

## The Politics of Victimhood: Representation and Victimhood

ESRC Funded Seminar, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012

To be held in The Conference Suite, University Staff Club, University of Nottingham, University Park Campus. Film screening in Hallward Library Screening Room.

Draft Programme

Programme, Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2012

10.15 – 10.30 Registration and Coffee

10.30 – 12.30 The Value of Victims: Fundraising, Lobbying and Victimhood

Welcome and Introduction: Julia O'Connell Davidson, University of Nottingham

This session is concerned with the value that certain kinds of victim and certain representations of victimhood have for NGOs and others seeking to raise funding, and/or advance political and other agendas.

- **Kate Manzo**, University of Newcastle, 'Post-emotional' appeals? The iconography of childhood in humanitarian communication

### *Abstract*

In my earlier work (Manzo, 2008) I explored the ways in which images of children are utilised in campaigns by NGOs that are signatories to NGO codes of conduct on images and messages. Since then, Chouliaraki (2010) has argued for the emergence of a 'post-humanitarian' style of appeal, which she argues decouples emotion for the sufferer from acting in the cause of suffering. This talk will compare the key features of humanitarian and 'post-humanitarian' communication, and ask to what extent the latter can be considered a progressive alternative to the former.

**Ola Florin**, Socialstyrelsen (Stockholm) *Looking for Real Trouble: Save the Children, Victimhood and Rights*

### *Abstract*

In this paper/presentation Ola Florin sets out to explore the ways in which notions of victimhood are significant to the work of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for children's rights, with a focus on the thematic area sexual exploitation and abuse. Informed by extensive in-house experience from Save the Children Sweden, he discusses how issues for advocacy and marketing are selected and shaped by factors such as the normative framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), considerations on publicity and donors, different kinds of professional knowledge and the media.

He argues that the appeal of helping specific children in tangible need - which is widely important to the organisation's members, supporters and growing number of communications staff - often undermines its proclaimed position that children, i.e. persons below the age of 18, should be seen as competent actors. This is particularly evident in relation to problems involving sexuality – in itself a culturally defining element of adulthood – that are perceived and mediated with limited recognition of agency on part of children. He claims that so far, Save the Children has not succeeded in deriving guidance on substantive issues from the CRC. Rather, the Convention serves to mark off a broad and shallow consensus around the desirability for adults to care about children. This makes notions of victimhood difficult to challenge but is simultaneously a key reason behind the organisations' self-defined success. The paper concludes that scholars ought to concern themselves with international NGOs as contributors to discourses on victims, not least given

their alleged role as vocal representatives of civil society. In understanding how and why this is done, we need to consider, among other things, the interests and power structures behind and within such organisations as well as developments in fundraising methods and the charity market.

**12.30 – 1.30 LUNCH**

**1.30 – 3.30 FILM SCREENING: ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE**

A documentary directed by Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin in which the men and women who perpetrated massacres in the killing fields of Cambodia give testimony never before heard or seen. Sambath says “Some may say no good can come from talking to killers, and dwelling on past horror, but I say these people have sacrificed a lot to tell the truth. In daring to confess, they have done good, perhaps the only good thing left. They and all the killers like them must be part of the process of reconciliation if my country is to move forward”.  
<http://enemiesofthepeoplemovie.com/>

Followed by Q&A with **Rob Lemkin**.

Chair and Discussant: **Stephen Hopkins**, Department of Politics, University of Leicester.

**3.30 – 4.00 TEA**

**4.00 – 6.00**

### **Sympathetic and Unsympathetic Suffering: Claiming and Narrating Victimhood**

This session examines the ways in which victimhood is subjectively experienced and publicly claimed, as well as how it can become an object to be appropriated by governmental and non-governmental agencies in pursuit of particular ends; the ways in which victims attempt to construct narratives that fit with dominant representations of true victimhood; at the ways in which access to victimhood is mediated by gender, age, race, class and nationality and at the consequences of suffering that is not socially imagined as victimhood.

**Andrew Jefferson**, Rehabilitation & Research Centre for Torture Victims (Copenhagen),  
**‘Benefactors and beneficiaries – the entangled production of subjectivities’**

#### **Abstract**

Relations between benefactors and beneficiaries, helpers and the targets of help, perpetrators of goodness and victims of goodness typically feature good intentions, contradictions, ambiguous exchanges, arbitrary attributions, shifting positions and unequal relations of power. Or so I will argue. This paper seeks to unpack the products of this potent mixture via an examination of the micro-hydraulics of power and the entangled production of subjectivities within an NGO in-the-making. The paper traces the slow birth of the organization Promoters of Peace and Justice, an organization created soon after a group of over fifty former fighters were released from a Sierra Leonean prison after six years incarceration. The paper’s empirical point of departure is the former fighters’ attendance at a series of meetings facilitated by an expatriate lawyer and a local church group. The birth pains of this group as it slowly established itself as well as the respective discourses of the key players are subjected to analysis highlighting the complex and contradictory relations between benefactors and beneficiaries and the ways in which contrasting moralities produce and reveal particular versions of goodness, victimhood and even subjectivity. Analysis includes consideration of the degree to which a notion of institutional agency is useful to combat a tendency to attribute causality and efficacy too easily to individuals to the neglect of structures or institutions. In conclusion I will make two related arguments, firstly that it is useful to study benefactors and beneficiaries together at the point of their encounter and secondly that the practices of benefactors and the reception of their goods,

services and packaging needs to be understood as operating through complex webs of diffusion rather than as simple transfers of goods or morals.

**Inka Stock**, University of Nottingham, 'Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco and their social and political construction as "victims" or "villains"'

**Roda Madziva**, University of Nottingham, 'When paradise turns out to be hell: Zimbabwean migrants in the UK who are forced apart from their children'

**Andrew Slack**, University of Manchester, "En/Countering Victims: Hospitality in Anti-trafficking as Both Care and Defence"

### **Speaker Biographies**

**Ola Florin** coordinates government projects addressing violence, prostitution, so called sex trafficking and other crime related issues at the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden. He has previously covered similar topics as well as discrimination and sexual and reproductive health and rights for development NGOs, in particular Save the Children where he also worked as an adviser on strategic management. Ola has extensive experience of media work and commissioning academic research in these areas. His special interests include the ways in which knowledge on social problems is created and used in policy making contexts.

**Stephen Hopkins** is Lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Leicester, and part of the 'Politics of Victimhood' organizing team. He is currently working on a book, *The Politics of Memoir and the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, with Liverpool University Press, and has a particular interest in the biographical dimension of violent conflict and its legacies.

**Andrew M. Jefferson** is Senior Researcher at the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims. He specializes in the study of prisons beyond the West and is co-founder of the Global Prisons Research Network. Currently he is engaged in a 'practice research' project together with organizations in the Philippines, Kosovo, and Sierra Leone looking at the entangled encounters between prisons and reform agencies with a particular theoretical interest in the relationships between confinement, violence and reform.

**Roda Madziva** is Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at CAS, University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on the experience of migrant parents who are separated from their children by asylum and immigration policy.

**Kate Manzo** is Senior Lecturer in International Development in the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at the University of Newcastle. Her current research is on climate change visualisation. For further details see Kate's website: [www.katemanzo.com](http://www.katemanzo.com)

**Andrew Slack** is a Doctoral Candidate in Politics at the University of Manchester. His Ph.D project draws on postcolonial and poststructuralist work, investigating the interrelated positions of victims of various phenomena grouped under the terms 'modern slavery' and 'trafficking', those who research and seek to help or rescue them and to govern these phenomena, and those of use to whom appeals are made as concerned citizens. Particular emphasis is placed on (un)intelligibility and the role of particular life narrative tropes in identifying 'real' victims, and the multifaceted desires and effects of rescue projects.

**Inka Stock** is a PhD student at the University of Nottingham. Her ethnographic research examines the life of sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco who are stuck there for indefinite periods of time in a situation of forced immobility. It focuses on migrants existential outlook on life in such a situation and how this consequently influences their actions and feelings of belonging. Before coming to Nottingham, Inka worked for several

years with international NGOs and as a free lance consultant in both African and Latin American countries in the field of development aid and human rights.