Martyrdom

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1. Definition

The concept of martyrdom refers to both a death endured in supposedly conscious acceptance of that fate or even out of a desire for that end and to the concomitant suffering by a person to attest a superior ideal or belief system. The activation of discourses on martyrdom hence primarily suggests a defeat. At the same time, however, such discourses constitute a powerful assertion of a position of strength and moral superiority. Constructing a martyr is therefore quintessentially the reinterpretation of a loser as a victor and hero.[1] For the individual seeking martyrdom, death constitutes a (seemingly unavoidable) means of finding final refuge and of self-defence. The community that remembers someone as a martyr therefore explains their death as the unjust suffering of an innocent person. On the one hand, invoking discourses on martyrdom reveals that those who make use of them perceive themselves as being in a position of weakness or vulnerability. On the other hand, death for a higher cause is a strong and unifying rallying cry for the bereaved. Hence the concept of martyrdom combines references to both strength and weakness and is rife with ambiguities.[2]

2. Explanation

In their societal manifestations, discourses on martyrdom are most concentrated around society's martyr figures. The understanding of the underlying concept of martyrdom varies greatly over societies, spaces and times. For instance notions regarding the martyr's passive or active disposition towards violence differ considerably – not just between religions, but also within the historical traditions of the different belief systems and denominations.[3] Therefore, to provide a more detailed theoretical definition of the concept of martyrdom on the one hand and to examine that concept from a cultural-studies perspective in order to determine the unique characteristics of singular notions of martyrdom on the other, a three-step approach seems appropriate: first, the phenomenon can be apprehended and delimited conceptually by examining the similarities and parallels of generalisable ideas of martyrdom. Second, the effect of the figure of the martyr, on which this concept is based, on societies must be described. Third, an examination of figures put forth as martyrs in their respective contexts can reveal specific ideas about martyrdom.

2.1. The concept of martyrdom

Martyrs suffer and die professedly for a belief system while simultaneously rejecting a competing belief system. Therefore, the underlying concept of martyrdom signals the strength of a specific belief. That signal appears unrivalled in its clarity, for only the true believer – according to the construct – will consider making the ultimate sacrifice of giving their life for their belief.[4] Further, at the moment of their death, the martyr radically articulates a specific form of superiority: the individual who chooses death escapes all forms of oppression. Thus, according to Popitz, the martyr develops the countervailing power to an authority by *having themself killed*:

> "The person [who] kills himself evades all subjection. Also the martyr sacrifices his life but does not take this last step by himself. He does not escape confrontation with power, but rather leads it to its extreme end. This entails something peculiar. The most extreme helplessness, insofar as it is borne, generates a power of its own, the counterpower of letting oneself be killed. The power holder can kill the martyr – he rules over his death – but cannot compel him to remain alive, to do something to preserve his life. This means he is no longer lord over life and death, having lost the lordship over the life of the other."[5]

By contrast, however, only those who consider themselves to be in a vulnerable situation or are in fact in an inferior position in the face of a competing belief system can invoke the entire power of the martyrdom concept. Freely dying for a generally established and recognised value that is above all not perceived to be threatened or vulnerable would be regarded as an unjust or even criminal act if the underlying deed led to the injury of innocent people. Alternatively, the self-sacrifice would be placed on a pathological spectrum, stretching from senseless idiocy to fanatical insanity. The case of Anders Breivik and the debates in Norway surrounding his mental state constitute a prominent example of the latter in recent history – even though he did not die during his attacks in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011 and therefore does not even meet the fundamental prerequisite of a martyr. Prior to his crimes, however, he himself invoked the concept of martyrdom and constructed a serious threat to society. In his feigned interview with himself, Breivik considers himself "in a situation with only two outcomes;

destruction of his own culture and existence or the salvation by his martyrdom and long-term victory, with the final victory in the year 2083".[6] However, since the majority of the Norwegian public did not accept the threat alleged by Breivik as fact, his mental state was instead quickly at the centre of public attention. His presumption to declare himself a martyr was taken as an indication of his pathological disorder.[7] His perceived struggle, even if he had died during his attacks, hence would have never entailed his being recognised as a martyr by these parts of society, irrespective of the question whether or not they shared Breivik's goals. Simply put, there was no serious threat at all for the society for which he professed to be championing. Since this threat is perceived as real by radical right-wing groups, however, his being esteemed as a martyr within those circles would have been entirely plausible.

Beyond the cases of agent-centred observation of perceived threats, the same logic also applies to discourses within belief systems and social orders: every social order would delegitimise itself if it expected self-sacrifice from its members on behalf of society without pointing out an existential threat to that order. The concept of martyrdom hence always bears an asymmetric logic in relation to the power structure prevailing in a given situation. This thought also correlates with the assertion that Western modernity is a post-heroic society that is no longer capable of attributing meaning and symbolism to death because the idea of the individual sacrificing their life in order to save the whole has purportedly become foreign to modernity owing to the erosion of the religious.[8]

In contrast, from the viewpoint of the pious believer, the argument can be made that only the judgment of the act of dying in the afterlife is decisive – both regarding the motives that led or are to lead the martyr to endure suffering and accept death as well as regarding the transcendental regime that presumably constitutes the reward for the deceased. In following this viewpoint further, the term martyrdom would hence appear detached from worldly power structures and the martyr would be expressly thought of only in relation to the transcendental regime to which they bear witness by willingly enduring the attendant pain and suffering – the etymology of the term *martyr* alone, i.e. witness, and of its Arabic equivalent, *shahid*, which can also be translated to mean witness, points to this. However, since there can be no concept of the afterlife from the religious perspective that would not be based on notions of how the believer's conduct regarding the challenges and needs of their specific community in life is to be judged, the hypothesis of martyrdom as an asymmetric phenomenon is certainly consistent with the religious argumentation as well. Therefore, suffering and dying for one's own faith can only make sense when the belief system in question is perceived to be under threat or endangered. Without pointing out the supposed desiderata of one's own society and, accordingly, an urgent threat, the religiously motivated construct of a consciously chosen or even desired death can only yield a nihilistic interpretation of the agent's motives – Farhad Khosrokhavar has coined the term "martyropathy" for such nihilistic manifestations in which death appears to be not the means to an end, but the *goal*.[9] Thus dying can even be deemed simply as an act of suicide, regardless of whether or not the agent's hopes are directed at the afterlife. It bears noting that such hopes must – again in religious terms – necessarily be disappointed as suicide is morally condemned in the three monotheistic world religions, Judaism, Christianity[10] and Islam, and therefore is not to be confused with the martyr's death.[11] However, this is contrasted by the glorification of the martyr and their function for the (faith) community:

> "Martyrdom is defined as a conscious attempt to embrace death for a personal or political cause. While it may appear as self-negation [...], martyrdom is often an act of self-aggrandizement to affirm the time-honored tradition of the community. Loyalty to communal tradition strengthens the personal and the communal sense of honor and consolidates cultural vitality and historical continuity. Thus through martyrdom the community regenerates itself."[12]

Finally, the delimitation between martyrdom and suicide thus becomes the question of a "noble or wretched death"[13] and thereby authoritatively determines the significance of the martyr figure for the living.

2.2. The martyr figure

To the person seeking martyrdom, the effect of their death initially seems entirely clear: martyr status guarantees an eternal, blissful afterlife.[14] It certainly bears mentioning, however, that such an assumption constitutes a reductionist view of only the possible interests of a soon-to-be martyr since it ultimately ignores all earthly motives of such individuals who are willing to sacrifice their lives for a greater cause, particularly in cases of 'merely' political martyrdom. These individuals may be in such despair as to simply no longer wish to live in this world; they might choose death out of sense of duty to their families or communities[15]; or they might regard their actions in life as political or religious obligations irrespective of all assumptions as to how life after death might be influenced by their worldly decisions. However, although these perspectives might intrinsically explain the symbolic power of such interests in the agent's belief system, examining them would not help in determining the sociological dimensions of martyrdom. That is to say, when we recognise that an individual can never fully control how their death will be judged by the bereaved, we cannot view martyr status as a self-evident fact or the result of an automatic reaction, rather simply as the outcome of social processes of attribution that is to be determined analogously to the mechanisms of heroization. And in these processes, the martyr is constructed as the figure that consciously accepts death and is allowed to hope for a reward in the afterlife – for only through such construction can the attribution of meaning to death take full effect for the living and, ideally, even provide comfort. Accordingly, the constructivist perspective of martyrdom taken here is not enquiring into the possible rewards in the afterlife, examining instead the effects of martyrdom on a community from a sociological viewpoint[16] in order to comprehend the persistence and revitalisation of the cult of the martyr in the present.

In sociological terms, however, death is not the result of martyrdom. On the contrary, martyrdom is a *possible* effect of the act of dying – specifically, the effect that follows the heroization of the act through the activation of martyrdom discourses. Thus, the point of departure for defining martyrdom is the death of an agent, while the path leading to that death becomes the anchor point for all narratives and constructions relating to that person's status as a martyr. Essentially, the invocation of martyrdom discourses leads to the reinterpretation of a loser as a winner and hero.[17] Their death is no longer a defeat, but a victory that has been embedded into a transcendent space-time structure[18] In this context, constructing a martyr by invoking martyrdom discourses can be viewed first and foremost as a narrative that gives meaning to the death of an agent in several respects, as

Pannewick states: "The myth of the heroic sacrifice thus has a dual, not to say double-edged function: it provides comfort and gives meaning, but it can also be instrumentalised as exhortation and for fighting inhumanely."[19]

Martyrdom as a concept is to be understood accordingly, while the posthumous title of martyr is to be regarded as a tribute to those who are viewed by the living as worthy of that concept (in the sense of the rivalry between the noble and wretched death). Any and all attempts made by the deceased during their lifetimes to control in advance how they are remembered are to be separate from this since the honour can be conferred only as a posthumous act. Thus, a society can bestow on someone whom it constructs as an agent having accepted or even consciously desired their death the title of martyr who with their death bore witness to a higher truth. Through their sacrifice, the martyr gives a transcendental value to the ideal for which they were allegedly willing to die. However, only when this sacrifice is recounted can it actively have an effect on society.[20] "For martyrdom to succeed there must be a martyr" – a requirement that generally becomes reality "through the hagiographical accounts of his or her suffering that allow the audience to relate to this suffering."[21]

Furthermore, through these accounts, the martyr becomes a figure in the space where two belief systems intersect. They are described as the one who gave the ultimate sacrifice in order to pay tribute to their own belief system and reject the other. "He or she will stand at the defining point where belief and unbelief meet – however these two categories are constructed in the minds of the martyr, the enemy, the audience and the writer of the historical-hagiographical narrative – and define the relationship between the two."[22]

From the viewpoint of the community of admirers, the realm of unbelief begins precisely where the suffering and death of a person is no longer recognised as martyrdom, but is instead either condemned as a base act or simply ignored. Thus, the martyr is a paradigmatic figure of boundary work that makes the blurred lines between belief systems visible – or even helps to define them in the first place. Additionally, with their life, a martyr creates not only borders between the systems, they also become an embodied definition of the nature of their own belief system. The martyr not only stands at the front against unbelief and injustices, the also become the symbol and conveyor of values and virtues of their own community. The term *victim* from the Latin *victima*, which in martyrdom accompanies the heroized self-sacrifice, Latin *sacrificium*, and is always implicitly invoked, connects the martyr with the moral standards of their society (cf. Typological Field of the Heroic regarding the term *victim*). Although it is a central aspect of all concepts of martyrdom that the martyr dies willingly and consciously in order to articulate their powerful message about the notion of *sacrificium*, the narrative encompassing that message must also always insist, because of the asymmetric logic of the concept described above, that things could have gone differently. The martyr could have survived. And above all: the martyr also *should* have survived. Hence, in reference to the ambiguous dimensions of martyrdom, the martyr is always framed in a discourse in which they are on the one hand granted agency (or, according to Popitz, the counterpower of *letting oneself be killed*) and that simultaneously underlines their victimhood. Consequently, not only are belief and unbelief distinguished through martyrdom, but also good and evil since every victimisation is ontologically linked to the innocence of the victim. Victims are created "through human action about which it could have been expected that it would have taken another direction", sociologist Bernhard Giesen states regarding his construct of the

ideal types of boundary work. He comes to the conclusion that the attribution of victimhood implies that the outcome of the underlying act is considered wrong and even must be perceived as avoidable.[23] Thus, according to Giesen, the discourse on victimisation is to be regarded ultimately as a social construct borne and simultaneously defined by the moral standards of a community, meaning that badness, or in fact evil, is centrally debated via this construct.[24] Discourses on martyrdom thereby regularly have a polarising social effect. They define not only the boundary between two belief systems, but also the notions of good and evil in paradigmatic fashion. As martyrdom presupposes that the other be represented as the bad of one's own community, martyrs themselves must be constructed in such a way that no doubt as to their purity and innocence arises. The binarisation of the discourses thus also has an effect on the martyrs directly: if their antagonists inescapably embody the evil in the world, they themselves must in return serve as the embodiment of the good and pure.

Consequently, the martyr *must* be depicted and represented using terms such as integrity and innocence, modesty and morality; they *must* be suited as the manifestation of the highest moral standards of their own community – for only then can the depravity of the competing community be demonstrated and thereby victimhood invoked to support the narrative. In this way, the dead who are heroized and remembered as martyrs take their place at the centre of societal discourses. They are to be regarded as liminal figures who communicate to the sacred core of a community. They are the ideal types of morality. This effect achieves its full impact all the more when the martyr's own system is imperilled and the martyr purportedly shows to the public that the threatened or subordinated belief system is worth dying for.[25] Thus, *irrespective* of the belief tradition or the cultural contexts in which the concept of martyrdom is invoked, the theoretical considerations about martyrdom confirm the asymmetric aspect discussed above, which finally renders the martyr figure a potent weapon in the struggle for interpretational authority over morality in societal disputes.

The multidimensional aspects of the martyr's contribution to the boundary work of societies mentioned here are summarised by Sasha Dehghani and Silvia Horsch in their introduction to *Martyrdom in the Modern Middle East* as follows:

> "As paradigmatic examples for others, the place assigned to the martyrs is the very centre of their communities; for that however, they also act in the border areas running between different religions and cultures. As such, martyr figures are not only agents of demarcation but at the same time of entanglement and mediation. This mediation occurs not only synchronously between different religious and cultural traditions but also diachronically between different eras which are, supposedly at least, to be clearly delimited from one another. The hybrid figure of the martyr calls into question the demarcations between pre-modern and modern as well as those between religion and the secular."[26]

2.3. Martyrdom compared between religions

Against the background of the asymmetric core to all notions of martyrdom, it is no coincidence that the conceptual history of martyrdom points primarily to its use and creation by religious communities that on the one hand were able to convey to believers an attractive idea of the afterlife and on the other hand in historical situations considered themselves surrounded by enemies who were able to claim hegemony over the routines of the mortal world. Apart from situational, modern manifestations

of secular discourses on "political martyrdom"[27], the concept of martyrdom revealed its entire power for example in early Christianity when the new religion faced persecution in the Roman Empire and focused directly on the example of Jesus Christ himself[28], but also during the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Europe of the 16th century as well as during the persecution of Christians in connection with the missionary efforts pursued primarily by Jesuits in Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries.[29] Finally, the concept of martyrdom is found in early Islam in the prominent hagiographical accounts in the Muslim minority context of the Shi'a. In the account of al-Husayn ibn Ali (626-680 CE), the martyred grandson of the prophet Muhammad, the story of the struggle of the weaker, but morally superior position against supposed oppression and tyranny can be found. According to Shiite tradition, al-Husayn is to have chosen death over life in Karbala when confronted by a superior enemy who represented the political and religious hegemony at the time. The history of the Battle of Karbala lastingly defined the notions behind the terms *shahid* (i.e. martyr) and *shahadat* (martyrdom) in the Islamic context (cf. Karbala paradigm). The figure of al-Husayn constitutes the central prefiguration for the heroization of the self-sacrifice in Islam that even Sunni discourses can reference in certain circumstances.[30]

However, apart from these parallels in a comparison of religions, significant differences particularly between concepts of martyrdom in Islam and Christianity have been identified again and again. Specifically, these differences focus on a slight inclination towards passivity in Christianity's fundamental notion of martyrdom and a presumedly active interpretation of same prevailing in Muslim societies. According to scholars, the latter ultimately indicates the glorification of the voluntary self-sacrifice in the militant conflict in these societies. It must be pointed out clearly that such interpretations do not represent any trans-historical constants within the particular religions and the notion of a passive (in Christianity) or active (in Islam) essence is untenable. On the contrary, in the internal discourses of each religion the respective interpretations are subject to change. This becomes obvious particularly when looking at concepts of martyrdom in Shi'a Islam, where the Karbala paradigm has proved to be a relatively flexible reservoir of symbols and in which the debated hagiographies of martyrs were interpreted through to the 1960s expressly as passive accounts emphasising the suffering of the agents.[31] Not until the reinterpretation processes during the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War did the Shi'a discourse shift towards active interpretation, not only of the ideal contemporary martyr, but also of the prefigurative Karbala paradigm.

3. Recent discourse history

It was precisely that shift in the course of the 20th century in concepts of martyrdom within societies moulded by Islam that resulted in numerous studies of supposed martyr cults in their respective societies with a pronounced focus on the use of the *martyr as a weapon*.[32] This increased interest traces back not least to numerous religiously motivated suicide attacks in conflicts throughout the world that strongly invoke martyrdom discourses – a process that hardly seems surprising when one considers the power of the asymmetric concept described herein and transfers that to the non-conventional and likewise strongly asymmetric conflicts of the post-colonial world. Accordingly, Leo Braudy states in his analysis of terrorist tactics:

"Terrorist tactics in general try to imply that all the high technology in the world cannot stop a determined enemy, even one armed only with primitive weapons, especially if it is psychologically bent on self-sacrifice. But the tactics of suicide bombers oddly resemble the changes in other conventional national armies in that they rely on small professional forces, in which semi-independent groups are the most effective combatants. The soldier is no longer a member of an actual army but of, at most, a small group, prepared carefully by his recruiters for certain death, binding a ritual cloth around his head and looking to a transcendent afterlife as his reward. All war has in effect become a suicide mission."[33]

It is therefore no wonder that terrorist groups throughout the entire world invoke the concept of martyrdom and present it both as a weapon of choice and as a final means of self-defence. In parallel to the rise of such terrorist activities in recent history, there is considerable academic production on the subjects of martyrdom, suicide missions and radicalism in modern Muslim societies.[34]

The example of the modern Middle East also shows that the concept of martyrdom has such subversive potential that it moulds even secular discourses on political resistance or self-sacrifice for a threatened society. Although politically motivated suicide is not a phenomenon limited to the Middle East[35], the explicit entanglement with discourses on martyrdom to which a religious and afterlife-related dimension is inherent paradigmatically shows the power of the concept. For example, the invocation of martyrdom led to a greater admiration of the self-sacrifice of guerrilla fighters of the Palestine Liberation Organization through rhetorical references to martyrdom already in the 1970s, at a time when the Palestinian struggle was predominantly secularly motivated. Such references to martyrdom were thus integrated into the routines of the PLO leadership.[36] As regards present societies moulded by Islam, the significance and the mobilising character of martyrdom is underlined by the fact that it has become a highly disputed issue of who has the authority to offer a legitimate definition of martyrdom and thus is capable of utilising the concept for their own cause. This is true for the dispute over the concept during the Turkish civil war in the 1970s[37] just as it is in currently ongoing processes in connection with the Islamic State.[38] Paradigmatic for this dispute, however, is arguably pre-revolutionary Iran when revolutionary Islamists appropriated the concept in a way that moulded the Iranian Revolution of 1978/79 to such an extent that it must also ultimately be labelled as an 'Islamic revolution' when referencing the 'martyrs of the movement'.[39] The mass events followed in particular the Shi'a mourning rhythm and thus referenced directly the presumed martyrdom of the Islamic activists. Martyrdom constitutes not only a powerful discursive concept. Due to the fact that people indeed choose death in order to articulate their convictions, it also has profound effects on the conflict itself to which it relates.

The history of martyrdom shows that where individuals died, moral valuations shifted; regimes were delegitimised through the confrontation with martyrs, while others attempted to establish their legitimacy by appropriating the concept.[40] The struggle for the legitimate use of the concept is therefore dialectically reflected in the struggle for hegemony: the power of martyrdom promises moral superiority, while vice versa the cult surrounding the martyr can only be sustained in a discursive setting of inferiority or vulnerability. Accordingly, martyrdom appears to be both the weapon of choice and the final means simultaneously. The logic of martyrdom demands a conflation of both: discourses on subversion and hegemony.

4. References

1   Pannewick, Friederike: "Sinnvoller oder sinnloser Tod? Zur Heroisierung des Opfers in nahöstlichen Kulturen". In: Conermann, Stephan / von Heer, Synrinx (Ed.): Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft. Historische Anthropologie. Vol. 1. Berlin 2007: EB-Verlag, 291-314, 310.

2   The considerations presented herein are in keeping with the observations on martyrdom in the editorial to the special issue of Behemoth "Martyrdom and the Struggle for Power in the Middle East". Cf. Gölz, Olmo: "Martyrdom and the Struggle for Power. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Martyrdom in the Modern Middle East". In: Behemoth 12.1 (2019), 2-13. DOI: 10.6094/behemoth.2019.12.1.1013.

3   A comparative study between Christianity and Islam that also examines historical transformations within religions can be found in Siebenrock, Roman A. / Cicek, Hüseyin Immanuel: "Zeuge und/oder Märtyrer. Klärungen aus der christlichen und muslimischen Tradition". In: Guggenberger, Wilhelm (Ed.): Im Wettstreit um das Gute. Annäherung an den Islam aus der Sicht der mimetischen Theorie. Wien 2009: LIT, 105-153. See also Kippenberg, Hans G.: Gewalt als Gottesdienst. Religionskriege im Zeitalter der Globalisierung. Bonn/München 2008: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung. See for the reinterpretation of a passive conception of martyrdom to an active understanding: Gölz, Olmo: "Martyrdom and Masculinity in Warring Iran. The Karbala Paradigm, the Heroic, and the Personal Dimensions of War". In: Behemoth 12.1 (2019), 44-45. DOI: 10.6094/behemoth.2019.12.1.1005.

4   Cf. Gambetta, Diego: "Can We Make Sense of Suicide Missions?" In: Gambetta, Diego (Ed.): Making Sense of Suicide Missions. Oxford/New York 2005: Oxford University Press, 266-267: "Martyrdom is as strong a signal of the strength of a belief as one can get: only those who hold their beliefs very dear can contemplate making the ultimate sacrifice of dying for them."

5   Popitz, Heinrich: Phenomena of Power. Authority, Domination, and Violence. Transl. Gianfranco Poggi. New York 2017: Columbia University Press, 37.

6   Leonard, Cicilia H. / Annas, George D. / Knoll, James L. / Tørrissen, Terje: "The Case of Anders Behring Breivik – Language of a Lone Terrorist". In: Behavioral Sciences and the Law 32 (2014), 408-422, 412. DOI: 10.1002/bsl.2117.

7   Leonard et al.: "The Case of Anders Behring Breivik", 2014, 412-413: "The themes of the Knights Templar, martyrdom, and Breivik's interview with himself were all considered by the first team [of psychiatrists] as part of his grandiosity, which they attribute to delusion. They recognized 'general enemy concept, paranoia and grandeur' in 'the intensity of the subject's war terminology and his experience and description of being in a war.'"

8   Münkler, Herfried: "Heroische und postheroische Gesellschaften". In: Bohrer, Karl Heinz / Scheel, Kurt (Eds.): Kein Wille zur Macht. Dekadenz. (= Merkur 61.8/9 [2007]) Stuttgart 2007, 742-752, 742: "Because the notion of the sacrifice of laying down one's life in order to save the whole can hardly be conceived without reference to religion, heroic societies commonly have a religious core. To phrase it differently: the erosion of the religious fosters the development of post-heroic dispositions. Political religions in Eric Voegelin's sense must also be ascribed this religious core: ideologies, that is, bind societies and communities together and furnish them with symbols that transform a mere death in a struggle into a heroic sacrifice. Only societies capable of attributing meaning and symbolism to death can be understood as heroic societies. [...] It is not the blood sticking to their weapons that makes a warrior a hero, rather their willingness to sacrifice

themselves so that others will be saved." ("Weil die Idee des Opfers, bei dem einer sich hingibt, um das Ganze zu retten, ohne Religionsbezug schwerlich gedacht werden kann, haben heroische Gesellschaften zumeist einen religiösen Kern. Oder anders formuliert: Die Erosion des Religiösen befördert die Entwicklung postheroischer Dispositionen. Diesem religiösen Kern sind auch die politischen Religionen im Sinne Eric Voegelins zuzurechnen: Ideologien also, die Gesellschaften wie Gemeinschaften zusammenschweißen und sie mit Symboliken versorgen, die den bloßen Tod im Kampf in ein heroisches Opfer verwandeln. Nur Gesellschaften, die über diese Fähigkeit zur sinnhaft-symbolischen Aufladung des Todes verfügen, können als heroischen Gesellschaften begriffen werden. […] Nicht das Blut, das an seinen Waffen klebt, macht den Krieger zum Helden, sondern seine Bereitschaft zum Selbstopfer, durch das andere gerettet werden.")

9 Khosrokhavar, Farhad: Suicide Bombers. Allah's New Martyrs. London 2005: Pluto Press, 60: "Martyrdom, just like heroism, means sacrificing one's life for an ideal that is more important than life. To that extent, martyrdom is no more irrational than other types of devotion and, in the eyes of its actors, the martyr's demands cannot be described as pathological. Martyropathy is the result of an inversion born of ressentiment. The goal is no longer to realise an ideal, but to take leave of life by destroying the enemy in an apocalyptic vision that will put an end to life. Acceptance of the logic of martyrdom subordinates the death of both martyr and enemy to the realisation of a goal that will put an end to injustice, establish fairness and bring happiness to the whole world (or community). There is no fascination with death, no luxuriating in death and no quest for happiness in and through death. Martyropathy begins with a change of meaning: a deadly logic takes over from the logic governing the struggle for life and the pursuit of a frustrated ideal."

10 Thomas Macho sees in the radical reinterpretation of suicide a defining moment of modernity. For the construction of suicide as one of the central sins in the past centuries, however, he writes: "For many centuries, suicide was considered a grave sin, even a 'double murder' of both soul and body; a crime that was severely punished, not just through mutilation and hasty burial of the corpse, but also by seizure of family assets for example; at minimum, however, it was regarded as an effect of madness and as a sickness. While suicide could still be associated with honour in Antiquity, by no later than the beginning of the hegemony of the Christian religion, it seemed a disgrace and the ultimate failure." ("Viele Jahrhunderte lang wurde der Suizid als schwere Sünde, sogar als 'Doppelmord' – nämlich an Seele und Körper –, als Verbrechen, das streng bestraft wurde, nicht allein durch Verstümmelung und Verscharrung der Leichen, sondern beispielsweise auch durch Beschlagnahmung des Familienvermögens, zumindest aber als Effekt des Wahnsinns und als Krankheit bewertet. Während der Suizid noch in der Antike mit Ehre assoziiert werden konnte, erschien er spätestens seit Beginn der Herrschaft der christlichen Religion als Schande und finales Versagen.") Macho, Thomas: Das Leben nehmen. Suizid in der Moderne. Berlin 2017: Suhrkamp, 7.

11 Pannewick, Friederike: Opfer, Tod und Liebe. Visionen des Martyriums in der arabischen Literatur. München 2012: Fink, 54.

12 Dorraj, Manochehr: "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition. Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture". In: The Review of Politics 59.3 (1997), 489-521, 490.

13 Cf. Pannewick: Opfer, Tod und Liebe, 2012, 39.

14 Khosrokhavar, Farhad: Radicalization. Why Some People Choose the Path of Violence. New York 2017: The New Press, 86.

15 Cf. Gambetta: "Can We Make Sense", 2005, 270: "All agents who intentionally die in an SM [suicide

mission] have a major trait in common: although their action can be based on wrong or irrational beliefs, they see themselves, and are often seen by their group, as altruists. All SMs belong to a family of actions in which people go to the extremes of self-sacrifice in the belief that by doing so they will best further the interests of a group or the cause they care about and identify with. This family of self-sacrificial actions has several members, among them religious martyrdom, self-immolation, hunger strikes, and war heroism – actions that humans have carried out since biblical times. While all of these actions involve being prepared to give up one's life, some of them involve at the same time the killing of others. Even though we instinctively think of altruism as doing purely good deeds, altruism and aggression are not antithetical – in warfare you risk your life to help kin, comrades, and country also by killing enemies."

16 Kraß, Andreas / Frank, Thomas: "Sündenbock und Opferlamm – der Märtyrer aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht". In: Kraß, Andreas (Ed.): Tinte und Blut. Politik, Erotik und Poetik des Martyriums. Frankfurt a. M. 2008: Fischer, 8: "How does one speak about martyrs appropriately? There are two possible perspectives: the ideological from within and the academic from without. Anyone who chooses the first perspective will decide based on criteria provided to them by their religious convictions who is a true martyr and venerate him or her. Those on the other hand who take the second viewpoint will examine the discourses, practices and institutions that interact to form 'martyrs'. The choice thus consists in an 'essentialist' position that seeks the sacred being and essence of the martyr and in a 'constructivist' position that analyses the strategies of creating and (self-)assigning the martyr role." ("Wie spricht man angemessen über Märtyrer? Zwei Perspektiven sind denkbar: die weltanschauliche Innensicht und die wissenschaftliche Außensicht. Wer die erste Perspektive wählt, wird aufgrund der Kriterien, die ihm seine religiösen Überzeugungen an die Hand geben, entscheiden, wer ein wahrer Märtyrer ist, und ihm Verehrung zollen. Wer die zweite Perspektive einnimmt, wird hingegen die Diskurse, Praktiken und Institutionen untersuchen, in deren Zusammenspiel 'Märtyrer' hervorgebracht werden. Die Wahl besteht somit zwischen einer 'essentialistischen' Position, die nach dem Heiligen Sein und Wesen des Märtyrers fragt, und einer 'konstruktivistischen' Position, die die Strategien der Herstellung und (Selbst-)Zuweisung der Märtyrerrolle analysiert.")

17 Pannewick: "Sinnvoller oder sinnloser Tod", 2007, 310.

18 Pannewick: "Sinnvoller oder sinnloser Tod", 2007, 310.

19 Pannewick: "Sinnvoller oder sinnloser Tod", 2007, 310. In the original: "Der Mythos des heroischen Opfers hat also eine doppelte, um nicht zu sagen zweischneidige Funktion: Er spendet Trost und stiftet Sinn, aber er lässt sich auch zu Durchhalteparolen und für menschenverachtende Kampfeinsätze instrumentalisieren."

20 Pannewick: Opfer, Tod und Liebe, 2012, 21.

21 Cook, David: Martyrdom in Islam. Cambridge 2007: Cambridge University Press, 1.

22 Cook: Martyrdom in Islam, 2007, 2.

23 Giesen, Bernhard: Triumph and Trauma. Boulder, Colorado 2004: Paradigm, 46. In the original: "[…] durch menschliches Handeln hervorgebracht, von dem man hätte erwarten können, dass es eine andere Richtung eingeschlagen hätte."

24 Giesen: Triumph and Trauma, 2004, 46.

25 Cook: Martyrdom in Islam, 2007, 2.

26 Dehghani, Sasha / Horsch, Silvia: "Introduction". In: Dehghani, Sasha / Horsch, Silvia (Eds.):

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27   Cf. for example the initiation of martyrdom discourses in revolutionary Cuba. Guerra, Lillian: Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs in Revolutionary Cuba, 1946–1958. New Haven 2018: Yale University Press.

28   Bowersock, G. W.: Martyrdom and Rome. Cambridge 2002: Cambridge University Press, 54; Cf. regarding *imitatio Christi* Aurnhammer, Achim / Steiger, Johann Anselm (Eds.): Christus als Held und seine heroische Nachfolge. Zur *imitatio Christi* in der Frühen Neuzeit. Berlin/Boston 2020: De Gruyter.

29   Döpfert, Mirjam: "'Miles Iaponus et Christianus'. Japanische Märtyrer auf der Jesuitenbühne". In: Aurnhammer, Achim / Korte, Barbara (Eds.): Fremde Helden auf europäischen Bühnen (1600–1900). Würzburg 2017: Ergon, 49-70.

30   Fuchs, Simon Wolfgang: "Von Schiiten lernen. Der Reiz des Martyriums für sunnitische Gruppen in Pakistan und Afghanistan". In: Behemoth 12.1 (2019), 52-68. DOI: 10.6094/behemoth.2019.12.1.1006.

31   Gölz: "Martyrdom and Masculinity", 2019, 44.

32   Croitoru, Joseph: Der Märtyrer als Waffe. Die historischen Wurzeln des Selbstmordattentats. Ungekürzte Ausg. München 2006: Dt. Taschenbuch.

33   Braudy, Leo: From Chivalry to Terrorism. War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity. New York 2005: Vintage Books, 544.

34   E.g. Afsaruddin, Asma: Striving in the Path of God. Jihād and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought. Oxford 2013: Oxford University Press; Aran, Gideon / Green, Yaacov Jeffrey: The Smile of the Human Bomb. New Perspectives on Suicide Terrorism. Ithaca 2018: Cornell University Press; Cormack, Margaret Jean (Ed.): Sacrificing the Self. Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion. Oxford, New York 2002: Oxford University Press; Dehghani, Sasha / Horsch, Silvia (Eds.): Martyrdom in the Modern Middle East. Traditions of Martyrdom in the Modern Middle East (Conference). Würzburg 2014: Ergon; Gambetta, Diego (Ed.): Making Sense of Suicide Missions. Oxford/New York 2005: Oxford University Press; Günther, Sebastian / Lawson, Todd: Roads to Paradise. Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam. Leiden 2016: Brill; Hatina, Meir: Martyrdom in Modern Islam. Piety, Power, and Politics. New York 2014: Cambridge University Press; Hatina, Meir / Litvak, Meir (Eds.): Martyrdom and Sacrifice in Islam. Theological, Political and Social Contexts. London 2016: I.B.Tauris; Khalili, Laleh: Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine. The Politics of National Commemoration. Cambridge 2007: Cambridge University Press; Khosrokhavar: Suicide Bombers, 2005; Khosrokhavar: Radicalization, 2017; Kitts, Margo (Ed.): Martyrdom, Self-Sacrifice, and Self-Immolation. Religious Perspectives on Suicide. New York, NY 2018: Oxford University Press; Pannewick: Opfer, Tod und Liebe, 2012, 21; Pape, Robert Anthony: Dying to Win. The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. New York 2006: Random House.

35   Cf. for a fundamental overview of this subject: Graitl, Lorenz: Sterben als Spektakel. Zur kommunikativen Dimension des politisch motivierten Suizids. Wiesbaden 2012: Springer VS.

36   Khalili: Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine, 2007, 49.

37   Yenen, Alp: "Legitimate Means of Dying. Contentious Politics of Martyrdom in the Turkish Civil War (1968–1982)". In: Behemoth 12.1 (2019), 14-34.

38   Beese, Yorck: "The Structure and Visual Rhetoric of the Martyrdom Video. An Enquiry Into the Martyrdom Video Genre". In: Behemoth 12.1 (2019): 69-88. DOI:

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39 Cf. Gölz: "Martyrdom and Masculinity", 2019.

40 Cf. for a fundamental overview of this subject Yenen: "Legitimate Means of Dying", 2019.

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6. Further resources

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7. List of images

Teaser image: Mahmoud Farshchian: The Evening of Ashura, 1976.
Source:
http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5175/Every-time-I-see-Farshchian-s-Ashura-painting-I-cry-Imam-Khamenei (accessed on 17 October 2019)
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