had decided to reach, with the help of smugglers, the Greek island of Kos. During the crossing, though, the boat capsized; only Kurdi's father survived. On September 2, 2015, Alan Kurdi's body was found on the beach of Bodrum, in the province of Mugla, by the Turkish photojournalist Nilüfer Demir who captured the photograph of the child for the Dogan News Agency.

Alan was an innocent victim, and even if the description of purity sometimes can open the doors for blaming the victim, this "exceptional situation" justified his condition (Bouris 2007). He was a two-year-old child in a war context, thus the weakest subject par excellence, and due to the armed conflict, he earned a status of moral superiority in the post-victimization process (Bouris 2007). He was too young to realize the situation he was experiencing, nor who or what he was escaping from. Alan, as were thousands of Syrian refugees, was a victim of the biggest and worst offenders: the International System, beginning with his

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[1]   Photograph of Alan Kurdi, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Alan-Kurdi-close-up-Photo-Niluefer-Demir-DHA_fig2_340164615.

[2]   M. Serafini, "Alan Kurdi, il bambino sulla spiaggia", *Corriere della Sera*, January 16, 2019. https://www.corriere.it/esteri/19_gennaio_16/alan-kurdi-bambino-spiaggia-52e7ff02-19ab-11e9-8af3-37b4f370f434.shtml.

home country's regime of President Bashar Al Assad and of the Islamic State. He was also a victim of the regional powers and of the international community, as well as Putin's Russia, Erdogan's Turkey, Kurdish, Israeli and US forces that ignored or contributed to the problematic condition of the Syrian civil population. Meanwhile, the European Union and the whole Western world were turning their backs on the crisis. Time and space also have a major impact in determining who is a victim, because belonging to one country rather than another can have a different and more or less powerful effect on public opinion. Syrian, Palestinian and Kurdish citizenships, as well as that of many other people, imply that their free and legal access to other countries is even more restricted. This leads people to take difficult and illegal ways to leave their countries.

Images of the ideal victim are powerful and evoke an immediate response from the international community, causing an emotional reaction. The photographs of Alan Kurdi's dead body lying on the shore were rapidly spread worldwide. Several people lost their lives on Alan Kurdi's own journey, but it's his photographs that shocked the international community. Alan assumed a role, the role of representing a humanitarian crisis concerning thousands of Syrians like him, opening the eyes of those who had been indifferent until then and awakening the world to a crisis previously deemed anonymous. Alan Kurdi's photographs reached a global audience. In the first 12 hours, 20 million people were reached by 30,000 tweets and by the end of September 2, 2015, more than 500 articles on Alan Kurdi had been published online and on Twitter (D'Orazio 2016). The trend continued in the following days.

2.1 Political and social reactions to Alan Kurdi's photographs

Developing emotions in individual people, photographs have the capacity to connect those feelings among larger communities. Alan Kurdi's images had this power: they caused worldwide shock, sorrow, empathy, and anger, provoking a solidarity of attitudes towards Syrian refugees and in particular children. The refugee crisis was no longer an anonymous tragedy with high numbers but it now involved a *real* child. Until then, newspapers had been publishing pictures of asylum-seekers as masses of people, who were perceived by the audience as anonymous victims without identity, not enabling pity towards them. Alan, instead, had a name, a family, and a story, endowing him with a human nature.

Political leaders such as David Cameron declared that "anyone who saw those pictures overnight could not help but be moved" and, as a father, he felt deeply moved by the sight of that young boy on a beach in Turkey, adding that "Britain

is a moral nation, and will fulfil its moral responsibilities."[3] Also, Enda Kenny, who was Prime Minister of Ireland at the time stated "I think that picture more than any I've seen may shock political processes into taking action, both in terms of the stream of migrants and the causes that underlie that."[4] Kurdi's photographs were the representation of a child who needed protection: he was alone on the beach, he was well dressed, he looked as if he was asleep, showing no signs of shattering or deterioration, which allowed the media to use his photographs, and at the same time led Western citizens to think he could be anyone's child, removing the discriminatory elements of race and place while developing compassion for him. As an ideal victim, he received attention not only because of political-media interests but also for human and personal reasons. He was seen as vulnerable and without responsibility for his fate. Certain sections of public opinion condemned politicians around the world to be considered responsible actors for the Syrian crisis and urged them to take immediate action. Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff stated that European countries were responsible for the death of Kurdi: "He died because he was abandoned, because countries created barriers for the entrance of that child."[5] Many media and newspapers self-criticized themselves for the denigratory terminology they had been using towards migrants and refugees. In the meantime, the image of Alan Kurdi led to a reasoning that went beyond the representation of the child on the shore, it made the international community think of Alan as the victim of a bigger crisis. A social change was beginning. The number of searches on the internet regarding the Syrian conflict or Refugees was boosted after the publication of the photograph, becoming a transformative image because it led to action.

2.2 Actions following the sharing of the photographs

Alan Kurdi's photographs shook the world, causing growing political and social support for the cause of Syrian refugees. These natural reactions affected all groups regardless of their political ideologies, who, when confronted with the photographs of the child, leaned in support of liberal refugee policies (Sohlberg

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[3] M. Dathan, "Aylan Kurdi: David Cameron says he felt 'deeply moved' by images of dead Syrian boy but gives no details of plans to take in more refugees", *The Independent*, September 3, 2015. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/aylan-kurdi-david-cameron-says-he-felt-deeply-moved-by-images-of-dead-syrian-boy-but-gives-no-details-of-plans-to-take-in-more-refugees-10484641.html.

[4] "Taoiseach Enda Kenny describes refugee crisis as 'human catastrophe'", *Belfast Telegraph*, September 3, 2015. https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/taoiseach-enda-kenny-describes-refugee-crisis-as-human-catastrophe/31500186.html.

[5] "Brazil president criticizes Europe over refugee crisis", *Reuters*, September 5, 2015. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-brazil-idUSKCN0R42IE20150904.

et al. 2018). From the sharing of the news, public and social actions began to be undertaken by civilians and NGOs around the world. Donations to charitable organizations for the cause increased meanwhile demonstrations in solidarity with the refugees were taking place in major cities across the world. Thus initiatives in support of the humanitarian crisis were taking place at a community level.[6]

Moreover, politicians around the world were also affected by the tragic event that involved Alan Kurdi's death, leading countries to react and change their migration policies. Until that summer the refugee crisis, despite being obviously known, had not resulted in cooperation and the achievement of any agreements in Europe. Only after the tragedy had occurred did the European Justice and Home Affairs Council elaborate plans for the relocation of 160,000 Syrian refugees in other European member states (beyond Italy and Greece, overwhelmed by the negative effects of migrations) in two years' time. Focusing on the reactions of the United Kingdom's government, Alan Kurdi's tragedy led them to realize the different status of child refugees as deserving victims, in which the UK could invest. Until that moment the government had refused to take part in the resettlement programs proposed by other European countries. Following the news, Prime Minister David Cameron decided to extend to 20,000 refugees the already existing "Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme" of 2014, which aimed to resettle the most vulnerable refugees from the camps in the Middle East. Former Defence Secretary, Liam Fox declared: "If we are genuinely to help refugees, this cannot simply be about helping the fittest, the fastest and those most able to get to Western Europe. We must help those who are left behind in the camps, who are sometimes the most vulnerable" (Sirriyeh 2020). In 2015 Lord Alfred Dubs, who had been a Jewish refugee in his time and who had been saved by the "Kindertransport program," began to campaign for the protection of child refugees. In February 2016 he introduced an amendment to the Immigration Bill (2016) to bring to England 3,000 refugee minors who had already arrived in Europe. By May 2016 the Amendment was passed.

Considering North America's reaction to Kurdi's photographs, Canada also felt involved in the death of the child and this had a crucial political impact on the 2015 federal election that led to the preference of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who committed to welcome 25,000 refugees that year. Likewise, the United States President Barack Obama engaged in accepting 10,000 Syrian refugees.

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[6]   J. Stanton, "Artistic tribute or tasteless stunt? Thirty people recreate death of Aylan Kurdi by laying in the sand on a Moroccan beach dressed in the same clothes as the drowned Syrian boy", *Mail Online*, September 9, 2015. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3227703/Thirty-people-recreate-death-Alyan-Kurdi-laying-sand-Moroccan-beach-dressed-clothes-drowned-Syrian-boy.html.

All these actions and emotions triggered by the photographs of Alan Kurdi in the immediate aftermath of their disclosure were later followed by a reversal of migration policies. This subsequent change, according to some research, is due to the reassertion of individual political ideologies and the conflicts and interests they stir up, eventually repressing the initial emotions and revoking people's ideological preferences (Sohlberg et al. 2018). When right-leaning people began understanding the consequences of adopting liberal refugee policies, they began changing their initial response to the refugee crisis (Sohlberg et al. 2018). Therefore, when an increasing number of refugees started entering Europe, border control on the flow of migrants was temporarily reintroduced in many European countries. By January 2016, of the 160,000 refugees only less than 500 were resettled in other countries. Although the photographs of Alan Kurdi had received a lot of support at both a social and institutional level, this sympathy towards the Syrian refugee crisis did not last long.

Boltanski (2000) introduced the concept of "the spectacle of pain" to explain how people are becoming accustomed to constantly witnessing this uncontrolled flow of images of unpleasant circumstances, causing among them a certain ambivalence towards the suffering of people who come from different parts of the world. Also, the use of social media is powerful when it manages to develop a group consciousness on an issue. However, compassion is not a stable emotion, it needs to lead to action, but when people feel that there is nothing that they can do to help solve the issue, they become cynical and apathetic about it. According to some studies, this behavior also occurred in the case of Alan Kurdi and the Syrian refugees. Regardless, repeated exposure to a specific issue or to a high and daily quantity of horrific events presented to people through social media, television and newspapers, causes distress and the inability to continue to feel the same degree of sympathy over a long period of time, leading to compassion fatigue. Two events did contribute to this change of attitudes: the terrorist attacks in Paris, in November 2015, and the sexual assaults in Germany mainly carried out by Moroccan and Algerian Arabs on New Year's Eve of 2016. Based on these events another unexpected event took place: the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2016 published a satirical drawing representing two men chasing women and the phrase "Que serait devenu le petit Aylan s'il avait grandi?", and at the bottom the following caption: "Tripoteur de fesses en Allemagne."[7] The cartoon was criticized and blamed by the social community for being racist and unethical.[8] These

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[7]   "What would little Aylan have grown up to be? An ass groper in Germany."
[8]   "Charlie Hebdo backlash over 'racist' Alan Kurdi cartoon", *BBC News*, January 13, 2016. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35306906.

events moved the spotlight from the Syrian refugee crisis to new problems and contributed to changing the opinion of some people with respect to the issue.

In February 2017 the British program for the resettlement of children was interrupted and only 350 children had benefited from it. The age of the refugees that arrived in England did not assign them the same condition of vulnerability of young children as Alan Kurdi: they were mainly teenage boys seen as adult male refugees and not ideal victims who deserved compassion. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris, Obama's plan of resettling 10,000 refugees was stopped by the US House of Representatives, meanwhile, in Canada, Trudeau accepted only 10,000 refugees by the end of that year and the other 15,000 by March 2016.

That March a disputed agreement, in which Angela Merkel had a prominent role, was established between the European Union and Turkey to stop the illegal flow of migrants using the route from Turkey to the Greek islands. Later the agreement changed, and the "one-for-one principle" was established: Turkey had to detain migrants in its own country and prevent them from entering Europe, and as soon as any migrant returned to Turkey from Greece, the EU would welcome a Syrian migrant from Turkey and would also provide Turkey with financial assistance to help refugees settled in the country (since 2011 the EU has directed close to 10 billion euro to assist refugees and host communities in Turkey).[9] Although Turkey has the largest number of Syrian refugees, estimated to be more than 3,500,000 (UNHCR-officially registered by January 2023), throughout this period it has also adopted a discriminatory position towards refugees, returning many to their homeland in violation of international law.

The political and social actions following the sharing of Alan Kurdi's photographs had a short-lived response due in part to unforeseen events, failures of governments, and compassion fatigue resulting from the consumption of the media. Amnesty International commented on the issue: "One year after the body of Alan Kurdi was washed up on a beach in Turkey, thousands of refugees continue to die in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas. The public outcry should have marked a political turning point, but the global response to the refugee crisis since Alan's death has been an utter disaster" (Ibrahim, 2018).

Therefore, even though Alan's photo affected people's humanity at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 also leading to mobilization and action, the photo in some cases was instrumentalized, condemning the child to his original condition, the one of refugee, outsider, and different. Despite this, the Western

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9   "EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye", European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-support-refugees-turkiye_en#:~:text=The%20full%20operational%20budget%20of,%2C%20and%20socio%2Deconomic%20support.

world's vision of children, of any origin and religion, as vulnerable and innocent, has allowed us to see important discriminations and differences in the treatment and perception of adult refugees, who as real victims do not receive the same concern at a social, political and media level.

3. Refugees as real victims

Alan Kurdi's photograph had an enormous impact on the media and society as a whole because it was not like any other refugee representation proposed by European media at the time. Not all refugee news stories get this degree of attention. Not even compassion is bestowed on adult refugees who, like Alan, died crossing the Mediterranean: most refugees die nameless, their death only one among many, a toll on European policymakers for some, a burden to others. Refugees are *real victims* and, as such, they are not as warmly welcomed into our countries as other, higher-ranking victims. We looked at the attributes of an ideal international victim (Schwöbel-Patel 2016) to stress why most refugees *do not* fit into the description.

First, it's important to explore the concept of *weakness*. Most migrants are men, and as such they are expected to be strong enough not to leave their country of origin.[10] Europeans do not consider migrants as weak unless they are in clear dire situations (e.g., on a sinking boat), or unless *we Europeans* believe them to be in need: women, children, and disabled refugees are those who *really* need help. Although media representation focuses on these categories of migrants, most people do not associate the concept of "migrant" with that of an individual person. Specifically, we always think of "refugee" in collective terms, as further reinforced by the way migrants are represented by the media.[11] As pointed out by the recent European populist discourse, people see refugees more as a threat than as individuals in need, as "a flood" of people (with clear negative connotations), debilitating social welfare and security.[12] This contributes to their dehumanization and distances the audience from the victims.

Moreover, inside the category of migrant, there are important distinctions (a hierarchy of victimhood) which set refugees apart, meaning those migrants

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[10]   Migration and Data Portal, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/gender-and-migration#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20there%20were%20more,to%20men%20.

[11]   European Federation of Journalists, "Refugees: choices about words do matter", October 31, 2015. https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2015/08/31/refugees-choices-about-words-do-matter/.

[12]   A. Taylor, "Thousands of Migrants Are Crossing the Balkans on Foot", *The Atlantic*, October 26, 2015. https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/10/thousands-of-migrants-are-crossing-the-balkans-on-foot/412453/.

escaping from what are universally considered life-threatening situations, in comparison with other migrants, who are expected to "make it" in their own country and are therefore frowned upon for leaving. It is interesting to note the not-so-subtle hypocrisy of this reasoning: people from the globalized North migrate looking for better opportunities in other Western countries all the time but, coming from rich countries, they are allowed to do so at a fraction of the time and with no social repercussions. In International Criminal Justice courts, victims are represented by field specialists: they are required to take a step back and lay their fight in the hands of other, generally wealthier, speakers. This brings us to the second important attribute of international ideal victims: that of *dependability*. This legal route is not possible for most refugee migrants, and therefore, going against it, they do not fit into the international model of ideal victimhood as they are not directly dependent on legal and social workers. What is true is that most refugees are not able to work within transnational justice because they find themselves lacking means, and migrating illegally is in many cases their only option.

Surprisingly, we found that migrants, especially refugees, *do fall* into one category of the expected victims of international crime: that of *grotesqueness*. The grotesque in this context can be described as the distorted, the abnormal, and the unpleasant, but in a way that demands our compassion. The aesthetics of refugees in the collective European public sphere is that of devastation, death, and desperation. Images of helpless people, drowned people without a face, without a name: all of this as a display for the attention economy.

3.1 Refugees as "The Other"

Alan Kurdi was not readily defined as an ideal victim, even if everything would make us think that he would fit the criteria. At first glance though, his story would look like that of many other migrants who died at sea. Yet, it is rather easy to see why people gave meaning to Alan's life, suffered with him, and saw him as a victim. Alan was a Syrian refugee, of Kurdish descent, and Muslim faith. It is as if Alan Kurdi's status as an ideal victim allowed public opinion to separate him from the other refugees, who in turn are always grouped together as a monolithic entity and do not enjoy the same international public attention.

A hierarchy of victimhood distinguishes the "good" victims from the "bad" ones. This hierarchy inside of the same category derived from subjective, Eurocentric views of what a "good" migrant should be, and, as we explored in the last part, refugees are considered a burden on society unless they meet the criteria of the ideal refugee (woman/kid, running from a desperate situation and

in need of our help). Schwöbel-Patel (2016) noted that the weakness required to be considered a victim in the international context is profoundly gendered and racialized. The Western impulse to "help" Third World countries therefore comes from a history of imperialism mutating into a deep essentialism which distinguishes "civilized" from "uncivilized" people. The victims' weakness and dependent features are therefore socially constructed and they further the division that requires racialized victims to (politely) ask for "our" help. As Anne Orford (2009) best recognized, "We are shown nameless starving, weeping, mourning strangers as part of a narrative in which we [in the First World] are spiritually enriched by knowledge of our own superiority and capacity to rescue and redeem others." This analysis makes for a peculiar example of *white saviourism*. This term, stemming from Kipling's *White Man's Burden,* is an example of how colonial attitudes are still perpetuated in the mainstream neo-liberal culture, especially in the field of international development.[13] This paternalistic logic affirms that we, as Westerners, are not only able but are expected to help, support and *educate* people from the Third World, as they are not capable of helping themselves.

Refugees, Muslims, Arabs: these terms are always pluralized. In doing so, the victims are stripped of their own identity and individual suffering in place of a generic and confused representation. The idea of Islam and the West as two completely separated entities is now a consolidated opinion made possible by Western societies (Aydin 2017). For centuries, Westerners saw the Muslim as "The Other." This separation has been made possible also by transnational Muslim communities, stressing the cultural discrepancy between East and West in referencing the unity of the Muslim struggle against Western cultural hegemony. Scholars, transnational activist groups and Islamic states alike still reference the unity of the global *umma*, helping propagate the idea of two divergent, irreducible world orders at war with each other. These constructions, such as that of *Orientalism*, originate from stereotypes rooted in repeated essentialism, which is accepted and reproduced by and inside of the prevalent culture (Said 2003). The prevalent culture, in this case, the Western, neo-liberal worldview, has been able to impose itself onto others, making it tough for other narratives to withstand a confrontation. This further racialization is therefore a co-construction which stems from the need for The Other to separate themselves from a racist society: a co-construction both of the self (in this case, the First World) and the broad category of The Other, someone different, someone who doesn't play by

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13   M. Sondarjee, D. Kanakulya, "How white saviourism harms international development", *The Conversation*, February 26, 2023. https://theconversation.com/how-white-saviourism-harms-international-development-199392.

today's conventional rules. This process influences Westerners' capacity to feel empathy towards racialized (real) victims, with some even opposing or wishing for the victims' demise. This negative image can then be exploited by political actors to polarize public opinion in their favor: refugees in Europe have been used as a *scapegoat* for the 2008 financial crisis, with populist politicians blaming everything from welfare cuts to security issues on the recent refugee crisis (Mavelli 2022). Politicians are able to turn political discontent towards these particular victims, which have arrived in such a fragile framework of European neo-liberal policies, and divert the responsibility of poor economic decisions onto them. Refugees live at the margins of society; they have little to no voice to defend themselves against such accusations. Therefore, they make for an easy target: their "otherness" becomes a pretext for deflecting blame, as migrants are seen as never truly integrated into their new country and are opposed by some because of their skin color, religion and cultural standing.

The discussion around refugees can be defined through different lenses (McEvoy & McConnachie 2012). The *danger/securitization/control framework* views migrants as a security threat to hosting countries; the *economy/social costs framework*, discussing the economic utility of migrants in host countries; the *culture/integration framework,* focusing on integration policies; the *humanitarian framework* views migration in the context of humanitarian law. The most typical representation of refugees in all these instances is that of either a *threat* or a *victim*, with no possibility of fluidity between the two categories. We would argue that these frameworks are all attributed to the prevalent neo-liberal attitude in Western societies, and even the philanthropy of international justice can be argued to be rather utilitarian in nature. Refugees, considered as a wide social category, are to be considered real victims at two different levels: the native-local system, and the international system.

3.1.1 Real victims of the native and the international systems
Refugees are victims of the local system they belong to, unwittingly and unconsciously. They are born in places where war and violence are a daily occurrence, the system imposes limits of freedom often under dictatorial regimes, and no possibility of living a proper and peaceful life. All these factors, combined with the fact that globalization led inequalities to become insurmountable, pushed refugees to emigrate from their original country to the European continent in legal (through human corridors) or illegal ways (by paying smugglers). Once they arrive in Europe, they experience a lack of freedom, assaults, corruption, and violence also carried out by the police, border control forces and immigration officers. Therefore, according to a first-level analysis, refugees are real vic-

tims of the global system because of the disparity created by colonization and globalization, and they are victims of the place they belong to, which leads people to categorize them as just "unlucky."

According to a second perspective, arriving in Europe is a double misfortune because of the hostility of European countries, which see them as The Other to be excluded because of their good physical condition or their age, not allowing them to be identified as victims. They are seen as foreigners, without the possibility of inclusion, dangerous men, who are wasting time, energy, and money, who steal jobs and resources. It is like a choice of "either us or them" (Mavelli 2022). They are not allowed to be integrated unless extraordinary gestures are put in evidence in front of public opinion. In European countries where people's rights are important, the ones of the refugees are instead cancelled, and according to Hannah Arendt (1949), the concept of the "right to have rights" is therefore lost for them. Refugees frequently experience aggressiveness from the locals of the host country as well as xenophobia, discrimination, and hatred. Unfriendly treatment in daily life and incarceration further amplifies the feeling of unfair treatment and contributes to perpetuating stress disorder from prior victimization and traumatization (Kilchling 2016). In this second sense, migrants are therefore real victims of "developed", "just", "civilized" international systems that identify them as a threat, because of the presumed responsibility behind their condition. Unless they are like little Alan Kurdi, visible from a media and political view, they do not deserve too much attention.

4. Case Study: The Calais refugee situation[14]

The case of Calais is presented below in contrast to the echo brought by the photo of Alan Kurdi, with the aim of questioning the figure of the ideal vic-

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[14]   From September 1st to October 31st Maria Bell carried out two months of an internship abroad with the Erasmus+ project for a traineeship. She was in Nord-Pas de Calais (France), working as a volunteer for a humanitarian association called Salam that is involved in providing daily care to the refugees coming from everywhere around the world and stuck in Calais waiting to reach England in all possible ways. Maria spent six days per week working with the association, distributing food, clothes and the necessary items for survival to refugees. In addition, on Wednesdays, Maria used to go to the Sécours Catholique afternoons to socialize more in-depth with refugees. Here, indoor and outdoor spaces were provided in order to ensure a safe place where refugees could play, have interactions, pray, sleep and wash themselves and their clothes. Maria Bell has collected testimonies, which are stories about refugees, in informal moments or as a result of specific situations during the entire internship thus a non-precise reference date is reported. Moreover, to protect the privacy of those interviewed, the names used in the testimonies are not real. All these testimonies were collected and transcribed into a notebook during Maria Bell's experience. The stories were later translated from French or Italian into English and included in the chapter.

tim in front of what can instead be considered the real victims in Calais, or the broader category of refugees.

The refugee camp of Calais, in the North of France, was in the past a "jungle,"[15] a place for refugees to organize themselves into a small, self-managed community. There, they created a space to stay until the obtainment of the necessary documents, or the necessary amount of money, to travel illegally to England. The Jungle was like a city, it contained ten thousand inhabitants, and inside of it, a real urban life was organized, inserted into a human and economic fabric, characterized by constant mobility. Still, the Jungle was a no-man's-land, and refugees' lives were stuck there.

In 2016, the jungle was dismantled by the decision of the French government because the refugee situation had become "unsustainable."[16] The dismantling of the Jungle was placed within the framework of the national presidential campaign, and it was intended to enhance the French state as "strong and able to protect the territory against undesirable foreigners" (Agier, 2018). The event of the Jungle's dismantlement attracted a lot of media attention from all around the world. The administration, which wished to demonstrate the power and humanity of the public powers, used the media's widespread presence to its advantage. However, in this spectacle, refugees' voices and those of humanitarian associations have proved to be relatively inaudible.

After the dismantling, the dispersed refugees[17] fragmented into small self-regulated informal settlements[18] around the city center divided by ethnicity. Individuals, who do not feel part of and protected by society, organize themselves in camp forms. It is considered a phenomenon of self-exemption and self-protection in a society where the camp is increasingly recognized as an exception and a place in which to confine the exception. Camps in Calais were, and still are, built with tents, and plastic bags, covering wooden poles to prevent rain and cold from invading these precarious structures.

Calais' migrants are victims of their past lives, of the French political system,[19] and of the racist feelings of the community they live in. In Calais, refugees live

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[15]   The Jungle camp of Calais before and after the evictions, *Time* website: https://api.time.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/calais-migrant-camp-before-after.jpg.

[16]   The dismantlement of the Jungle of Calais, *Liberties* website: https://www.liberties.eu/it/stories/calais-sgombero-della-jungle-reportage-di-sara-prestianni/10529.

[17]   Refugees in Calais, *Internazionale* website: https://media.internazionale.it/images/2016/10/24/130545-hd.jpg.

[18]   Refugees' informal settlements after the Jungle, *La Manufacture* website: https://manufacture.paliens.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/photo-1-missions-Calaide.jpg.

[19]   Police watching over refugees, Il Post website: https://www.ilpost.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/calais42.jpg.

in a situation of limbo and can only rely on the charity of humanitarian associations. David Rousset with regard to the conditions of concentration camp prisoners during the Second World War wrote: "They have judged the ravages of hunger." "They have walked for years in the fantastic setting of all the ruined dignities. They are separated from others by an experience impossible to transmit. The decomposition of a society, of all classes, in the stench of destroyed values, has become sensitive to them, immediate reality like a threatening shadow profiled on the whole planet solidarity" (Rousset 1965).[20] These words are still relevant for those living in today's refugee camps.

Ibrahim is a 27-year-old refugee who migrated from Sudan to Libya. He briefly mentioned the torture he suffered in Libya's detention centers, without ever going into too much detail. "It is difficult to explain what I felt and what they did to me, thinking about it makes me feel bad. I'm trying to erase those memories, even if the kind of torture that happens in the camp reminds me of it every day." He then explained the smuggling and the money they have to pay to cross the sea routes in total absence of safety and in inhuman conditions, with the constant risk of being sent back. And finally the crossing of Italy, Germany and the arrival in Calais with the hope of reaching England as soon as possible.

The military police are dispatched at irregular intervals to terrorize, steal, and physically harm the refugees. Wire fences are put up to prevent refugees from entering certain parts of the city, and the *géndarmerie* is ready to intimidate, evict, and mistreat refugees in accordance with what is known as a pressure and dispersion strategy to obstruct settlements and disadvantage those minimal living conditions provided by the associations. Violent expulsions are carried out using tear gas and batons. The use of violence is ongoing in an effort to dissuade new arrivals and force camp inhabitants to leave. Thus, refugees leave behind the violence perpetrated in their home country only to find their human rights violated once again in France. These mistreatments have been sadly felt by Samira, a six-year-old girl from Eritrea. She lived momentarily in the Calais Eritrean camp with her mom and dad. One morning at dawn, she and her family attempted the crossing, but they were discovered by the police and were forced to return to the camps. That morning, Samira, with terrified eyes, said: "They pointed their weapons at us and forced us to go back."

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[20]   "Ils ont vécu l'inquiétude comme une obsession partout présente. Ils ont su l'humiliation des coups, la faiblesse du corps sous le fouet. Ils ont jugé les ravages de la faim. Ils ont cheminé des années durant dans le fantastique décor de toutes les dignités ruinées. Ils sont séparés des autres par une expérience impossible à transmettre. La décomposition d'une société, de toutes les classes, dans la puanteur des valeurs détruites, leur est devenue sensible, réalité immédiate comme une ombre menaçante profilée sur toute la planète solidaire."

For these reasons, refugees decide not to stay in Calais and try to get to England by taking dangerous ways, such as racing towards the trucks stuck on the motorways.[21] They climb on the trucks and use plastic bags to breathe in to avoid being discovered by police machines which are used to measure oxygen levels. However, this often leads them to suffocate to death. Other refugees attempt the "*traversé de la mort*"[22] by boat by crossing the English Channel, moved by their hunger for freedom. Yusuf is one of them. He is a 23-years-old Nigerian man who stayed in Rome for three years, where he learned to speak Italian very well. When he lived in Rome he worked illegally for an agricultural consortium; he had hoped to obtain the residency permit documents in Italy, but after an inconclusive wait he decided to travel to England, to be able to finally live without hiding. One day he finally made it there. The same fate, instead, did not befall Ahmad, a forty-year-old gentleman from Senegal. In fact, it is suspected he lost his life at sea among others like him on November 24, 2021.

Calais is full of real victims; there, as in many other parts of the world, asylum seekers and refugees are dehumanized by political and mass media campaigns that discredit their image by presenting them as illegal immigrants (Volpato 2011). Calais is anonymous to many people because the further away the pain is, the less people realize it exists.

5. Conclusions

To conclude this study about refugees as real or ideal victims, it is important to emphasize the importance of understanding their victimized condition, to go beyond imposed social and cultural categories, in the hope that, in the future, refugees will be all seen as individual human beings.

The analysis should also lead us to think about the refugee problem as a symptom of an even larger issue. The countries refugees flee from are characterized by wars, dictatorships, and inequalities, in which both local regimes and international powers have been involved, to cite the United States in the case of Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, and Russia in the case of Syria and Ukraine. In this context, the United Nations organization with its five permanent members of the Security Council with veto power (USA, Russia,

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[21]   Refugees trying to board lorries in Calais, *The Independent* website: https://static.independent.co.uk/s3fs-public/thumbnails/image/2015/06/23/13/migrants-calais.jpg?width=982&height=726&auto=webp&quality=75.
[22]   "The crossing of death."

China, France and the UK), has been able to block measures supported by a majority of the 193 member nations of the UN, allowing the perpetration of local wars, such as the 75-year-old problem between Israel and Palestine, among many others.

Thus, both local and international actors have enormous responsibilities in the situations these countries find themselves in and on the lost lives of millions of civilian citizens. Even so there seems to be no accountability and Europe has been left to deal with millions of displaced refugees, alongside Turkey, in the case of Syrian refugees. Moreover, the countries they arrive in judge them by their language, cultures and the color of their skin, leading to structural disparities and relegating them to a sub-citizen, passive role in Western societies.

When, in February 2022 war broke out in Ukraine, people began leaving the country. Yet, although they experienced the same situations of war as the refugees coming from different parts of the world, like Africa and the Middle East, the treatment European governments reserved for them was different. In the French case, Ukrainian migrants were immediately provided with food and lodging, and in Calais, youth hostels were made available to accommodate them, and many refugees have been able to reach England easily since then. This is not the case for African and Middle Eastern refugees who also see the little they have taken away: the dismantling of camps continued to take place in Calais and on the French coast. What is impressive is that both are considered refugees, but Ukrainians are considered as human, legal, and ideal victims, and therefore deserving of help compared to refugees from countries outside of Europe. Therefore, since the arrival of Ukrainians in Calais, some associations have denounced double standards in the treatment of refugees. Why such a different treatment? Surely it is time to consider how to make all those involved assume responsibility and avoid patronizing Third World countries by making their reality a spectacle for us to quickly disregard when something new and more interesting comes up, in a cycle of entertainment for us who have the privilege to watch from the comfort of our own homes.

The refugee crisis has been involving an increasing number of people and in the long-term will cause instability in those countries seeking to alleviate the situation. The climate crisis will exacerbate the problem by increasing forced migrations. Perhaps, it is time to question the effectiveness of the United Nations, and that of international humanitarian aid based on a neo-liberal economic model that forces the less fortunate to fight for rich, western countries' attention. Now more than ever, it is crucial to ask ourselves how this new generation of scholars and activists can provide new possible solutions to solve the root systemic causes of the ongoing refugee crisis.

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Chapter 10
Homeless people as non-ideal victims

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Abstract

By utilizing Christie's classic concept of the ideal victim, this chapter aims to uncover the social construction behind the victimization processes of people experiencing homelessness. Most notably, the chapter's aim is to focus on answering the following questions: How are people experiencing homelessness being perceived by society? Why can homeless people be described as non-ideal victims? Which specific structures lead to that perception?
Despite the limited information available about the unhoused, the findings have suggested that in today's society homelessness is still perceived as a condition to be blamed for rather than a product of social inequalities and structural violence. Based on these perceptions and stereotypes, homeless people go through a process of dehumanization which prevents them to be identified as victims. As such, they do not fit well into the priorities of the public agenda and therefore inadequate support is provided to help them break away from their condition.

Keywords: Homeless – Violence – Discrimination

1. Introduction

As argued by Christie, being a victim is not "an objective phenomenon" (Christie 1986: 11). The victimization process may vary according to the context and to the subject to which the label is applied. This creates two very distinctive categories of victims: the real victims and the ideal victims (Fohring 2018). The first category is what is to be found in the real world. It corresponds to those individuals that are often the "negation of those who are most frequently represented" (Christie 1986: 12) in the official counts. The second category instead,

has its origins in the social system, which creates stereotypes and depictions that are comparable to the same level of abstraction of the status of the "traitor" or the "hero" (Christie 1986). The ideal victim is "a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim" (Christie 1986: 12). Such construction has major implications for the way in which society recognizes and perceives a person as a victim. Only those with specific attributes are considered worthy of sympathy and deserving to be recognized as victims, while others will be excluded from such recognition and will not receive any kind of help for their condition. The social construction of the notion of the ideal victim, by simplifying reality and the complexity of adverse situations, creates a system of injustice and disparities towards those who are excluded from being a victim.

By utilizing Christie's classic concept of the ideal victim, this chapter aims to uncover the social construction behind the victimization processes of people experiencing homelessness. The chapter's aim is to focus on answering the following questions: How are people experiencing homelessness being perceived by society? Why can homeless people be described as non-ideal victims? Which specific structures lead to that perception?

The first section of this chapter provides a sociological foundation of how people experiencing homelessness are seen by society and which place they take in it. The second part of this chapter will have a deeper look into the specific situation of women being homeless, as gender is indeed a decisive factor in the vulnerable living conditions of homeless people. The third part deals with the structural violence under which homeless people have to suffer: as an important element, hostile architecture and how that can lead to the victimization of homeless people will be examined carefully. Finally, the fourth part concludes with the case of Kelly Thomas, a mentally ill homeless man who died at the hands of the police in California, showing an emblematic example of the way in which people experiencing homelessness are treated by society and more specifically by the police body. The last part provides a conclusion on the information that has been worked out.

2. Social perceptions of homeless people and the notion of Non-Ideal Victims

> *[W]e have dehumanized our most vulnerable to no longer being people...*
> (NCH 2018: 18)

For persons living in bigger cities, it is almost normal to see people experiencing homelessness on the streets – on their way to the train, to the bakery, or to

the park. Some of them might want to sell a journal, to ask for money or food and drinks – so being in contact and social interaction with homeless people happens on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the social group of people experiencing homelessness is often seen as a group apart of "the society" – namely the working society. The homeless community lives in precarious conditions with scarce resources. Yet, according to the aforementioned Christie's theory, homeless people present characteristics that do not allow them to be considered ideal victims when they become victims of a crime.

Homelessness vulnerability suits the ideal victims' definition. The homeless community's living conditions are precarious. They have rare access to sanitation or health care and depend on social welfare support to get food, clothes and, perhaps, a temporary place to sleep. This vulnerability drives them into an unprotected position and leaves them at a high risk of suffering an attack in eventual crimes. All these aspects should lead to the consideration of homeless people as being weak and in need of protection – but as a matter of fact, they are, nevertheless, not seen as weak and innocent.

A victim, in order to be considered "ideal", should be carrying out a respectable project and cannot take the blame for being at the crime scene. That's where the common perception of homelessness clashes with the idea of an ideal victim. Prejudices and misperceptions shape the way one thinks about homelessness. People experiencing homelessness, often perceived as responsible for their own situation, are seen not as innocent victims, but as the ones to blame for being in that situation (CoH 2021). The consequences of this misperception are immense, as underlined by the NCH: "The lack of education and understanding how people become homeless helps create a distinct 'otherness', which leads to an individual reaction of fear and disgust when housed individuals come across a person experiencing homelessness" (NCH 2018: 16). This process of factual dehumanization of homeless people prevents the apprehension and consideration of them being victims. Taking all the arguments above into consideration it is interesting to have a look into the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms according to homeless people experiencing homelessness: How does society often see them? What are the possible explanations? And does that view affect the perception of homeless people as "non-ideal victims"? In a globalized world, the dynamics of society seem to be in constant transformation: positionings and trade-offs are changing, and there are new risks and new chances (Geiger 2004: 9). Hence, there are also winning and losing members of society. And then, there are people, who don't fit in the losing-winning-notion: they don't even have the possibility to take part in the distribution of chances in a society (Offe 1996: 274). They are already "lost" because they have no stake to give (Dahrendorf

1994: 239). They are "useless" for the economic system, and therefore no part of the generic society (Geiger 2004: 9).

People experiencing homelessness fit in this category of an excluded social group: not being part of the working society means being gratuitous and redundant (Castel 2000: 14, 259). Homeless people normally don't work, and don't consume in a way that advances the economy. Additional to the social division of top and bottom, there is also one of inside and outside the society: the phenomena of exclusion (Geiger 2004: 11). Mechanisms of exclusion in particular refer to the employment market and to primary social relations in the context of family and the nearest social environment, which serves as an important source of social capital (Bourdieu 1992: 49-79), as well as to the participation on the individual, political and social rights (Kronauer 2002: 23-24). Homeless people often don't have a lot of these factors at their disposal.

2.1 Process of exclusion mechanisms within the social context

Considering the fact described above – that people experiencing homelessness can be seen as a social group excluded from society – there is another important factor that has to be taken into account: homeless people are often living in a special social context with their own structures and mechanisms. Despite, or even due to the fact of not having a place to live and having no or few familiar backing or ulterior social support, people experiencing homelessness (as all humans) have the desire of belonging to a certain group, the need for resonance, support and protection (Geiger 2004: 37). This social context on the streets develops certain behavior patterns, rules, and common ideals, which in turn are expressed by certain habits, appearances, habitus, language, and symbolics (Geiger 2004: 37). Consequential, this leads to a social milieu which is due to the peculiarity easy to be identified by the outside, while the inner structures and internal relationships are hard to see through (Geiger 2004: 37).

Considering these factors, one comes to the conclusion: people experiencing homelessness are easily identified by people passing by – whether the fact of homelessness is actually true or not. As homeless people are subject to exclusions mechanisms, this feeling of "not being part of the society" not only exists inside of them, but this perception of foreignness also occurs by a vast majority of society. Hence, the barrier to entering into social interaction with people experiencing homelessness is high – while the state of knowledge about their actual living circumstances, their background, or the inner structures of living in the streets is rather low. Instead, a wide range of stigmatizations that were constructed through decades predominates the view on people experiencing

homelessness: criminal behavior, addiction problems, culpable failure, no will to work or to rehabilitate socially – the list is long (Lutz, Sartoruis, Simon 2021: 74-83). This phenomenon has already been written down by Nels Anderson in 1923: in the lecture *The hobo: The sociology of homeless man*, he describes his experiences and perceptions of living together with homeless people for several months in Chicago. It allows an internal view of living conditions and challenges that people experiencing homelessness meet in that time period. In which way do these factors affect our perception of people experiencing homelessness as non-ideal victims? Regarding homeless people as a group and not as individuals with individual problems, aims, and needs, the process of social distancing and dehumanization leads to aversion rather than sympathy and compassion. In turn, people experiencing homelessness are not seen as vulnerable victims in case of attacks or criminal acts.

3. Women experiencing homelessness: The gender issue

Homeless women are one of the most vulnerable subpopulations among the homeless
(Milaney et al. 2020: 1)

It is important to point out that the few studies available about homelessness discuss the topic mainly in global terms. Nevertheless, homeless people constitute a quite heterogeneous population with different subgroups and different characteristics. This inevitably implies that – to effectively address their necessities – one should consider the differences between each subgroup. However, research has mostly focused on homeless men, thus treating the female question as a residual part of the male universe. In this way, homeless women have been left out of the societal discourse and out of public policies. Such an approach, consequently, did not take into account the fact that women are characterized by a different positioning in terms of roles, self-perception, and social expectations and neither had been considered the different types of homelessness experience these factors can imply with respect to the male gender. This has made "homeless women […] one of the most vulnerable subpopulations among the homeless" (Milaney et al. 2020: 1) as often their needs, traits, difficulties, and concerns have been analyzed mostly under a male-oriented approach, forgetting their gender specificities (Stephen 1984).

On the contrary, homelessness for women is experienced in very different ways and is characterized by various challenges compared to their male counterparts. In fact, if incidents like "illness, housing shortages, employment loss or discrimi-

nation" (Takahashi, McElroy, Rowe 2002: 303) constitute common problems across the homeless population, homeless women have to face additional issues such as "pregnancy and childcare responsibilities, abusive relationships, victimization" (Takahashi, McElroy, Rowe 2002: 303), sexual assault and physical violence.

Studies have shown that homeless women are more likely to have experienced violent abuse during their lives, either before or after their homelessness. Most notably, comparing them with men, "homeless women are more likely to be sexually assaulted than women in the wider population and much more likely than homeless men to have experienced battery, rape, and psychological stress" (Takahashi, McElroy, Rowe 2002: 303). This, in turn, can become a risk factor in the lives of these women, putting them in a vulnerable position to other types of social hardship such as substance abuse, mental health diseases, and suicide attempts (Milaney et al. 2020). Homeless women also face serious challenges related to gender-specific health needs such as "gynaecological health, pregnancy, feminine hygiene, and sexually transmitted infections" (Milaney et al. 2020: 2). They also lack access to preventive care (e.g., prenatal, mammograms, or other tests), menstrual products, and contraceptives. Another major difference compared to men is that most homeless women are "single heads of families with the direct responsibility of children in their custody which is almost never the case for homeless men" (North & Smith 1993: 2). Having a child in custody implies many more responsibilities and challenges, making the experience of living in the streets qualitatively different from men.

Even though the parental role can help the woman to improve her self-perception and stimulate feelings of gratitude, motherhood during homelessness can be experienced by particular suffering and frustration, feeling responsible for the children's condition. This, again, demonstrates how different experiencing homelessness can be for the two genders and suggest the need to apply different solutions to them.

4. Structural violence

> *People aren't choosing to be homelessness – we are making it impossible for all*
> *people to earn a living wage and to be able to afford adequate health care.*
> *There are structures in place [...]*
> (NCH 2018: 8)

The precarious situation homeless people live in exposes the community to a wide variety of crimes. Physical and psychological violence are the most men-

tioned type of violence towards homeless people, but one should not forget to mention the importance of structural violence in this community, which creates and helps to perpetuate the homelessness condition. According to D.D. Winter and D.C. Leighton (2018), structural violence can be defined as:

> "Whenever people are disadvantaged by political, legal, economic or cultural traditions." Because they are longstanding, structural inequities usually seem ordinary, the way things are and the way things always have been (…), "structural violence is the result of societal systems, such as social stratification, that have been in place for years – systems that create situations where people don't have access to the things required to fulfil their basic human needs" (NCH 2018: 8).

Regarding homeless people, several legal, political, and infrastructural aspects lead to the ongoing structural violence and build the ground for homelessness: the de-investment in social support systems, the rise of housing prices, the lack of job opportunities, and low medical and political attention (NCH 2018: 8). Furthermore, local prohibitions for homeless people from sleeping in parks, under bridges or in train stations lead to discrimination, stipulated by law. Thus, as described above, the homeless community is a victim of occasional violent crimes and a permanent victim of the underpinning structures of our society. This enlightens why hate crimes against homeless people are often not reported or quickly forgotten. As the social status of homeless people is on the lowest side of the scale, the general and political interest in their wellbeing is rather little (NCH 2018: 7). In the words of the NCH: "The more we criminalize, the more we dehumanize, and the more the direct violence this vulnerable population faces on a daily basis is socially acceptable by third party community members and our municipals, county, state and federal governments" (NCH 2018: 18).

It is worth mentioning that violence towards homeless people has been materialized through the criminalization of their daily actions as well. Anti-homelessness legislation, allied with hostile architecture, restricts the homeless community's daily activities and is being adopted by several countries around the globe, being on a regional scale, as happens in the United States of America or on a national level, as happens in Hungary. Anti-homelessness legislation consists of prohibitions to punish homeless people or those who help them, such as local volunteers. These measures prohibit the homeless from begging for money and food or sleeping and staying in public spaces, established by the authorities (O'Sullivan 2012). In the United States, for example, the Las Vegas City Coun-

cil prohibited distributing food in public parks to homeless people, leading to the arrest of two women accused of distributing free meals, as this action was against the law (Mitchell 2020).

Taking a look at European Union countries, Hungary is the one that stands out, as it is the only country of the Union that enshrined in the Constitution the illegality of sleeping on the streets. After several attempts, by local and regional authorities, of restricting homeless actions, such as begging and sleeping or residing in public places that the Hungarian Constitutional Court was able to push back (Bence & Udvarhelyi 2013), the Seventh Amendment of the Fundamental Law of Hungary (2018) established the prohibition residing in public spaces (Venice Commission 2021).[1]

4.1 Hostile architecture vs. Homeless people: How can public space architecture foster homeless victimization?

> *No person should ever have to sleep rough or be forced to carry out life-sustaining activities in public spaces. Unfortunately, some homeless people are forced into just these situations. (...) When people have no alternative, they should not be penalised or criminalised because they have nowhere to sleep, pass their time during the day, or cannot engage in active employment.*
>
> (FEANTSA 2015: 2)

In our society, individuals have various perceptions of public space. Some individuals conceive the latter simply as a place that is open and accessible to the general public, while others – such as the homeless community – perceive it with a different connotation. Why does this happen? The question is complex, but one of the factors for this is the dual use of public space. For an unhoused person, such spaces are indeed used differently from regular citizens. They are perceived as places where they can rest and perform private activities (e.g., washing, sleeping, eating, etc.). In other words, for the homeless population, the public space is not only public, but it becomes a private place because it is employed for performing many of the activities of their private sphere (Pospěch 2020). Hence, there is an overlapping of the public and private realms. When refereeing to the homeless people's victimization process one should take into consid-

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[1]   Council of Europe - European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), *Hungary - Fundamental Law (prior to the Ninth Amendment, adopted on 15 December 2020)*, 3 June 2021, CDL-REF(2021)046. https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2021)046-e [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

eration several layers of discrimination. These layers might directly target the homeless community and other marginalized groups being visible to the public eye. Yet, not all of them are acknowledged by the public, one of these examples is the hostile architecture found on display in the public space. Nonetheless, being visible or not, these different layers of discrimination have a decisive objective: to remove homeless people from the public space. The removal of these citizens will turn the community invisible to the rest of society. As Laco Toušek and Lenka Strnadová concluded:

> Public space in a modern capitalist society is not necessarily an inclusive space for all individuals regardless of identity and social status but is actually a space for cultural conflict, social control of diversity and its repression and the perpetuation of injustice and inequality (Toušek & Strnadová 2016: 202).

The phenomenon of removing homeless people aims to turn cities into clean and appealing spaces. These attitudes by governmental identities, being local, regional, or even nationwide, are driving homeless people even further into exclusion, as they are treated as burdens by not fitting in the ideal picture of public space. In their research, Laco Toušek and Lenka Strnadová (2016) mention tolerance as the main driving factor behind this:

> Tolerance will always have limits [...] society will only allow for certain values, actions, and behaviour that are aligned with the wishes of the majority, creating a homogeneous public sphere and systematically disqualifying modes of action typically linked to individuals with minority identities (Toušek & Strnadová 2016: 214).

Further in their research, the authors interviewed several Czech citizens who claimed they do not feel comfortable with homeless people's presence on the streets as "Homeless pester others with their dirtiness, odor and begging. They are also said to pollute their surroundings by sleeping and urinating there, becoming intoxicated and having dogs." (Toušek & Strnadová 2016: 12).

These views shared by regular citizens and business owners create the perfect opportunity to develop mechanisms to exclude the homeless from the public space (FEANTSA 2015). This process has two ways: (1) The promulgation of specific legislation that will affect homeless people even if they aren't the intended target. Some of these laws found around Europe target other marginalized groups, such as drug addicts, but will affect homeless people directly since they are the group of people who spends more time in public

space. Not allowing people to spend the night at a bus station or to enter a train station without a valid ticket are examples of these restrictions. As mentioned on the previous section, Hungary has enshrined in the Constitution the prohibition of residing in public spaces. This kind of discriminatory legislation is found in other European countries, for example Denmark's Criminal Code punishes the act of beginning with imprisonment up to 6 months.[2] These legislation affects all marginalized and vulnerable groups, including the homeless community. (2) Removing existing objects from the public space, such as benches on bus stops, or adding an extra element to an already existing object, such as seat dividers on benches or spikes on the edge of windows and doors not allowing anyone to rest.

By definition, hostile architecture is the synonym for "the design of public space in a way that stops unwanted behaviour."[3] This definition is by the Cambridge dictionary, but a similar one can be found in every other dictionary, noting that hostile architecture is often mentioned as defensive architecture. Hostile architecture is materialized in small changes, almost invisible to the common eye. Nonetheless, it exerts enormous pressure on homeless people as their resources become scarce. If we pay attention to our surroundings, we will find small elements that we have never analyzed their structure. Hence, we do not imagine how their design can impact someone's life. The most common example given by academics is the public benches.

Rosenberg (2017), in his book *Callous Objects: Design against the homeless*, made some interesting points. He defined a bench as multistable, which means benches have multiple functions: a bench "provides a place to sit"; is used by joggers that "lean against beaches to do stretches," but is also used by unhoused people because it "is something that affords sleep." When governmental identities decide to change the benches' structure, by adding divisors, changing their construction material or making them higher and reclined, it still provides a place to sit and stretch, but will no longer be used as a place to sleep and spend the night (Figure 1).

The author continues his analysis by mentioning the design of public garbage bins. Garbage bins' designs are, for most people, irrelevant. Bins' aesthetics matter in the sense of fitting or not in the environment they are included, but for someone without a home, the design is important (Figure 2). Garbage

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[2]   Criminal Code, Order No. 909 of September 27, 2005, as amended by Act Nos. 1389 and 1400 of December 21, 2005, C-22, § 197. https://europam.eu/data/mechanisms/PF/PF%20Laws/Denmark/Denmark_Criminal_Code_2005.pdf [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

[3]   "Hostile Architecture", in *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hostile-architecture [Accessed: June 10, 2024].

Figure 1: Leaning benches in Rome, Italy – picture taken by G. Melloni.

bins are a source of food and the waste found there can be recycled and "traded in for a modest income" (Rosenberg 2017). But if this access is no longer viable, then this is no longer an opportunity to find something to eat or something that can be exchanged for money.

Figure 2: Garbage bin with a small opening in Cascais, Portugal – picture taken by C. Ferreira.

Cara Chellew (2019) identified other elements used to prevent people from sleeping in public spaces, such as anti-skate elements, but what is more interesting about her analyses is what she calls "ghost amenities." The author is referring to "washrooms and water fountains" commonly present in public spaces, but that are "absent due to disrepair, reduced operation, or intentional omission" (Chellew 2019: 23). Their non-existence jeopardizes the already precarious life of a homeless person since they rely on these elements as a way of keeping themselves washed and clean. Other elements mentioned by several authors include spikes used in benches, on walls, and on doorsteps (Figure 3) to prevent people from sleeping there and "automated water sprinklers in parks and other spaces homeless or indigent people are known to inhabit" (Petty 2016: 74).

Figure 3: Metallic structure on the window frame in Lisbon, Portugal – picture taken by C. Ferreira.

4.2 Statistics on crimes against homeless people

> *Because the homeless community is treated so poorly in our society,*
> *many attacks go unreported, and people who are homeless are far more likely*
> *to be the victims of violent crime than the general population.*
>
> (NCH 2018: 4)

Having a look at the statistics can be a useful tool to better understand why homeless people can be seen as non-ideal victims. As crimes against homeless people are often not reported or not of huge interest in society and in the media, as we will see later, the extent of the violence is often underestimated. The Statistics which will be shown are descended from a survey of Bias-Motivated Violence against Homeless people, an official report of the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH). The numbers refer to crimes that happened from 1999-2017 in the United States of America. The information is taken from various sources, from national and local news reports to personal reports (NCH 2018: 5). According to the report, in the 18 years between 1999-2017, there have been 1,769 reported acts of violence committed against homeless people (NCH 2018: 4). The crimes vary from different forms of violence, such as murder, beating, rape, and mutilation. Due to the reports, there have been 476 deaths. While the intentions of these crimes vary from a huge range of motives and cannot always be verified, in many cases the main motive was the bias against the victims' housing status and their consequently vulnerable position (NCH 2018: 5). Most of the victims were male (83%), and 69% of the victims were over the age of 40 (NCH 2018: 11). The majority of the offenders, on the other side, were mostly male and under the age of 30.

As mentioned before, the actual numbers of crimes against homeless people are most likely to be a lot higher. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, only 44% of violent victimizations were reported to the police in the year 2016 (NCH 2018: 4). An explanation is given by the NCH: "Because the homeless community is treated so poorly in our society, many attacks go unreported, and people who are homeless are far more likely to be the victims of violent crime than the general population" (NCH 2018: 4). Therefore, it can be supposed that the crime rate against homeless people is a lot higher. In other words, even if crimes against homeless people happen regularly, the information basis and the presence in the media are scarce. This inevitably reflects the social status homeless people have in our society and the general disinterest in their living conditions. That is, according to society, homeless people do not fit well in the collective notion of "victims" and therefore they are not worthy of social sympathy and deserve the victim status.

4.3 The case of Kelly Tomas

The case of Kelly Thomas is a striking example of how homeless people are perceived as non-ideal victims. Kelly Thomas was a homeless man who was born on April 5th, 1974, in a little town called Fullerton in California. He suffered from underdiagnosed schizophrenia. During the period between 1990 and 2011, he had 92 encounters with the police, ranging from minor infractions to armed assaults. It is unknown how long he lived exactly as a homeless person, but it is most likely that it was for several years. On July 5, 2011, when Kelly Thomas was 37 years old, he was beaten up by the local police with such a high intensity that he died from the injuries five days later. On that day, a manager of a bar in Fullerton informed the police about vandalism across the street – but according to investigations, the manager was worried about Thomas loitering in the bar's parking spot (Tanner 2020). The contention between the police and Kelly Thomas soon got really violent. In a long and brutal security-camera video on YouTube, one can see how Thomas is hardly beaten up by six members of the Fullerton Police Department. They use a taser on him, beat and kick him while stretching his arms behind his back. Even though in the beginning, the unarmed Thomas doesn't behave cooperatively with the police, he doesn't show any attempts of aggression and remains sitting most of the time. During the violence of the police, you can hear him screaming for help and for his father. After the beating, police officers claimed Thomas to have been violent and aggressive (Tanner 2020). Before writing the report, officers were allowed to see the video. Furthermore, none of the police officers were actually found guilty of the incident – charges were either dropped or they were acquitted.

As a consequence of the incident, some reforms in the Fullerton city government were taken – after the incident became higher attention of the public. For example, non-police professionals were instructed in Fullerton to deal with homelessness and mental illness (Tanner 2020). In general, the incident started a public discussion about how to handle homeless and mentally ill people. Nevertheless, in most cities in California, there are still law-enforcements against homeless people, giving police officers reasons to approach homeless people for insane reasons (Tanner 2020). The example of Kelly Thomas shows the notion of the Non-Ideal victim, as we discussed before: Being in a vulnerable position without any possibility to offend himself and into the bargain suffering under mental illness, he became a victim of the abuse of power of the police officers. Nevertheless, the fact of being homeless and his encounters with the police before, prevent him to be considered an Ideal-Victim.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the concept of the ideal victim and non-ideal victim, this chapter aimed to uncover the dangerous and concerning living conditions that affect people experiencing homelessness. Despite the limited information available about the unhoused, the findings have suggested that in today's society homelessness is still perceived as a condition to be blamed for rather than a product of social inequalities and structural violence. Based on these perceptions and stereotypes, homeless people go through a process of dehumanization which prevents them to be identified as victims. As such, they do not fit well into the priorities of the public agenda and therefore inadequate support is provided to help them break away from their condition. Limited research and scholarly attention, hostile architecture, violence, and crimes are all elements that reflect how homeless people are poorly treated by society. This is something that seems to be reinforced by the current Covid-19 pandemic and the scarce attention that has been given to the unhoused. Notwithstanding the high risk of infection due to their delicate health conditions and the difficult access they have to medical services people experiencing homelessness are still treated as invisible victims (Bohannon et al. 2020).

For the very end of this chapter, we would like to conclude with the following citation:

> We must begin to acknowledge our un-housed neighbours and affirm our shared humanity. Try to smile and say hello as you pass someone you believe to be homeless. Ask the person their name and share yours's. [...] With compassionate and just policy change, we can end the direct violence our homeless community faces on a daily basis and begin to correct the structural violence that created endemic homelessness (NCH 2018: 19-20).

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Epilogue: Toward a Public Victimology

Susanna Vezzadini

> And now it is your turn to beat you, youth of the world; be uncompromising about the duty to love. Laugh at those who will talk to you about prudence, about convenience, who will advise you to keep the right balance. The greatest misfortune that can befall you is that you are of no use to anyone. And that your life will be make no sense.

These are the famous, oft-quoted words addressed to young people by Raoul Follereau, a French journalist and philanthropist, known for his tireless battle against leprosy and especially the stigma it carries for millions of men and women around the world, condemned to suffering and shame "by our ignorance and cowardice" even before the disease, as he would assert many times. A convinced pacifist, of Christian-Catholic training but soon a leader of an ecumenism without frontiers, in his speeches to the multitudes of young people who followed him everywhere, he loved to remind them how in the face of humanity's sufferings, as the outcome of prevarications and violence, persecutions and despotism, no one had the right to be silent or rest: "neither you, nor I".

    These words, which as a girl I much loved to repeat and repeat to myself, came back to my mind as I worked on the writing of this book. It grew out of a singular experience: that of classroom discussion with students in my *Power relations and victimization processes* course, within the Second Cycle Degree in International Relations, Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna. This teaching, within the academic curriculum "Crime, Justice and Security," has for years now attracted students from many European countries but also from the Americas, Africa and Asia, and the Australian continent, be-

ing chosen by young people on study mobility programs such as Erasmus + or Overseas; thus, coming from realities that are geographically distant from each other as well as sometimes very distant at the socio-political, economic and cultural levels. Young people who, exactly like those to whom Follereau addressed, are curious about the world, they travel through it eager to know, to confront themselves with it; passionate young people, never indifferent, concerned about the fate of the planet on which they live and the species that inhabit it. Young people often engaged in social activities, able to dedicate themselves to those who have received less from life: homeless people, prisoners, migrants camped at the borders. Young people who believe in the importance of dialogue, who strive for a more just world respectful of men and women, as well as flowers and animals, who ask to be heard when in the face of the suffering of the other, of entire peoples violated and trampled, they forcefully call for peace.

So it is with these students that we met in the classroom, physically and ideally, starting with the themes addressed during the semester course: who is the victim, what about the characteristics of victimization processes in contemporary societies, the dynamics that lead to the social construction of a role (often neither comfortable nor easy to play), the presence of multiple stereotypes (and prejudices) in this context, political and media representations of victimization, public reactions when faced with the suffering of the other, the goals and effectiveness of the (few) prevention and support policies in the field... and much more. An encounter, and a debate, that was intense and stimulating as each person in the classroom has – or had already – encountered the victim: in the daily news, sometimes during studies previously carried out, less frequently (but not so infrequently, to say the truth...) directly in personal relationships and in their own existence. The classroom has thus become, repeatedly over the years, a place of confrontation, exchange of viewpoints and opinions, elaboration of notions and concepts but also of individual and mutual enrichment, a moment of reflection "out loud", a place where we have put ourselves on the line setting aside personal and cultural preconceptions to meet the other's gaze. A confrontation that took place by employing a common language, English, hardly ever the mother tongue for participants coming from very distant realities and latitudes, but nevertheless a privileged and ductile vehicle for observations, analyses, comments.

In this perspective it may be useful to remember that exactly the term "lesson" (from the Latin noun *lectio*, that means choice, but also selected reading and thus lesson, and again from the verb *legĕre*, to grasp, to choose and thus to read) allows, thanks to the Greek etymon *légein*, a further lexical deepening by referring not only to the act of choosing and selecting but, above all, to that of gathering and putting together. Thus, the lesson is the context in which

one gathers, and gathers around someone who exercises a specific function, the teacher. This gathering takes place voluntarily, exercising a twofold important choice: with respect to the topic on which to debate, and with respect to being there, to one's participation, to letting oneself be involved. The lecture becomes a kind of "rallying call around knowledge", as the Italian jurist and writer Gustavo Zagrebelski puts it, a public act of the word being addressed to the people gathered around. Although listening is certainly essential, participants are not mere recipients of utterances, information, notions and concepts; on the contrary, their voices are important, as are their perspective, the way they look at social and relational phenomena. From this point of view, the lecture becomes a "fermentative moment," configuring itself as a place of free expression of knowledge, a moment "rich with the satisfaction, if not of discovering new things, at least of touching things already done and said countless times, but of touching them with one's own hands and mind" (Zagrebelski 2022: 46, translated by the Author).

During the course of *Power relations and victimization processes*, a significant part of it was devoted to the writing and classroom presentation of a paper, produced in small groups, on the topic of the social construction of the victim's role, and in particular on the concept of "ideal victim." Or rather: on the juxtaposition between this notion and the condition of "real victims," i.e., all those who, despite experiencing situations of suffering caused by the violation of fundamental rights, abuse, forms of marginalization and discrimination, or even expulsion from the social context, are not recognized by society, not meeting the social expectations inherent in the victim condition as represented in a given context, in a certain historical time. Such denial, as is well known, invests many dimensions of living within a community, affecting the way political attention is concretely declined, the presence of policies of intervention and support in favor of victims; the forms assumed by the media narrative in the face of the suffering of others and the ways in which public opinion reacts; the ways in which the criminal justice system treats victims and constructs pathways aimed at their protection, the affirmation of truth and justice, and their recognition.

The working groups were built directly by the teacher in an attempt to give rise to spaces of elaboration and confrontation capable of taking into account the antecedent study and experiential paths of the students involved, as well as inevitably the historical-political and cultural complexity of the current moment. Thus realizing open, critical and international "territories of dialogue" – in the spirit of the course –, in which to bring together different looks at the surrounding reality. Different glances always sensitive, attentive, ready to question and reflect on the social roots of the suffering of the other, that is to say on our

own responsibility. The groups, from year to year thus constituted, were able to choose, in total autonomy, the topic on which to measure themselves and work together, particularly with respect to the case study to be discussed and presented in the classroom, with regard to their own scientific and cultural interests. So the volume collects, in the second part, some of the papers presented during four academic years (from 2020 to 2023), among those considered particularly original and valuable in relation to the chosen topics and the dissertation of the case study. They have, of course, been revised and partly modified to meet new editorial requirements, while remaining consistent with the significance of the critical path taken in class.

By tearing down the walls that surrounded us and expanding figuratively the limited spaces in which we met and gathered for several times a week during the mentioned years, our classroom became a perfect "place of vibrations and resonances" (Zagrebelski 2022: 86, translated by the Author). Here, each person's knowledge and experiential background have been nourished by the gaze of others, learning to recognize – but also to express and accompany – our multiple, often ambivalent emotions toward victims, toward those who suffer an offense and do not always have a voice, or sufficient strength, to affirm it, to be believed. In this sense, perhaps I can say today that our classes – without seeking it and probably not even being aware of it – have represented a small, preliminary and clearly incomplete "political" core in the original sense of the term, a small agglomeration of people, students and teacher, who have tried together to tell each other, while lecturing, the society they would like: more respectful, just and responsible; even more compassionate, free and courageous. Indeed, these are the words that run through the stories told in these pages. As Zagrebelski states again:

> The construction of a class can be seen as a prefiguration, a promise, an image of the society we want to build, competitive, discriminatory, violent, or cooperative, egalitarian, friendly. So, either way, for better or worse, it is a contribution to the work of social edification. In a sense, it is a political building block (Zagrebelski 2022: 82, translated by the Author).

Here then, as I set out to conclude, the experience together with the students of the *Power relations and victimization processes* course can, in my view, also be understood as an interpretive activity and at the same time an operational mode capable of bridging the gap existing today between the study of victims in the field of social sciences, or the academia, and the public sphere. In particular within the political and media discourse on victims, which is not infrequently

marked by false myths and prejudices, misleading representations of victimization, and the search for approval and consensus rather than true compassion and willingness to intervene. It is an experience that, precisely with this volume, aims to step out of the classrooms of the academy to address society, offering reflective critical contributions to deepen and enrich the debate on the recognition of victims within a more just society. A "civilized" and "decent" society, as Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit (1996) recalled while seeking a dialogue of peace together with the Palestinian people, even in these tragic and overwhelming times of war and pain: a society whose institutions do not humiliate the people under their authority, and whose citizens do not humiliate one another.

In this sense, there is now more than ever a need for a Public Victimology that – without ignoring its limitations and complexities, as already in the debate on Public Criminology – knows how to make available to governments and policy makers new lenses through which to grasp, analyze, understand and explain the social roots of victimization processes, their implications for the individual and the community, offering the possibility of reasoning beyond ideological fences about concrete interventions and support to victims, on the implementation tools to prevent and contrast victimization.

A *public* victimology because of common interest, addressed to the community, available to all, able to express a shared knowledge. At the center of this new course, the authentic, non-instrumental nor discriminatory recognition of every victim as a subject – individual, group or social category – who is in a condition of suffering. A suffering with respect to which society cannot be said to be irresponsible or indifferent, if we want each person's life – our life – finally makes sense.

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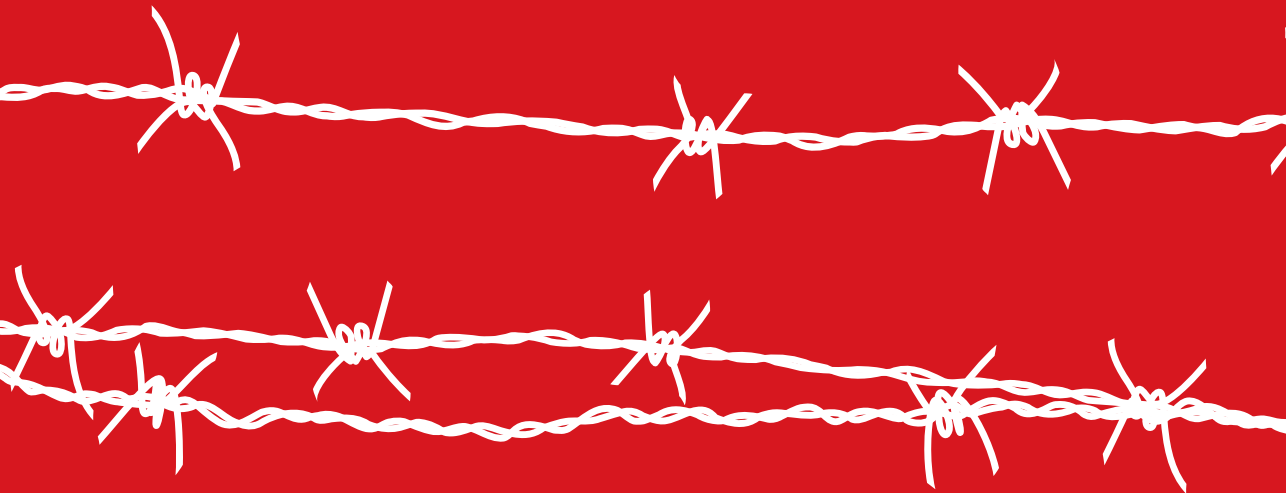Email: sara.tanan@hotmail.it

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After a long period in which victims of crime, abuse and violence fell into forgetfulness, in more recent times they have largely redeemed themselves from that oblivion thanks to the growing social interest dedicated to their condition: their stories are often at the core of the judicial chronicles, open broadcast news and television specials, constitute a powerful appeal across the political spectrum, thus originating an extraordinarily articulated circularity among political and media attention, the purposes of the justice system, the curiosity of the public opinion. It is certainly an interesting process that, nevertheless, does not always concern all those who have been wronged, abused or are in condition of suffering due to wars, conflicts, catastrophes. On the contrary, there are subjects – categories, social groups – with respect to whom the application of the victim status is delayed or totally disregarded, because they are considered to be "lacking" the attributes perceived as fundamental to allow their recognition, this having important consequences in terms of supportive policies and their implementation. The volume asks exactly about the reasons for such disallowance referring to the underlying power dynamics and social relations, the repercussions for the lives of individuals and communities through the analysis of peculiar "case" studies, starting from the evidence that sees the notion of victim as a social construct. And therefore, focusing on the distinction between ideal victims and non-ideal victims, or real victims.

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€ 25,00