

THE POSITION OF THE RUC IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. The Scapegoating Society

Every society is built up and stays with the help of scapegoat mechanisms.

The Scapegoat outside the group of society

1.1 It was once 'bad violence' which swept the scapegoat out of the group – the scapegoats of other nations, the scapegoats who remained outside the country or boundaries of the nation.

This task was later performed by the army and still is.

[Armies later came to have this role – the denying of opportunity to others in different countries who have once been defined as enemies in the scapegoating process).

The Scapegoat within the group or society

There are of course, the scapegoats who remain inside a group or country and who are taken care of by the police and judicial system – these are the processes of 'good violence' which limit the extent to which the others of that group or society is upset or made chaotic – the rules and laws governing behaviour are enacted as controls of 'good violence'.

1.2 'Good violence' is mostly dealing with individuals or groups of people who are called criminals and acknowledged as such within the law and by police actions. They belong to the society or group, are deviant and apt to be scapegoated – therefore they fulfill a necessary function. (In a scapegoating culture!)

However there are situations in which certain groups become scapegoats such as the Jewish people in Nazi Germany: the Black people in south Africa and the Roman Catholic people of Northern Ireland.

The old group of scapegoats is partly or mostly taken over by the scapegoated group.

1.3 A society, which scapegoats certain groups or a certain group of its members, tries, of course, to use the old mechanisms. It tries to show that the members of these groups or this particular group are 'just criminals'. The old mythological crimes always ascribed to the scapegoats are ascribed to them.

The system often works, because by the scapegoating process the group used by it may exhibit or come to exhibit 'deviant behaviour' (? Deviating compartments).

In all these cases the society as such takes care that the scapegoating process goes on. The deviant behaviour of the scapegoated group, as soon as it becomes disagreeable for the scapegoaters (or majority) is taken care of by the police. In such a situation the police

becomes the strong arm of the scapegoating society – indeed more and more it becomes the expression (exponent?) of it.

It needs to be stated that (almost) every society is caught up within a scapegoating mechanism and so (almost) everywhere the police are the scapegoating force of society as a whole.

- 1.3 (a) In a divided society, in which one (each?) part is scapegoated by the other the scapegoating process is “squared2 [? Increases by a further factor]. In this situation the police (can) become the agent of scapegoating not only as part of the texture of all culture but visibly as the helper of the majority or the group (in power) which scapegoats another group of the same society.

Furthermore it is clear that these are processes which just occur (?within the fabric of the culture) – no one is responsible in the strict sense of that word. The police forces of such a society who are not especially ruthless are no more responsible than all the others.

One distinction (which?) become more difficult still because the scapegoating society always takes care to have good reasons for it (its behaviour?) One of the groups is in the place of the “Criminalised” scapegoated group. So, for example in Northern Ireland Roman Catholics (? Protestants) can be a member of the RUC with a very good conscience.

2. **The scapegoating society that is Northern Ireland**

- 2.1 Northern Ireland was and is clearly a scapegoating society. Primarily this is not made as a moralistic or ethical statement as it is recognized that all the mimesis, and so all the scapegoating happens before we think. Our thinking always comes afterwards.

Scapegoating is in fact a mechanism by which culture can (continue to) exist and, as long as we do not find other possibilities, we will “instinctively” resort to it. When a society becomes (a) clearly scapegoating (one) – one in which a section or a group of its citizens are scapegoated – then there are special reasons for it.

- 2.2 The special reason in Northern Ireland is that a part of its inhabitants also belong to a bigger group outside the country (province) which is perceived by the other group as an enemy. As such, of course, this is not specific to Northern Ireland. The same situation exists (framework applies to) in South Africa, Nazi Germany and formerly in the Netherlands where the Protestant scapegoated the Roman Catholics. Lebanon is another and very complicated example.

Again of course this deepest reason is not the only one and may not often be the (initial one) starting factor. Economic power and rivalry are very often at the root of the process. However the character of the process comes from the deepest layers of the scapegoating process – the generative process by which society comes into existence and is maintained.

(? This generative mechanism needs described more (DW)).

- 2.3 In such a situation the task of the police become very ambiguous. The police force is the instrument for securing and maintaining the internal peace of the society and it is able to use good violence (?force) backed up, as it is, by the rules of law that is operating within the society.

However, in all its actions in handling (insofar as it sees itself dealing with) the scapegoated group and is associated as reinforcing them as part of an enemy 'across the border' it is (drawn into) using against it 'bad violence' – the 'bad violence' of war.

[This, of course, is how traditionally the Unionists preferred the RUC to act – on their behalf over and against the Nationalist community – as though all members of this group were deviant and criminal].

In this situation many consequences could flow. Here I try to mention some:

- 2.3.1 The police-force is not any longer in reality only a police-force. Is police-force and army, two societal entities with totally different tasks and rules.

In a “doubly-scapegoating” society the task of the police in the old sense, with its unequivocal description, has disappeared. I fear that time and time again this is not clearly seen by the victims of the process, that is, the members of the police force.

- 2.3.2 There are many accounts of brutality of members of the R.U.C. against Roman Catholics. I assume they are not all true and yet, in any case they are very understandable (in the light of the above analysis). Bad violence does not have rules. The war, as an expression of bad violence, takes hold of those who are using it. Also out of a very deep cultural sense of knowing (the scapegoat mechanism) those who suffer caught in the double-scapegoating position and 'expect' to be treated thus – so again they ask for it and reinforce the mechanism.

- 2.4 The segregation, which has taken place in Northern Ireland, was, and is, a substantial part of the scapegoating process. If you have your enemies in the midst of you, then in any case you have to know who they are and where they are.

Again there are many consequences and I mention some:

- 2.4.1 Although the device is as old as culture itself this does not mean that it makes things better. In fact all scapegoating processes between two big groups always are drifting to chaos, which eventually destroys everybody and everything.

- 2.4.2 Just because things are more clear they are, in the same time, much more threatening, not only subjectively but objectively. Out of the (conflictual) mimesis and the violence comes the growth of many more possibilities (of the same) whereas those possibilities out of (education0 mimesis are disappearing more and more.

- 2.4.3. The ambiguous position of the RUC too becomes much more clear. The police stations become fortresses in “enemy-land”. Many Catholics can still wish to see the RUC in the old manner whereas the members of the RUC try desperately to be just police. In seeking to be the arm of (all) society for good violence while surrounded

by the old perspectives of Catholic (and Protestant) expectations they get hopelessly mixed up.

- 2.5 As a result of all this, society is more and more breaking down and the army is called in. In this case it is now clear that (in cultural terms) “the enemy is amongst us” as intimidated by their presence.

As mentioned in 1.1 the army (traditionally) has the task of destroying enemies from the outside and also people from the inside who threaten to destroy the group or nation. The army represents the possible use of ‘bad violence’ of the state against its enemies.

If there are accounts of brutalities by members of the army then that too is understandable as the army simply represents the possibility of a country to defend its existence by brutality.

At the same time the position of members of the army is exactly as impossible as the position of members of the RUC – they too are in a double bind. They are members of an army having the task of doing police-work. Coming from Britain they knew (or had some feeling) about the scapegoating-processes going on.

- 2.6 In the same time all these insecurities can contribute to making human beings again more brutal. In the end there are in Northern Ireland two forces, the RUC and the army. The RUC was both police and army whilst the army was both army and police – both these forces are caught in double binds and both are caught up in a rivaling with each other.

3. **Scapegoating society in Northern Ireland after the Agreement**

- 3.1 The situation before the agreement was a very endangered equilibrium, but in any case it was an equilibrium. Behind the scapegoaters stood the large might of the U.K. and the scapegoaters found their identity in the U.K. and were protected by it.

Opposite to the Protestant community was the smaller scapegoated community, backed by the Republic of Ireland but between this community and the Republic of Ireland was again the army of the U.K.

Although things were not that good in bringing charge nevertheless the old structure was still there holding certain equilibrium.

- 3.2 The agreement has changed everything dramatically. The scapegoaters feel that the U.K. left them and gone to stand beside the scapegoated community and the Republic of Ireland – the scapegoaters were and are alone. To make things worse the frontier between the scapegoated and the Republic of Ireland is in fact not any longer there – the scapegoated and the Republic of Ireland are becoming one body.

- 3.3 Although, of course, it is possible to handle what is happening rationally, simply registering what is happening and trying to make best of it, in fact from the point of

view of a society that has existed by scapegoating the changes are so overwhelming that, in a sense, there are no measures to cope with it (at present).

Everything has been overturned; the result (apparently) is chaos, inner chaos and if there is any course, outward chaos, and otherwise hopelessness. Time and time again the word treason is used – it is a mythical word which indicates actions by which the very existence of a society can be destroyed or, and it is the same thing, by which chaos is provoked.

- 3.4 Because of the position the scapegoaters now are in, there is, very understandably, a big fear that they will be scapegoated. Power is, so they feel, shifting from them to the other side and they see no other state but those for so many years had the position “up” will now have the position “down”.

When a society has in fact no other experience than the scapegoating-equilibrium and when another, different, possibility is not perceived on the existential horizon, then this fear is very understandable.

The first task, political and person, for the churches is to change this feeling, however difficult it may be. This paper is not meant to be anything about that problem and it may well be a point of departure for a new one.

4. The R.U.C. after the Agreement

- 4.1 The consequence of the Agreement for the RUC is that the force is literally nowhere. The movement to the middle ground between the scapegoaters and scapegoated, which the RUC was already making ends abruptly in the “nowhere”. Till the agreement, it would seem that the RUC, by moving, would stay on solid grounds because Northern Ireland belonged to the U.K. Although of course this is still the case, Northern Ireland has become, as a result of the Agreement, such a special place, that the ground for the RUC has disappeared.

This was always already more or less the case. That might be one of the reasons, although only one of them, that the RUC never really found the middle ground between the parties.

- 4.2 The protestant community, the community of the scapegoaters, ends in chaos in the “nowhere”. The RUC, in another manner, is in the same position.

Although many pressures can lead to it, it cannot be attractive for the RUC to join with the community it served so long. It has its own (professionally) precious position which it cannot forsake, even if in the moment that position in society is built on “nothing”.

- 4.3 The RUC is still more isolated because the army has changed front as a result of the Government. (In the eyes of the Protestants).

The army belongs to the U.K. which is (perceived as) the traitor. The army is now backing up the once scapegoated (if it was not always doing so in the past) in the feelings of the former scapegoaters.

At the same time there are many reasons why this does not seem so clear, the actions of the I.R.A., old sympathies – these and other factors have not changed the direction in which things are (perceived as) going.

- 4.4 The former scapegoaters, driven into the corner and into chaos, do not have any other means to defend themselves and to try to get back an identity of their own than the old means culture always and only has had – mimesis, violence and scapegoating.

Scapegoating is, in fact, only possible against weaker persons or groups. Although the scapegoating against the Roman Catholics will go on (and in the scapegoating mechanism exponents of the Roman Catholic tradition will play their role in its continuance),

If there would be chances that it would not, the disowned Protestant community, desperately seeking an identity, will seek out new scapegoats. It is obvious then that the RUC is sorted out for that role. The RUC men and women are called traitors – in a sense they have no defenders and if they do have it is the army which is worse for them as it represents an even greater traitor in Protestant eyes – in the U.K.) The RUC are a group with no boundaries, they wear weapons and so they can be called violent people.

Although there are certainly more than these four characteristics (i.e. traitor, a group with no defenders, a group without boundaries and a group that wears weapons) are very old mythological indications that in a scapegoating process and make them very suitable to be scapegoated. Because the scapegoating is going on in a situation of chaos, being scapegoated means to be driven out and to be killed.

- 4.5 In a sense this situation is not a new one. The police everywhere always have had to do with being scapegoated. Police have always had to do with violence, with the sacred. It always was, in culture and with the means culture gave, a scapegoating force and so it was always too scapegoated.

In such a situation there must be accumulation of much wisdom from the past life of the police tradition as well as the need for much new wisdom.

The difficulty, of course, is that not only the dimensions have changed but also the “aggregate of culture”. To exist in a culture drifting into emotional, existential and maybe political chaos; to be marked out as the scapegoats of that culture, has as a presupposition a set of virtues (wisdom knowledge courage) which only can grow in the situation, if it is given time.

- 4.6 However we can still go further back. The police force in all societies has to do with violence, with the sacred. It is one of the figures in which the divinity comes back among the humans. For a deep reason the police are called Santa Hermondad.

The police force partake in the properties of the divinity, it is the scapegoat of society. The police take care that there is order and that trespassers are punished. It uses (good) violence it is isolated from the rest of society, having, as all sacred, its own place.

Thus the RUC is back in the original position of all police.

4.7 In other words (what has been said means):

The police force is the sacred in its cultural forms. It prevents violence and has the task to be itself as peaceful as it can possibly be.

4.7.1 This means for example that it never has to be in a mimesis (mimetic rivalry) with others, becoming violent when others are. It demands much training to learn this as well as possible (in practice).

4.7.2 Never has to defend itself in a violent manner (if at all possible) rather to resort to non-violent means of defence. There is now a tradition of which much can be learnt.

As soon as the police become violent, in fact it becomes the enemy – the scapegoat of everybody. This is not because people are bad but because it is the cultural position of the police to come in that situation as soon as it becomes violent itself.

4.7.3 Of course as long as is (humanly) possible they seek to handle the violence of others against others in a manner as non-violent as is possible. There are, for some, many possibilities, which we have to find, explore and train.

4.8 The RUC is not so alone as is sketched in this paper. There are big groups in the country who are with their hearts on the side of the RUC if only they (the RUC) succeed in showing that there is no sectarianism in the force. These groups, who are in the middle, are probably the carriers of a new society in Northern Ireland. They too can be the people in whom the RUC culturally and emotionally is embedded and carried..

Note

The word scapegoaters and all the others derived from it are not meant in a moralist manner. They are used to indicate what simply is happening. The question if there are guilty and unguilty persons in such processes is not touched upon by this paper.