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The Japanese contribution to violence in the world: The kamikaze attacks in World War II

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Abstract

The author attempts to understand the kamikaze attacks during World War II as a phenomenon that crossed a border into the systemic use of suicide attacks. The author first presents two historical precursors before World War II: the Seinan (Southwest) War in 1877; and an event in 1932 known as the Three Suicide-Bombing Heroes. To examine the process leading to kamikaze, the author offers two examples: a scene in which a suicide attack was proposed to pilots; and a story of a general, Ōnishi, who has been identified as a person responsible for the campaign. In the discussion, the author employs psychoanalytic arguments on chosen trauma and apocalyptic order to see kamikaze as sharing a common psychology with other warfare. He then focuses on the previous debate over the normality of suicide attackers and argues for the importance of finding a role for positive value in the psychological processes. He concludes that kamikaze was realized through multiple mechanisms and ended up crossing the border

to unconventional attack. He closes the paper by suggesting we should make efforts to keep the positive feedback in response to suicide attacks under a certain threshold in order to avoid reinforcing the spiral.

Key words:

kamikaze

suicide attack

apocalyptic

self-sacrifice

chosen trauma

mourning

Additional information

Notes on contributors

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Shigeyuki Mori, PhD, licensed clinical psychologist, is a professor at Konan University, Japan, and an individual member of International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies. He has authored and edited numerous books on the subject of trauma and also translated books, including by Ferenczi.

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