Over the last decade the increasing phenomenon of suicide terrorism has raised questions about how it might be rational for individuals to engage in such acts. This book examines a range of different forms of political self-sacrifice, including hunger strikes, self-burning and non-violent martyrdom, all of which have taken place in resistance to foreign interference. Karin Fierke sets out to study the strategic and emotional dynamics that arise from the image of the suffering body, including political contestation surrounding the identification of the victim as a terrorist or martyr, the meaning of the death as suicide or martyrdom and the extent to which this contributes to the reconstruction of community identity. Political Self-Sacrifice offers a counterpoint to rationalist accounts of international terrorism in terrorist and security studies, and is a novel contribution to the growing literature on the role of emotion and trauma in international politics.

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K. M. FIERKE
University of St Andrews
In memory of Mateo Castrillon (1993–2012)
Contents

List of figures

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Part I The Framework

1 Political self-sacrifice

2 Agency

3 Body and emotion

Part II The Historical Cases

4 Hunger strikes in Northern Ireland, 1980–1981

5 Martyrdom in Poland, 1984

6 Self-immolation in Vietnam, 1963

Part III Comparisons and Conclusions

7 Martyrdom in the contemporary Middle East and north Africa

8 The public diplomacy of suffering

Bibliography

Index
Figures

1.1 The body of self-sacrifice: contesting games  page 47
2.1 The prisoner’s choice structure  73
2.2 The warden’s dilemma  74
4.1 Shifting games in Northern Ireland  127
5.1 Shifting games in Poland  154
Acknowledgements

This project began with an observation regarding the use of the labels ‘suicide’ terrorism and ‘martyrdom’ to refer to the human bomb. While the language of ‘martyrdom’ is often dismissed as the mere propaganda of terrorists, I questioned what was being communicated in the use of these two terms and the dynamics generated by these different meanings for the same phenomenon. After presenting the paper ‘Agents of death: the structural logic of suicide terrorism and martyrdom’ at a workshop in honour of Professor Raymond Duvall at the University of Minnesota, Professor Kathy Hochstetler suggested that I look at other forms of bodily self-sacrifice, such as self-immolation. My first thanks must go to her, since, without her suggestion, I might not have taken the project in this particular direction.

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