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On the contrasting concepts of victimhood in Christian and Islamic cultures

Jan Van Dijk and Hossein Sarkeshikian

I. The etymology of the word victim

In the German language those harmed by crime or other misfortunes are called *Opfer*. The original meaning of the German word *das Opfer* is the sacrificial animal, a living being which is ritually slaughtered and offered to a deity. In the Dutch language those harmed by crime are similarly called *slachtoffer,* literally meaning the slaughtered animal. In one of the oldest Germanic languages, Icelandic, persons harmed by crime are called *Foernarlamb*, or the sacrificial lamb. In English and in Roman languages those harmed by crime are denoted with various derivations of the Latin word *victima*, originally also meaning the sacrificial animal. Slavic languages also use a word denoting sacrificial animal for victims (*zertva*) and so does modern Greek *(tema)* and Hungarian (*aldozot*). On the basis of desk research and questioning of foreign colleagues we have come to the conclusion that all modern Western languages refer to those harmed by crimes, accidents or disasters as sacrificed animals (*Van Dijk* 2006; 2008; see also *Fletscher* 2007). To our knowledge there are no exceptions to this linguistic rule.

The use of words for sacrificial animals to denote those affected by crime in Western languages is puzzling. This denotation seems to suggest that the perpetrators have acted from unselfish, high- minded motives and that the harmful acts have served a higher purpose. It puts the perpetrators in the favorable light of sacrificing priests. In previous publications *Van Dijk* (2008) has observed that the Swiss lawyer and theologist *Calvin* was the first to use the Latin word *victima* for a human being, namely for Jesus Christ in his classical book *De Instititutiones* of 1536.[1] According to the most authoritative etymological dictionary of the Dutch language, the term *slachtoffer* was also first used to refer to Jesus Christ. In 1557, the author Gnapeus wrote that Jesus Christ had been "the victim (*slachtoffer*) on behalf of us poor sinners". A quick scan of dictionaries of French and English confirm that the words *victime* and *victim* respectively were also initially used to refer to Jesus Christ. In French, one of the oldest citations

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[1] "*The arrival of God's Son among humans (..) served no other purpose than to make him a victima in order to reconcile us with the Lord*".

of the word victim for a human being appears in a play by Corneille from 1642. The citation refers to Christ as *victim volontaire* (voluntary victim). In English the oldest citation dates from much later, 1736. In that year the word victim was used as an honorary name for Jesus Christ in a translation of the New Testament ("*the expiatory victim*").

Although further studies of the etymology of the term victim in other Western languages are called for, it seems reasonable to assume that this term has initially entered Western languages everywhere as special name for Jesus Christ. At a later moment in history, this special name for Jesus Christ has acquired the wider meaning of persons suffering from serious misfortunes such as accidents, disasters and crimes. It seems plausible that this broadening of the meaning was caused by the recognition of the similarity between the suffering of ordinary people with the suffering of Jesus Christ at the Cross. This recognition will have been facilitated by the gradual humanization in religious art of the image of Jesus Christ (*Van Dijk* 2007). The adoption of the term victim for those harmed by disaster or crime seems to have taken place in all Western languages sometime between 1650 and 1800 (in the English language in 1781 (Oxford English Dictionary). In this respect there seems not have been any difference between Roman Catholicism, various forms of Protestantism and the Orthodox or Greek-orthodox church. In all Christian societies, regardless of their prevailing theologies, people started to recognize the deep suffering of Jesus Christ in the sorrows of their fellow beings afflicted by misfortunes somewhere during the 17th or 18th century. The term did emerge in Western languages in colloquial speech, but not as a legal term. In legal texts more neutral terms, such as the 'damaged party,' continued to be used. For example the term *slachtoffer* was not incorporated in the Dutch Criminal Code before 2009. According to the dictionaries consulted, the term is not reserved for those harmed by crime or even by acts of human beings. The use of the term seems governed by its association with innocent suffering and not by an association with the motives of the perpetrators.

The use of the victima label seems a characteristic of late Christianity. The fact that this concept has over the past two centuries been used universally in modern Western languages for those suffering the consequences of disasters, accidents and crime begs the question whether this use is exclusive to the languages of Christian societies. If this label is common among other languages as well, this linguistic fact would shed doubt on our linkage of the victim label to the suffering of Jesus Christ. Most other religions celebrate sacrificial rituals as well. Perhaps people with other religions might have recognized the suffering of sacrificial animals in victims of disasters or crimes. If that is the case, the victim label may not necessarily carry a Christian stamp.

The first results of our examination of this pertinent question regarding the use of the victim label outside the sphere of influence of Christianity were am-

biguous. It became evident that in the Chinese and Japanese languages those harmed by misfortunes are called *Those Receiving the Harm.* This is a neutral, technical term without any sacrificial connotation. Further enquiries revealed that the terms used to denote those affected by serious misfortune are also devoid of sacrificial connotations in Urdu, classical Latin, classical Greek and old Hebrew (*Van Dijk* 2008). However, the examination did not only produce negative results. Those affected by crime are called *korban* in modern Hebrew and *dahyiah* in modern Arabic, both concepts originally used for sacrificial animals. We can add to this that in Farsi/Persian those affected by crime are also called korban (qurbani). The latter results seem at first glance to refute the hypothesis that the victim label is a uniquely Christian phenomenon.

II. The deeper meaning of the victim label

In his elaboration of the Hebrew concept of korban, *Fletscher* (2007) explored the possible deeper meaning of the use of this concept against the backdrop of Judaism. He assumes that Jewish people might have recognized in the commission of a crime certain characteristics of the traditional sacrifices of a korban in Leviticus, notably the quintessential innocence of the victima. In a second, alternative interpretation *Fletcher* assumes that people might have recognized in criminal acts Abraham's rejected sacrifice of his son. To make a victim in this interpretation would mean to contravene God's prohibition of human sacrifices. In both interpretations the term korban is used for the afflicted person in order to inculpate the perpetrator. *Van Dijk* has elsewhere critiqued Fletcher's interpretations as speculative and far- fetched (*Van Dijk* 2008).

   Van Dijk subsequently explored the possible Islamic background of the use of the word dahyiah for those affected by acts of terrorism or crime in modern Arabic. According to *Van Dijk* the adoption of this concept in Arabic might be somehow informed by the story in the Quran of the intended sacrifice by Abraham of his son. He speculated in a concluding paragraph that perhaps the terms korban and dahyiah were adopted in both Hebrew and Arab as an exhortation to the persons so labeled to forgive their attackers as a sacrifice in the spirit of Abraham. The readers were in this context reminded of the linguistic fact that in both Hebrew and Arab the word for victim has the double meaning of the sacrifice and the sacrificed. In *Van Dijk*'s view, the use of the victim label might have been welcomed partly because of its implication that those affected by crime should ideally denounce their right of retaliation.

   In a critical reply to *Van Dijk*, *Sarkeshikian* has pointed out several reasons why the latter interpretation is implausible (*Sarkeshikian* 2011; *Van Dijk & Sarkeshikian* 2011). We will briefly present here the main arguments leveled against *Van Dijk's* assumptions. The first argument is based on the etymology

of the terms dahiyah in Arab and Korbani in Farsi. Sarkeshikian points out that the colloquial word dahiyah does not feature in the Q'ran at all, not even in its original meaning of sacrificial animal.[2] This by itself makes it unlikely that the concept has its roots in the story of Abraham's intention to sacrifice his son. The word dahiyah originally refers to the time between sunrise and noon (*Ebne Faares* 1983) and in later times to the animal killed and eaten at noon and to the Feast of the Sacrifice, also known as the Korban ceremony (*EbneMazour* 1995). The study of different books of Arabic etymology from the 11[th]century (e.g. *Lesanol-Arab, Maghaiisol-Loghat*, etc.) until 1972 (e.g. *Al-Monjad and Al-Vasit*) reveals that dahiyah had never been used for a human being in the texts and conversations of Arab people. In one of the most important lexicons of Arabic, the lemma of the word dahiyah says: "*a sheep or goat that is slaughtered, or sacrificed, in the time called* (الضحي) *on the day called* (يوم الضحي)*; the day of the victims*" (*Lane* 1863, p. 1774). This shows that at that time the word was still exclusively used for sacrificial animals. This was also true for the etymological dictionaries of the next century like the one of *Al-Monjad* (1960). The first dictionary giving a new meaning for dahiyah is Arra-ed (1964). In this book, the author gives, besides the original meaning of dahiyah, a new one: "*everyone bothered or deviled as a result of a mistake, aggression, or accident; like the dahiyah of an explosion*" (*Masood* 1964, p. 508). One decade later, Larousse's Arabic dictionary also gives exactly the same meaning for the word dahiyah (*Al-Jarr* 1973, p. 765). Subsequently, all dictionaries and etymologies published after 1964 include this new meaning using either the same citation (*Al-Jarr* 1973) or some related words like "*everyone bothered because of a mistake, injustice, or aggression; like the dahiyah of aggression, drug dahiyah, and dahiyah of counterfeit money* (*Al-Mohit* 1993)*.* To conclude, *dahiyah* as word for victims of crime is a very recent linguistic innovation. Islamic jurisprudence books, from a long time ago up to today, have used words like *maghtool* (murdered), *majnialaih* (wounded), and *valie dam* (owner of the blood, the family of murdered) for victims of crime.[3] So, the words used for the affected party in Islamic jurisprudence dating back to the 6th century have been quite factual and neutral, without any connotations of sacrifice. In fact, contemporary Islamic jurists still apply the traditional legal terms such as *majnialaih* in their texts for those affected by crime instead of *dahiyah*. The word *dahiyah* is, just like the European synonyms of the word victim, not a legal concept but an emotive, colloquial term.

The analysis of the etymology of the word korban in Farsi produces similar results. Persian etymology books give the following meanings for the word

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[2] In *Van Dijk's* older publications the Arab term for victims is erroneously spelled as Udhyiah (Van Dijk 2006).

[3] See also: *Najafi, M.H.,* Javaherol-Kalam, 1985.Tehran: Institute of Islamic Books and *Mousavi Khoii, S.A.G.* Mabaani Takmelatol-Menhaaj, 1987. Qom: Alhadi Institute.

korban/korbani: becoming closer; everything used to approach God, an animal sacrificed in Korban ceremony, the one who is sacrificed for his/her beliefs, or for someone else (*Deh-Khoda* 1993, p. 17496; *Amid* 1963, p. 1863 and *Moin* 2007, p. 1118), and taking disaster to remove it from someone else (*Deh-Khoda* 1993, p. 17496). Iranian people often use korban in this last meaning. In Persian, people say *I Korban you*, meaning I sacrifice myself on your behalf (meaning I love you). Clearly, these words and expressions have nothing to do with victims of crime or disaster.

The examination of the use of the word *korbani* in Persian language shows that the use of such word for a victim of crime never appears in legal texts. Before and after the Islamic Revolutionary of Iran (1978), legal texts used the term *majnialaih*, the conventional Arabic and Islamic word for victims of crime. The word korbani also sporadically appears in criminology books. In what is considered the first book on criminology in Iran, *The Principles of Criminology* (1981), *Keynia*[4] translated the word victim to *bezehdide.* In fact, he created a new word which is composed of two Persian words: *bezeh (*crime) and *dide* (the participle of the word *to see)* which means "*the wronged person".* He used korbani as a synonym for this word. In his next work (1995), the translation of the book *La Criminologie Theorique* by *Gassan*, Keynia translated the word *victim* again as *bezehdide.* Following this esteemed example, other Iranian criminologists often use *bezehdide* for victims of crime, and only rarely *korbani.* However, in sociological and psychological literature the use of korbani for the victims of crime has become fairly common. However, the usage of korbani in the books of these sciences is, as in Arabic?, a very recent trend. According to *Amid* (1963) and other dictionaries of that period, korbani had never been used in the Persian language for those affected by crimes or other disasters before 1963. Hence the use of korbani for victims of crime in Persian language goes back no longer than five decades and is limited to the contexts of psychology and sociology (and sometimes criminology).The Persian case, then, shows the same results as our enquiry into the use of the word dahiyah in Arab. These etymological explorations refute the idea that the words dahiyah and korban have been adopted for ideological reasons. These concepts have been borrowed from French or English during the past three or four decades and are literal translations of the words *victime* or *victim*. From an etymological perspective there is no room for an Islamic interpretation of their current use. This conclusion regarding the Arab and Farsi languages brings us to the hypothesis that likewise the use of the word korban in Hebrew is a recent innovation, possibly not dating back more than a few decades either. As observed, the word korban did not have its current victima meaning in old Hebrew. Since modern Hebrew was developed in the 19th century and borrowed many terms from Western languages

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[4] This professor of Tehran University is considered the father of criminology in Iran .

and from Arabic, the word korban in Hebrew is probably a literal translation from English or French, just as dahiyah and korban in Arab and Farsi.[5] If this hypothesis is correct, it would lead to the conclusion that Jewish interpretations of the use of the word korban, such as those of *Fletscher*, are mistaken. Upon closer examination, the use of the victima label for those affected by crime seems to be a uniquely Christian phenomenon for which an interpretation in Christian theology must be found. The use of the label of a sacrificed goat or lamb for suffering fellow human beings must be understood against the backdrop of the profound significance of the story of the Passion of Christ for Western cultures. The transfer of the label to at least some other modern languages outside the Western sphere- of which we have so far identified Arab, Hebrew and Farsi but there might be others- should not divert our attention from the label's exclusively Christian origins.

III. On the implications of the victim label
for those so labeled

The adoption of the victima label is unlikely to have remained without consequences for those so labeled. It is hard to imagine how people in still deeply Christian cultures could have recognized the figure of Jesus Christ in those affected by crime without invoking a broader set of connotations informed by the Gospel. In several publications *Van Dijk* has elaborated on the dual impact of the victim label on those so labeled. In his view the label has both positive and negative implications. On a positive note, the label elicits a response of sympathy and compassion, epitomized by the Catholic symbol of the *Pieta.* Over the past decades this intrinsically Christian response has led to the establishment of many new provisions of help and support for crime victims across the Western world. According to the Roman Catholic philosopher Rene Girard, caring for victims can be seen as the essence of Christian morality (*Girard* 2001). However, if this is the case, why have these strong traditions of Christian charity not been extended to victims of crimes much earlier? There is a stark contrast between the centuries old church-based provisions for the care of prisoners and the total lack of church-based victim support. A possible explanation for this anomaly, suggested by *Van Dijk* (2006) is that victims may have be seen as potential contraveners of another central value of Christianity, the imperative to love one's enemies. In the view of *Girard* (1986; 2001), the defining characteristic of the figure of Jesus Christ is his readiness to forgive his tormentors ("*O Lord forgive them because they do not know what they do*"; *Luke* 24:32). According to Las-

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[5] A first scan of Hebrew dictionaries confirmed that the word korban has entered Hebrew in modern times.

caris, a Dutch Roman-Catholic theologist, the forgiving attitude of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith (*Lascaris* 1993).With his famous words at the Cross, Jesus practiced what he had preached all his life according to the Gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus preached forgiveness, symbolized by the gesture of turning the other cheek (*Matt* 5:38). The New Testament is full of exhortations by Jesus to forgive one's sinners, unconditionally and when necessary, seventy times seventy (*Matt* 18:22). This is not just abstract Christian theology. It has a powerful bearing on the Christian morality of everyday life. According to Catholic morality, wrath or vengefulness is a mortal sin. There are special places in Dante's hell for the unforgiving. The imperative to forgive one's attackers is equally strong among various branches of Protestantism, for example among the Mennonites and most notably among the Amish sect (*Kraybill et al.* 2007). Against this backdrop it seems logical that the victima label entailed from the outset the expectation that those so labeled would accept their fate meekly and, ideally, forgive their attackers. Those labeled as victims are in this view expected to be meek and forgiving in the spirit of their name-giver, Jesus Christ. Possibly, the connotation of mandatory forgiveness may even have been a factor promoting the universal adoption of the victima label across Western languages. By assigning this label one could acknowledge at a stroke the deep suffering of fellow human beings afflicted by misfortune as well as stress their moral duty to accept their fate as an expression of the will of God and to make peace with the sinners involved.

It is generally presumed in popular culture and confirmed by victimological research that many victims of serious crimes harbor feelings of anger and hatred towards their perpetrators (*Pemberton et al.* 2007). For many victims, a forgiving attitude towards the offender isa tall order. The tension between the Christian role expectation of forgiveness and the human reality of vengefulness may have taught Christian churches to be on their guard for crime victims. By unconditionally supporting crime victims Christian communities could easily become accomplices to the un-Christian practice of vengefulness. In support of this hypothesis, reference can be made to the historical fact that in the late 20th century initiatives of Christian churches concerning crime victims have invariably focused upon victim-offender reconciliation and/or out of court settlements (for critical reviews see *Acorn* 2004 and *Pavlich* 2005).[6] Church-based initiatives for victim support without the ulterior motive of reconciliation with the offender appear to be unimaginable in a Christian context.

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[6] Victims participating in the first generations of restorative schemes were, according to Pavlich often forced to adopt a particular identity: "*They should keep control of their emotions as far as possible, and never become abusive or revengeful*(.). *If possible victims are encouraged to forgive*".

IV. Victims and the Islam

Our understanding of the treatment of crime victims in a late- or post- Christian environment can perhaps be deepened and sharpened by a comparison with the ways crime victims are treated outside the sphere of Christianity, notably in an Islamic environment. We will first look at the role of forgiveness and revenge in Islamic theology and then at their role in the morality and laws of Islam.

As explained, the crucifixion story of Jesus Christ seems the key allegorical source of calling those wronged by offenders *victims* in all colloquial Western languages. One could argue that as Jesus Christ is accepted as one of the greatest prophets in Islamitic theology (*Quran*, 3: 45–49; *Quran,* 19: 30–33), the Passion of Christ might in theory also have played a role in the adoption of the Dahiyah label in Arabic. But this hypothesis is directly challenged by the knowledge that Islam emphatically denies the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and maintains that he wasn't even murdered (*Quran,* 4: 157). As explained above, *Van Dijk* (2008) has therefore speculated that "*possibly, other stories and images of sacrifice within the Islamic tradition have somehow inspired this modern use of the term (dahiyah)*". We will look more closely into this possibility. According to the history and tradition of Shia, one of two greatest branches of Islam, this assumption could indeed be true, but only up to a point. According to Shia, after the death of Prophet Mohammad, his grandson *Hussein* was cruelly killed while he was trying, as he himself claimed, to revitalize Mohammad's vanishing traditions (*Motahhari* V.1, 1985, p. 31). Because of the sacred character of Mohammad and his family, and the brutal situation in which Hussein was murdered and beheaded, some people compare him with Jesus Christ. According to some interpretations, Hussein was sacrificed, as his head was cut off like a scapegoat for the survival of Islam. Based on this belief he has been sometimes called *dabihah* which originally meant *victim (Masood* 1964, p. 372*)*. As discussed, the victima's label's first and foremost connotation is that of compassion or co-misery. In the story of Hussein we can see one of the most radical manifestations of compassion. For more than thirteen centuries the memory of Hussein's murder is celebrated during ten days of each year, when Shiites cry for him and exhibit such extreme mourning behavior that one could think they have lost their fathers.[7] One of the contemporary ideologists of the Shia, *Motahhari*, warns Shia people against replacing the picture of Hussein as a social hero fighting injustice by the imagery of Jesus Christ as a scapegoat and redeemer of humankind (*Motahhari* 1986, V.3, pp. 225–237). He challenges the Christian interpretation of Hussein by referring to Quran ideology and Hussein's historical speeches and letters,

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[7] For more information refer: *Motahhari, M.* Husseini Saga. V.3, 1986, Qom: Sadra Publisher, p. 90.

in which he affirms that his goals are fighting evil and re-establishing good traditions (Ibid). What in our view fundamentally distinguishes the Shia story from that of Christ is that Hussein's devotees, in contrast with Christians, tried to kill his murderers as brutally as they had killed him. For more than 13 centuries now, Shiites have believed that a man, called Mahdi, will one day appear to avenge the blood of Hussein (*Sharifiet al.* 2004, p. 371). This story[8] underscores the strong belief in revenge in Islam, in stark opposition to the Christian ideal of forgiveness. To sum up, although Hussein's story fully incorporates the first characteristic of the *victima* label (compassion), it fundamentally lacks the second, forgiveness. Instead it is replete of retaliatory desires. Besides, in contrast to Jesus Christ, the voluntary victim, who didn't resist his murderers and embraced his suffering, Hussein stood up for his rights, defended himself, and killed some of the army of his enemy. Hussein hated his murderers, and damned them instead of praying for them to be forgiven by God[9] (*EbnTavoos* 2004). In fact while Jesus Christ is the symbol of an ultimate meekness, Hussein is the symbol of resistance till the last drop of blood. So, although *Van Dijk* was intuitively right in assuming that Hussein might, like Jesus, have been named the sacrificed one (sometimes called *dabihah*), and although a resemblance between the Hussein story and the Gospel of Christ cannot be denied, the connotations are diametrically opposed.

If forgiveness is absent as a central value in Islamic theology, it is not a key feature of Islamic morality either. To people whose intimates have been murdered, the so called "blood owners" God says: "*And there is life for you in retaliation, O men of understanding*" (*Quran,* 2: 179); and somewhere else he says: "*if you forgive them it would be better for you*" (*Quran,* 16: 126). These two sentences, which apparently are about the contradicting strategies of revenge and forgiveness, constitute the foundation of rights of victims. Or, to be more precise, the first is a fundamental right and the latter not more than a moral suggestion. So, if victims refuse to forgive their sinners, there is no reason for feelings of shame or for fear of rebuttals. Unforgiving victims are simply exercising their rights. According to an ideological point of view, it would be wrong for clergymen or judges to convince people to sacrifice their rights of taking revenge.

To elaborate on these observations, let's look at the punishment for murder. Death is the original punishment for murderers. The offer of blood money wasn't acceptable until the murdered family forgave the murderer. Even when all members of the family of victimhave forgiven except one, the original pun-

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[8] For more information refer: *Ghomi, A.* Mafaatih-Aljenan. "Nodbeh Praying" part, 2002, Tehran: Vesale Andishe.

[9] While Jesus "*does not resist, he does not stand up for his rights, he doesn't move to protect himself, … And then he prays, he suffers, he loves together with and in his tormentors*" (*Nietzsche* 1969, translation from German by *Van Dijk* 2009)

ishment must be implemented (*Rohani* 2008, p. 344).[10] The retaliation is waived only when the murderer is dead.[11] According to traditional Islamic jurisprudence, in cases that the accused is found guilty, the blood owners have the right to take revenge by themselves and they don't even need the permission of the Imam (*Rohani* 2008, p. 345). To sum up, blood owners have three choices in the case of a murder: to forgive, to take revenge by retaliation, or to take the blood money and refrain from retaliation. From an ideological point of view, all of these three must be respected by Islamic judges or clergy. In Islamic ideology the Christian practice of demanding forgiveness and shaming those who refuse it, is unthinkable. However there are, as said, some statements, like that of Quran mentioned above, encouraging people to choose forgiveness: "*and those who control their wrath, and those who forgive the people, and Allah loveth the good*" (*Quran*, 3: 134); "*in forgiveness there is a joy which there isn't in revenge*" (*Deh-Khoda* 1993). But these are, as said, just moral exhortations. So it seems that in the ideology of Islam the victim isn't seriously expected to relinquish his right to revenge or to be a passive sufferer. Hence in this matter, Islam and Christianity hold fundamentally opposing views.

V. In conclusion

Our exploration of the etymologies of the victim label suggests that the label has been adopted because of the resemblance between those affected by crime or disaster and the Passion of Christ. This should perhaps not come as a surprise since Christianity is the only of the monotheistic world religions celebrating the scapegoating of a human being as the core of its faith. In Judaism and Islam sacrificial stories about human beings are limited to the failed sacrifice of Abraham. In these religions, the sacrificed ones are animals rather than a human being. In Islam and Judaism one can worship the human sacrificer but not the human sacrifice. The victima label for human beings is uniquely Christian.

In our view, the finding that the label is exclusively Christian supports the claim that it is likely to be replete of powerful Christian connotations. In the famous formulation of Christie (1986), Western culture cherishes the notion of "the ideal victim", a victim that is frail, helpless and totally innocent. Although Christie doesn't observe this himself, such idealized image fully complies with the Christian imagery of Jesus Christ as a meek sufferer. Precisely because of these connotations, the label has, in our view, lately become controversial in the

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[10] Here, if the other blood owners want the blood money, the one who asks for revenge must pay their share and then, s/he can implement the retaliation (*Rohani* 2008).

[11] In this situation the blood money will be paid from the murderer's properties, and if this is impossible by the government (*Rohani* 2008, p. 344)

West. According to actress Julia Osmond, goodwill ambassador of the United Nations for the global fight against trafficking in human beings, "*the use of the terminology victim is synonymous with weakness, synonymous with shame. The people I have met who are victims, are survivors, they are resourceful, alive and productive*". In the words of British criminologist Spalek:" *If the stereotype of victim as "passive" and "weak" is perpetuated in dominant representations of victimhood in society, then both males and females may increasingly refuse to situate themselves in terms of victimhood*" (*Spalek* 2006). The rejection of the victim label implies a breaking away from the Christian morality of passive suffering. Such rebellion can be expected to meet with resistance from conservative public opinion. *Diana Lamplugh*, the mother of a murder victim, remembers how her activist coping style was repudiated: "*A good victim is before anything else someone who is negatively defined: not intelligent, not visible, not verbal, not angry. The only permitted mode is: keep sobbing and be silent*" (cited by *Teeseling* 2001). Even more to the point is the observation of *Natascha Kampusch*, survivor of an eight year long kidnapping in Vienna, how the public mood turned against her after she had presented herself as strong-willed survivor on national TV: "*I had withstood all Wolfgang's Priklopil's psychological garbage and dark fantasies and had not allowed myself to be broken. Now I was out in the world, and that's exactly what people wanted to see: a broken person who would never get back up again, who would always be dependent on help from others. But the moment I refused to bear that Mark of Cain for the rest of my life, the mood turned*" (*Kampusch* 2010).[12] In a similar fashion public opinion turned against the couple McCann, parents of a disappeared six years old, after they had launched a professional media campaign to find their daughter. According to newspaper reports they had not behaved like "authentic victims" (*Van Dijk* 2009). Some of this negativism towards vocal victims can perhaps be explained as just another form of victim blaming triggered by the wish to restore the belief in a just world (*Pemberon* 2011). But negative responses to autonomous victims asserting their right to be taken seriously, may also originate from lingering expectations of how a true victim ought to behave according to conventional Christian morality.

Finally, we want to comment on the possible implications of the adoption of the label in Islamic cultures. The crossover of the new science of victimology to Islamic countries, especially by the contributions of the international victim's movement, and UN declarations and guidelines, have probably all played a role in the adoption of the words *dahiyah* in colloquial Arabic language. This adoption seems, as argued above, to have been a matter of literal translation

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[12] It cannot be excluded that Ms. *Kampusch* has read *Van Dijk's* comments on her secondary victimization by the media in his online publication *The Mark of Abel* (*Van Dijk* 2006). Even when this is the case, her recollections confirm his interpretation that the public mood soured as soon as she presented herself as a resilient survivor rather than as a sufferer.

rather than of the conscious transfer of an ideology. What remains to be seen is whether the growing use in Arabic colloquial language of *dahiyah* may eventually influence the victim label in Arabic countries. In another words, what could be the future impact of using such word instead of the more technical term *majialaih*? Considering the fact that this word includes the victim-related meaning of deep suffering, is it possible to assume that the social expectations from victims of crime may be in the process of changing from the current Islamic traditions of revengefulness to the more support-oriented and non-retributive ideology of Christianity? But this seems more a question directed at the future of the Arab and Iranian world than at its past.

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