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Conclusion

A victimological imagination of genocide

Yarin Eski and Sandra Walklate

Introduction

In 2007, at the University of Amsterdam, Yarin, a master's student at the time, had a class of the course 'Prosecution, Mass Murder and Genocide' by the lecturer Ton Zwaan. Zwaan, who provided expert testimony in the prosecution of Slobodan Milošević during the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and who is currently an emeritus professor of genocide studies and anthropology and author at the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, advised the students something—something, Yarin will never forget. Zwaan explained that in order to study genocide and its horrors, you should do so with grim optimism. It is difficult to study genocide, Zwaan admits, because

not many researchers, besides a few psychoanalysts, can immerse themselves thoroughly in the dark sides of humans, because it is also about yourself. That is difficult, you're human as well. ... Freud [wrote] about the potential of dispositions of people, [how] that [they] hint at ruthless aggression. If you ask yourself: how come I can turn extremely angry in a very short time, for example in traffic? You [can] catch a glimpse of that aggression.¹

(Zwaan and Schneiders, 2010: 19)

In imagining victimologies of genocide, we are confronted with those dark sides of ourselves, yet optimism and hope must be kept in exploring the crime of crimes that leads to the victim of victims. 'Hope is stronger than all imaginable "testimony of reality"'. ... Hope needs no proof. Hope is valid and real even if groundless' (Bauman, 2004: 67). However, it is difficult to merge hope with empirical reality, as reality is saturated with complexities that raise many questions about how, in this case, genocide could be explored using various, different perspectives and methodological approaches (Swedberg, 2007).

In delivering a starting point for a diverse appreciation of genocide and its victims, and motivated by working toward a victimology of genocide as

envisioned by Nicole Rafter (2016), this book explored and tied together different yet connected perspectives to offer contours of an interdisciplinary, victimological imagination of genocide (victimhood). The different contributions altogether delivered critical analyses of genocide, having integrated different disciplinary theories and methodologies, including religion and history, musicology and photography, philosophy and existentialism, and ethnography and biography.

This book has brought about four dimensions that are ripe for further victimological imagination and exploration to understand genocide victimhood: neglected theory and taboos, neglected genocide victimhood, alternative understandings of genocide, and genocides and their relation to 21st-century migration crises and xenophobic populism.

Neglected theory and taboos

Despite the inherent connection between genocide and existential questions, existentialism as a theoretical paradigm used to comprehend genocide has hardly, if never, been used in victimology. In exploring existentialism and its relevance for the victimological imagination of genocide, Eski proposes to integrate genocide studies, existentialism, and victimology in order to deliver genealogical knowledge on genocide victimhood. A specific focus ought to be given to survivorship of nothingness, the genocidal human condition and genocidal effects of genocide laws and politics. In analysing those themes, gathering data may consist of auto/biographical material, archival studies, and analyses, which enables research to capture survivors' socio-cultural lives and histories and to discover what is still intact of their social identity. It is as important to deliver critical victimologies of politico-legal histories of the genocide concept, predominantly to uncover cobra-effects of genocide laws and regulations and forgotten, unacknowledged victimhood.

Walklate too points out how victimology has neglected to consider either gender or the question of choice regarding genocide victimhood. The extermination of people is driven by a certain rationale which is gendered, targeting men and women differently. Not in all genocides, but overall, rape feminises victims, and masculinises perpetrators. It is a type of sexualising humiliation that leads to a mortification of the victims' social identity. In genocide it, therefore, is always about gender. Moreover, alongside gender, Walklate argues that the role of choice on the part of the genocide victim should be re-explored, as distasteful as this might appear, without the danger of 'victim-blaming.' Then it might be possible to fully understand genocide victims' choiceless choice, in which victimology is tasked to advance broader analyses that go beyond the specific horrors of the Holocaust. Victimologists could start to conceptualise genocide victimhood in terms of victimality with a view to understanding 'choice' as (re)configured by victims under certain social conditions of genocide.

Much in line with Eski's suggestions to uncover hidden (perverse) effects of genocide conventions and law, Lohne delivers a critical victimological imagination of how the (Westernised) understanding of crimes against humanity, and efforts of the International Criminal Court specifically to punish them, reinforces a certain humanitarian imaginary of a global moral order. It is a mechanism to constitute what 'humanity' means, according to the 'rescuers'/'saviours.' This is problematic because the divide between rescuers, victims, and evil-doers, puts a certain global moral order in place, which eventually limits justice for genocide victimhood. Meaning, through its humanitarian imaginary, from which a self-legitimised fight against genocide perpetrators and saving of victims develops, international criminal law and the ICC, in particular, emerge as global rescuers of genocide victimhood. However, they neglect other sorts of genocides and genocide victimhood that does not 'fit' that humanitarian imaginary.

Neglected genocide victimhood

The atrocious victimisation of the Rohingya and LGBT+ identities, as well as of 'other-than-human' actors, are clear examples of not fitting the ICC's humanitarian imaginary. In her chapter on the Rohingya crisis and finding accountability for the decades of persecution by the Myanmar regime, O'Brien shows that, despite several possibilities in different international laws for calling the Myanmar regime to account, as a result of (strict) legal understanding of territoriality, the location of a genocide limits substantially the avenues of accountability. The ICC is the embodiment of global justice for genocide but is, in a way, both locally and geopolitically restricted. Thus, although the ICC may want to end impunity, the problem of territorial jurisdiction and having China and Russia exercising their veto on any Security Council resolution, makes it difficult for the ICC to intervene. Hence, the Myanmar state of denial toward the genocidal victimisation of the Rohingya continues, resembling the denial and impunity of the Armenian genocide. O'Brien also discusses The Gambia's case against Myanmar in the ICJ as a process which provides hope for some level of accountability against Myanmar as a state for their genocide of the Rohingya. Hopefully, genocide victimhood of Rohingya will not be further neglected by the ICC.

Panther critically analysed the neglected genocide victimhood of LGBT+ identities throughout history. After the Holocaust, Nazi officers were not charged at the Nuremberg trials for their crimes against the LGBT+ community; this is clear evidence of how LGBT+ identities do not fit the heteronormative frame that is still ingrained in the global moral and political consciousness. She provides examples of more current LGBT+ genocidal acts that represent a small portion of intended elimination of this particularly targeted group. In pointing out how the actual number of LGBT+ identities who have been eliminated is unknown, Panther problematises this insofar as

omitting LGBT+ identities in, for example, the Genocide Convention; thus, the LGBT+ genocide victimhood goes unacknowledged. By giving exposure, however, to their victimhood through education and media while criticising the heteronormative, nationalist ideologies that feed silent and invisible LGBT+ genocidal events, the state of denial toward LGBT+ identities victimised by genocide may be broken.

In their chapter on the symbiotic destruction of relations between humans and other-than-human entities, Woolford and Hounslow criticise the largely anthropocentric lens of genocide studies and genocide law. They propose exploring genocides in terms of symbiotic victimhood and symbiotic destruction. Considered from an interdisciplinary perspective that includes Indigenous studies, animal studies, biological notions of mutualism, anthropology, and actor-network theory, they conclude that symbiotic victimisation and destruction relate in various ways to genocide. Identity, and the destruction of it, is connected to interactions with other-than-human species: in destroying or severing their relationship with the other-than-human species, the genocidal perpetrator destroys the livelihood and (social) identity of the targeted human group. Their victimological understanding of relations between humans and other-than-humans and their symbiotic victimisation and destruction may offer new perspectives to incorporate into victimology (and genocide scholarship overall) to work toward a larger holistic (and not merely anthropocentric) comprehension of genocide and what counts as genocide victimhood.

Alternative understandings of atrocity

Moving beyond the more classical social scientific disciplines, Morrison's chapter and Hoondert's chapter deliver accounts of artistic, in particular photographic and theatrical, understanding of genocide victimhood. Leaving from a Southern epistemological point of view, in particular, a Māori way of understanding the world, called *kōrero*, Morrison delivers an original contribution. He explores an interactive set of photographic and personal reflections on the novel *The Reader*, arguing that the Nuremberg trials failed to deliver an untainted, holistic imagery of the Holocaust and, instead, reconfigured the hegemonic, stigmatising views of Jews. Much in line with Lohne in this book and her critique on the self-legitimising humanitarian imagery of international criminal law and the ICC, particularly on genocide victimhood, Morrison criticises how certain Holocaust imagery has kept and still keeps dominant perspectives on genocide victimhood alive, and vice versa, that are themselves, one could argue, victimising. By reflecting photographically and autobiographically while applying Māori understandings, he unfolds how dominant powers visualise 'convenient truths' of genocide, identities, and relationships of victim and perpetrator and their meaning for today. He also shows how to execute such a critical victimological imagination of genocide victimhood imagery, integrating epistemologies of the South.

Next to Morrison's photographic understanding, Hoondert introduces an original way of comprehending genocide victimhood through the lens of theatre and performance studies. He researched theatre plays in the Netherlands as a cultural practice of genocide victimhood and memory. The selected plays tell the story of the genocide that took place in Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina 25 years ago. The role of DutchBat, a Dutch battalion under the command of the United Nations, played an important role and has been accused of passively assisting in the massacre of Bosniak men by Serbian forces. Through these plays, theatre makers want us to remember it, and in their processing from memory to play, simultaneously, memory as narrative is constructed. This means that theatre is both a representation of memory and a way of memory-making. The victimological imagination here is thus one that enables an understanding of genocide victimhood and its connection to (and creation of) collective and communicative memory, as well as giving a voice to formerly silenced narratives and hegemonic memories.

Leaning on perspectives on colonialism, modernisation, and civilisation theses, and in delivering a comparative understanding of myth-making regarding the Hamitic Myth and the Myth of Kosovo Polje, Balorda reveals the importance of past colonial victimisation in the language of modern genocide and the role of European colonial hegemony in determining group identities and the ethnic 'other' subjected to genocidal violence. The origins of the genocides that happened in Rwanda and Bosnia can be traced back to early nationalist ideologies of European modernity and their racist, colonial imagination of those areas. Through processes of othering by European colonial politics, ethnic cleansing could be considered a 'logical' consequence of nation-state formation in both Africa and Europe itself. For the victimological imagination, the role of past victimisation is an important risk factor to understand, as it can be used in genocidal politics traceable in utopian projects across the world these days.

New challenges: genocides, migration crises, and contemporary populism

The dangerous atrocious violence(s) that hide within utopian projects has been unleashed and is still ongoing in the Middle East, in particular Syria and Iraq. It has caused major flows of victimised refugees running away from their oppressive regimes that brought about death and destruction. Yet when succeeding in fleeing and arriving at, supposedly, safe havens in the EU, genocide refugees encounter the harsh new (right-wing) populist political-cultures rising in European democratic welfare states dealing with 'their' migration crises.

Bučar Ručman reveals how structures that shaped the Holocaust are still intact under the surface in EU border control of migration crises. Based on a comparative analysis of Slovenian (political) narratives on genocide refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s and Syria and Iraq in 2015/2016,

he shows how genocide manifests itself indirectly as well through hate speech, threats, and intimidation of refugees in Slovenia. These different groups of refugees in the 1990s and 2010s, were marginalised and discriminated against, even stigmatised as terrorists, criminals, and rapists. It uncovers how genocide victims of today, instead of being sheltered and taken care of, undergo secondary victimisation due to populism and the consequential violent migration management of European border control in an area that was once tormented itself by genocidal violence.

Asquith makes a similar observation regarding border control of fortress Britain, disguised as warm and welcoming to those who have experienced persecution, yet is not experienced as such in practice. In priding itself as a safe haven for Holocaust survivors, refugees that got away from Nazi-occupied Europe were demonised as dangerous and thus alienated at the time in Britain, yet are now celebrated as heroes and idols. Rwandan and Bosnian genocide refugees were treated better, due to improved refugee policy and support. However, again due to populism-inspired, xenophobic governance and border control of recent years, genocide victims who want to find sanctuary in Britain because of positive images of British warmth and the rose-tinted public and political memories of migration, get victimised again when confronted with the cold reality of current government policy and policing at UK borders.

A hopeful victimological imagination of genocide

Different interdisciplinary explorations configure the victimological imagination (McGarry, 2016; Walklate, 2018) of genocide offered here. They invite further development. It is an imagination, as Mills would explain, through which ‘the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference’ in society toward genocide are clarified and communicated (1959: 13). Now more than ever, perhaps, victimological imaginations of atrocities are necessary to confront today’s societies that, more and more, show signs of ‘refugee tragedy fatigue’ (Bauman, 2016) and distance themselves. The paradox of a globalised sin of indifference toward refugees, that often escape from genocidal regimes and conflict, must be met with solidarity to overcome our indifferences (ibid. 19–22). To engage against indifference implies a partisan attitude within victimology (cf. Tombs and Whyte, 2003: 229–233) toward genocide. In fact, any victimologist who studies genocide and ‘publish[es] the results *is* acting morally’ (Mills, 1959: 79, emphasis in original). Thus, victimological imaginations of genocide cannot (pretend to) omit morality, because

inevitably as the meeting of oxygen and hydrogen results in water, hope is conceived whenever imagination and moral sense meet. ... It is reality that must explain why it failed to rise to the standard of decency set by hope.

(Bauman, 2004: 64)

Victimological imaginations of genocide therefore ought to grasp atrocious harm and victimisation as

substantive problems on the historical level of reality; to state these problems in terms of appropriate to them; and then, no matter how high the flight of theory, no matter how painstaking the crawl among detail, in the end of each completed act of study, to state the solution in the macroscopic terms of the problem.

(Mills, 1959: 128)

Moreover, against the horrific realities of genocide, imagining with a sense of morality, a hopeful victimological imagination of genocide results from being 'constantly pulled between those moments of optimism and pessimism' (Davis, 2010: 1).

In moving forward, and taking the lessons from the above critiques on victimological (theoretical) neglect toward genocide, as well as from the insights delivered by non-traditional social scientific disciplines and the new challenges genocide victims encounter today, there are a couple of key initiatives to be taken to enrich the victimological understanding of genocide. Clearly, in exploring genocide victimhood, the victimological imagination ought not to shy away from existential, controversial explorations of and questions on (dark sides of) human nature, will to power and nothingness, choiceless choices, gender and sexualisation, wrongfulness of genocidal victimisation, and perversities of genocide conventions and international criminal justice. If victimology remains in a state of denial toward such confronting questions and themes, it neglects genocide victimhood and, therefore, itself. In contending neglected genocide victimhood, the victimological imagination should include critical analyses of why certain groups (whether human or other-than-human) are considered, conceptually and legally, genocide victims—and others are not. The role of power and (international) politics should not be underestimated here and requires the victimological lens to scrutinise those actors behind genocide legislation and interventions. Connected to uncovering neglected genocide victimhood, is a call to also reveal victimology's epistemological neglect of alternative, artistic understandings of genocide victimhood as introduced in this book. The contributions here deliver interesting avenues to enrich a victimological understanding of genocide through (historical) analyses of pictures, theatre, and myth-making. This can be broadened to victimological studies to incorporate musicological and cinematic understanding of genocide (victimhood). Given the new challenges of genocide victimhood and its relation to migration crises and rising xenophobic populism, a critical victimological imagination of genocide should include analyses of how new populism (in Europe), nationalist politics, and fear of refugees tie into each other and how they create secondary victimisation of genocide victims. Only then, to end

with Zwaan's hopeful instructions, victimological knowledge may support relief and restoration initiatives, because

If aid workers really want to mean something for people, it is of huge importance to possess understanding of the process of conflicts in which those who were part of it, is given aid to, as well as [understanding] of the consequence of violence for mental and physical situation of previous victims of aggressors.

(Zwaan and Schneiders, 2010: 18–19)

Note

- 1 Translated from Dutch.

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