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An existentialist victimology of genocide?

Yarin Eski

Introduction

During the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of Genocide, 9 December 2019, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that ‘the world has failed’ too often victims of genocide, emphasising that, because of the shattering impact of genocide on victims, communities, and society as a whole, it ‘can take generations to overcome and heal’ (UN News, 2019). By targeting groups of people, their cultures, their histories, genocides remove essential elements from being human. It results in a ‘loss to humanity of the richness of our understanding of the world we share,’ making it ‘an existential loss—the loss of the possibilities of thoughts, points of view, and ways of life open to us’ (Lederman, 2017: 126).

Throughout history, the world has been a stage for genocide and the existential losses and victimhood it spawned forward, but it has been the 20th century during which more people were subjected to genocide than during any other century (Glover, 2001; Zwaan, 2008). Victimology is developing increasingly more understanding of genocide, considering different perspectives, such as but not limited to, historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural approaches (Rafter and Walklate, 2012; Walklate and McGarry, 2015). However, existentialist (victimological) understanding of genocide (victimhood) remains scarce, or rather non-existent (Eski, 2017; Eski and Pemberton, 2016). This, whereas existentialist perspectives have entered the domain of criminological research, focussing on the traditional existentialist topics of human nature and *being* and *becoming* (Crewe and Lippens, 2009). It is also remarkable, as existentialist perspectives themselves have been accused of justifying genocidal policies, in particular, Nietzschean and Heideggerian thought (Shuster, 2010: 7)—policies that have led to mass victimisation during the Holocaust.

This contribution will therefore comprise an attempt to confront victimology with its lack of existentialist understanding of genocide by highlighting possibilities to frame genocide (victimhood) as an existential concept. Firstly, an exploration of historical (missing) links between existentialism and victimology is presented. Secondly, the question of what is existential about genocide is posed, exploring genocide and its origins, genocide victims as survivors of

nothingness, and the genocide concept; in particular, ‘genocidal intent,’ and its political and legal background, shall be explored. In concluding this first chapter, a set of orientations of victimology are presented for future existentialist victimological studies on genocide.

Existentialism, genocide, and victimology

Given the various conceptual, legal, and political ambiguities of genocide, ‘genocide’ invites a wide range of academic debates in various social scientific disciplines (Beachler, 2011; Zwaan, 2008). One would assume that victimology would be the main one that would advance the study of genocide—the crime of crimes, with the victim of victims—the most. Yet, the opposite is true. Not until recently has victimology been paying increasingly more attention to genocide and its psychological, sociocultural, and political factors (cf. Kauzlarich et al., 2001; Letschert and Van Dijk, 2011; Pemberton, 2015; Rafter and Walklate, 2012). Still, existentialist perspectives are underdeveloped in victimology.

Existentialism could, however, offer victimology rich perspectives to grasp the nature of one of the worst phenomena known to humankind. For example, Sartre’s *On Genocide* (1968) comprises a sociopolitical pamphlet to support the charge of genocide against the US intervention in Vietnam. Arendt’s work on Eichmann (2006) and Rosenbaum’s question *Is the Holocaust Unique?* (1996) are significant attempts to understand genocide from an existentialist perspective. Glover (2001) too attempts to address genocide and its evil from a philosophical point of view. Horowitz (1997, 1980, and 1976) and Huttenbach (2004, 2002, and 1988) have also explored the existential nature of genocide.

What is existentialism though? To stick to a concise answer, provided by criminologists Crewe and Lippens (2009: 2):

Existentialism is that form of inquiry about the nature of human being that locates the essential quality of being human in the notions of freedom and authenticity. [...] The most fundamental theme addressed by existentialism is the question of being.

Several key thinkers have considered the thing-in-itself, also called *noumenon*, and whether things exist or not. They pursued a type of ‘[e]xistentialism [that] can be thought of as the twentieth century analogue of nineteenth-century romanticism’ (Wildman, 1996: 1). Kant (1781), Kierkegaard (1843), and Schopenhauer (1818) argued that there are things-in-itself that are independent of other things. Contradicting that independence approach is Nietzsche (1887), who was a strong critic of Kant and argued there is no thing or being in itself; things and being(s) only exist *because of* their relationship to other things and being(s). Existence is only perceivable. Hence, there is no essence and only existence through other existences, which seems to be agreed upon particularly by 20th-century existentialists: ‘[t]o be an existentialist, then, it is

both necessary and sufficient to accept the basic tenet that for human beings existence precedes essence' (Webber, 2017: 13). Meaning: there is no thing-in-itself that would exist independently of whether it can be sensed or perceived. There is no *noumenon*; there is only *phenomenon*, and therefore, there is only *becoming* and no *being*. These last-mentioned propositions are crucial to understanding (especially) Sartrean existentialism.

Sartre's existentialist thought developed ideas revolving around *being*, *becoming*, and *nothingness*, in relation to *indeterminacy* and *intentionality*. According to him, human beings are beings not because of the idea we are a thing-in-itself, as there is no intrinsically determined essence, but because we are a thing-for-itself; meaning, there is only existence through others and other things-for-itself. So, for example, I am Dutch (for myself) because I perform and undertake activities that make me *become* Dutch; however, I am not essentially Dutch in itself—my Dutch-for-itself it is not determined. I would be lying to myself if I were to try convincing myself I am a certain (set of) thing(s). I can only *become* Dutch; I cannot ever *be* Dutch. This is one of the reasons why Sartre explained he *is* not an existentialist; he could only *become* an existentialist.

So, because we (*intend* to) become, we can also direct ourselves from a certain becoming to another becoming; I can start becoming Dutch but also European. Human existence is therefore one of *indeterminacy*, and because of that, it is our intent, or our will, to become which defines becoming. Hence, according to existentialism, becoming is will-dependent, which makes any action, always *intentional*. Becoming, therefore, comprises *indeterminacy* and *intentionality* (Martinot, 1991)—or, actually, *indeterminacy through intentionality* and vice versa. Equally important is that as a being, we intentionally question the meaning of (our) being-for-itself, and, in doing so, we (feel we) become meaningful ('the Being for whom Being is a question') (Heidegger, 1962). It is because I inquire about (the meaning of) me *becoming* Dutch that I become Dutch.

That existentialist focus on becoming has been adopted by criminologists (Crewe and Lippens, 2009; Jones, 1986).

No systematic attempt has hitherto been made, within the broader criminological community, to apply existential thought to problems of crime and crime control, or to put it to use in the expansion or further development of criminological theory.

(Crewe and Lippens, 2009: 6)

Existentialist ideas on the human condition, being, and becoming have been utilised to analyse crime and deviance, as well as control and governance. Existentialist criminological inquiry that has integrated key existentialist work has extracted predominantly (and merely) ideas from 'a hitherto largely untapped neo-Nietzschean reservoir of critical potential' (Crewe and Lippens, 2009: 7–8). The criminologists who commenced existentialist inquiry into crime and control also touched upon ideas of Beauvoir, Dostoyevsky,

Camus, Heidegger, Husserl, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Schopenhauer alongside Nietzsche's influential work. Subject areas explored existentially by criminologists include peacemaking criminology, criminologies of becoming, including Katz' *Seductions of Crime* (1988); and cultural criminological work on edgework and criminological 'verstehen.' None of these existentialist analyses within criminology has focussed on genocide, though, and thus existentialist definitions and conceptualisations of genocide have barely been (if at all) developed.

The lack of existential understanding of genocide (in criminology and victimology) is particularly striking (perhaps worrying) because key existentialist work had been published directly after the Second World War. Works by especially Sartre and Arendt show how they 'were struggling to make sense of the international realignments, genocidal campaigns, and the technologies of past and future [that made] mass killing [...] possible' in 'times of unprecedented change that have stimulated new ways of thinking about the conditions of our collective existence' (Lyng et al., 2009: 95–96). Indeed, although genocide had 'its roots in the writings of such individuals as Sören Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Friedrich Nietzsche,' it was the existentialist writings that 'flowered in response to the horrors of the Second World War which clearly weakened the western notions of progress, good & evil' (Sartre and Mairat, 1960: 396).

Sartre (2003[1943]) talked about nothingness, right before the Second World War ended, in 1944, and how we could become free under circumstances of war, in particular, under the German occupation of Europe. Sartre, who initially rejected the existence of 'existentialism' as a school of philosophical thought (Fulton, 1999), after the discovery of the Holocaust, radically altered his mind and accepted the reifying of existentialism, and he even started to defend it (Sartre, 1946). He was especially vocal about genocide when he wrote 'On Genocide' (1968), an existentialist explanation of the Vietnam War as a form of (colonial) genocide (Card, 2003). Arendt, who survived the Holocaust, delivered an existentialist understanding of Adolf Eichmann (2006). Primo Levi was a camp survivor, and Emmanuel Levinas and Zygmunt Bauman fought at the front lines. They were heavily influenced by the events experienced during the war and, in particular, through their own survival (Totten and Bartrop, 2008: 387; Tymieniecka, 2002: 410). In sum, whereas existentialism, Nietzsche's particularly, may have inspired and influenced genocidal thought (although highly doubtful, according to Golomb and Wistrich [2009]), genocide, in turn, has influenced existential thought; existentialism and genocide are therefore inherently connected.

Despite this intrinsic link, existential analyses of genocide in criminology and victimology have been avoided, or, at the very least, not paid attention to in-depth, but merely observed on the surface:

Not only is there a close symmetry between the etiology and phenomenology of crime and punishment, particularly of violent crime and state

violence, but there are also close parallels with crimes occurring in war (by both sides), in terrorism and the response to it, and in the development and enactment of genocide.

(Young, 2003: 392)

Victimology should engage in existential analysis of genocide more significantly because of the abovementioned intrinsic link and even more so because genocide comprises the total annihilation of the existence of being: it is an inherently existential act (Sartre, 1968) and existential extermination. As put more recently:

[Genocide] is existential in the sense that it robs humanity of the unique experience and understanding of the world that emerge in groups that are formed over a relatively long period of time and share a common history, language, culture or other aspects that we usually associate with national, ethnic, religious and similar kinds of groups.

(Lederman, 2017: 17)

Hence, it is crucial for victimology to scrutinise genocide from an existentialist point of view, exactly because this crime of crimes that leads to the victim of victims (Rafter, 2016). It is one of *existential* elimination and harm to humanity, abolishing an *existence* of a group and their cultures, histories, and identities (Huttenbach, 1988). It is physical and sociocultural annihilation (Card, 2003); it is total, and therefore, as has been argued, genocide transcends being just another criminal act among many others:

Anything short of the existential character of genocide must be classified otherwise and not appended to the list of genocidal acts at the expense of actual genocide. [...] Anything short of a definition of genocide that dilutes its existential significance is a step away from its reality. [...] To list this crime alongside crimes that were not genocidal, not existential by nature, would be a disservice to the goal of clarification.

(Huttenbach, 1988: 297–298)

In this light, victimologies of genocide must therefore always include existentialist perspectives. To do so, victimology ought to set out an agenda to explore and define what is existential about genocide.

What is existential about genocide?

Existentialist victimological analyses need to include ‘a realist philosophy [...] start[ing] with harm, victimisation, seriousness, suffering’ (Cohen, 1993: 103). They should go beyond understanding genocide ‘as a purely academic concept’ by taking seriously ‘victimization status [as] a source of legitimacy

for historical or contemporary claims to recognition, restitution, or political power' (Beachler, 2011: 145). In particular, the historical claims to recognition of genocide victimhood is to acknowledge and explore the intrinsic connection between genocidal violence and the beginning of humans as a species.

A genocidal genesis

As Shearing noted recently: 'We [human beings] must now be conceived of as integral to earth systems [...] as biophysical "actants" who have, through our actions, significantly reshaped the earth' (2015: 257). Existential victimological analysis of genocide must integrate the knowledge that 'the human heritage—and the propagation of itself as a thing of value—has occurred on the back of seemingly endless acts of violence, destruction, killing, and genocide' (Kochi and Ordan, 2008: 11). Questions should explore genocidal violence as a defining element of us being a sapient human being (Best, 2009; Diamond, 2013)—genocide and its victims have been existential from the beginning of humankind. It is crucial to dissect how and why genocide is 'a consistent pattern reaching back into our early history and show[ing] a systematic problem inherent in our species itself—a proclivity towards violence that is likely to abide whatever the social setting' (Best, 2009: 291). Perhaps, 'of all our human hallmarks—art, spoken language, drugs, and the others—the one that has been derived most straightforwardly from animal precursors is genocide' (Diamond, 2013: 264).

At its bedrock, it has been argued (Banks et al., 2008; Golding, 1955; Jones, 2016), we, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the anatomically modern humans (a subspecies of *Homo sapiens*), rose from the ashes of another sapient species, *Homo neanderthalensis*, the Neanderthals. Neanderthals were the first group of victims of man-made genocidal wars, and, ever since, we have developed ourselves into becoming the dominating 'global species' of the planet that has 'become, through labor and technique, powerful "geological agents" [...] who are actively shaping the Earth system in ways that seriously undermine our safe spaces' (Harrington and Shearing, 2016: 13). Out of all species, people are 'the invasive species and agent of mass extinction par excellence' (Best, 2009: 298) that has made another sapient species extinct in order to survive and thrive (Jones, 2016); or, inhabiting a will to *become something* by letting another species *become nothing*. More than 45,000 years ago, '[t]he first act of human genocide, [was] the massacre of the Neanderthals, [...] a prelude to the assault of agricultural societies against primal peoples for thousands of years' (Best, 2009: 291). The abolition of the Neanderthals may actually be considered as

more than genocide, because what was lost was not a race of human beings, but an entire sapient species. It is also more than the extinction of

a species, because it was a species with (presumably) a ‘humanity’ and self-consciousness somewhat like our own.

(Silas, 1997: 75)

From a Sartrean point of view, then, humans (have) *become* by stopping another species’ becoming. Sartre iterated that any becoming implies intentionality, making genocide best explored if focus is laid upon the intention(al)ity behind genocide: the genocidal will. In turn, that will is best understood as a will to total annihilation, or, to absolute nothingness. To totally annihilate is to bring about ‘the existential destruction of a human collective,’ stressing the ‘nihil,’ which means ‘nothing,’ and as an act, to ‘annihilate’ unambiguously conveys the concept ‘to make—to transform Something—into Nothing’ (Huttenbach, 1988: 174). Total annihilation is therefore the production of absolute nothingness of the Other as a desired objective of the Self: ‘a genocidaire [who] seeks to acquire the power to control the existence of a group including the ability to obliterate it and everything associated with a targeted collective, including its historical existence through memory, as well as any conceivable form of an existential continuity in the future’ (ibid.). The nature of genocide in its purest form is then ‘an act of anti-creation, which aims at a totality of extinction so extreme that even the very act of genocide might be denied, its memory fully expunged from future records’ (Huttenbach, 2004: 87). The victims have never existed.

This means that to bring about complete nothingness is to, first of all, fulfil full *physical extermination* of a group of people on a certain territory (Butcher, 2013: 255–256). The territorial existence of a group has to end in order to speak of a ‘successful,’ end ‘whether or not there [it] is forced migration or physical extermination’ (ibid. 257); people must be (forced to be) removed (Shaw, 2015). Removal of a group is removal of an existential relation of a people with a certain physical space that is ‘a vital component of [a group’s] cultural existence that the process of genocide seeks to destroy’ (Butcher, 2013: 258). Second of all, nothingness of a group is eventually achieved by the full *elimination of culture*, because ‘culture is the social fabric of a genus. [...] the unit of collective memory, whereby the legacies of the dead can be kept alive and each cultural group has its own unique distinctive genius deserving of protection’ (Gauger, 2012: 7). Finally, in an ideal-type genocide, perpetrators and victims together will be forgotten, erased from history:

The act of complete genocide will become itself a non-act. [...] [T]here will remain not a single shred of evidence of a genocide ever having taken place, as if the terminated group had never existed, consigning it to a timeless, formless, condition of precreation, pushed back to a nonexistence [...] the unformed void.

(Huttenbach, 2004: 87)

If total annihilation of an existence is driven by a will to absolute nothingness that has led to ‘existential decisions by individuals in genocide’ (Chalk, 1989:

156), victimological understanding should focus on genocide victims as survivors of nothingness.

Surviving nothingness

The main difference between victims of homicide and genocide: a homicide victim 'has a name, a face, a past,' while victims of genocide, '[in] an amorphous mass, however ... become nameless' (Alvarez, 2001: 18). Genocide survivors undergo 'depersonalized victimization' (ibid. 48–49). One's identity becomes nothing; your sociocultural and historical context that shapes you and your group are turned into nothingness. Surviving genocide then means you physically have continued. However, identity-wise, there is a strong likelihood your identity (and the sociocultural context of it) has been totally annihilated, leading to social death (Card, 2003; Groenhuijsen and Pemberton, 2011). In that case, genocide survivors are 'no longer able to pass along and build upon the traditions, cultural developments (including languages), and projects of earlier generations' (Card, 2003: 73). It leads to feelings of uselessness and to feeling indecent to be worthy enough to procreate, through which social death removes 'all respectful and caring ritual, social connections, and social contexts that are capable of making dying bearable' (ibid.).

Social death is 'the special evil of genocide' which produces 'a consequent meaninglessness of one's life and even of its termination' (ibid. 73–74). Perpetrators 'can destroy not only your bodies but also your souls, just as we [the perpetrators] have destroyed ours' (Levi, 1989; p. 54). Or, as Bauman observed: 'the cruellest thing about cruelty is that it dehumanises its victims before it destroys them. And ... the hardest of struggles is to remain human in inhuman conditions' (Bauman, 1986: x). Cruelty, in particular the cold joke, is the ultimate form of disrespect of a human being that is subjected to absolute annihilation and thus a display of power to emphasise the difference between 'us' and 'them' and to show how 'little troubled [genocidaires are] by feelings of sympathy that [they] can laugh at your torment' (Glover, 2001: 37). It is that festival of cruelty that dehumanises, killing a group's and someone's spirit and dignity before the physical extermination of the victims begin. Once social, cultural, and physical extermination is complete, the existential loss has been realised.

Such collective (genocide) experiences affect the most essential foundations of human life. They touch on people's deepest fears of violent destruction and elimination, not just of themselves but of all of those they love and feel connected with. With it, a breach in existentially necessary feelings of safety and trust can appear. After the catastrophe, nothing is the same anymore for survivors and relatives. The continuity of everything is broken. Home is nowhere anymore; emptiness, desolation and devastation are everywhere; trust and security have become extremely scarce. Due

to the scale of genocide, normal mourning, which could assist acceptance and processing of disastrous events, is extremely difficult. Those who should be mourned are too manifold, those who should mourn are too outnumbered.¹

(Zwaan, 2015: 4)

The ‘perfect’ victims of genocide are the ones that are totally annihilated, and those whose physical and sociocultural and historical presence can be considered to never have existed and whose victimhood never existed. From the nothingness point of view, a victim has fulfilled its role once she has passed away and goes unacknowledged as a victim of genocide. That victim is the (non-existent) product of genocide as an act of anti-creation.

Genocide survival and victimhood should then be considered to go against the genocidal ideal of complete anti-creation: a victim has not *become nothing*, but is still *becoming something*. They escaped ‘the ultimate existential Nothingness, the consignment to the Void in the name of a utopian vision which perceives genocide as a means to a better world’ (Huttenbach, 2002: 175). Their survival is then ‘a failure’ or ‘a harm’ on that ‘better world’ that was aimed for by the genocidaires. Victims can feel survivor guilt, a ‘massive trauma [that] can never be fully confronted or “worked through”’ (Rosenbloom, 1985: 188). Survivor guilt, lying in ‘the sphere of existential guilt,’ leads to ‘fear of dying in an unfulfilled manner, which engenders a sense of absolutely lost connection within the framework of human continuity’ (Kaufman, 1971: 19–20).

In experiencing social death and survivor guilt, victims go through a variety of psychic, psychobiological and psychosocial anxieties, such as ‘suffer[ing] frequent nightmares characterized by overwhelming fear of existential destruction, utter helplessness and complete absence of counter-aggression’ (Eitinger, 1980: 146), as well as ‘an omnipresent sense of hopelessness and emptiness, an existential despair, an inability to enjoy life and to relate in a trusting way to others and the world’ (Russell, 1980: 177–178). In a way, victims have been zombified, a process in which ‘[e]xtinction [also] creates extreme difficulty in telling one’s story, particularly in one’s occupied homelands [...] rupturing the self and its relationships’ (Provost et al., 2010: 22). Like zombies, genocide survivors live in this world but do not (feel they) exist; they have become the living dead and this gives them a sense of disembodiment (*ibid.*).

That lived death could be dealt with, psychologically, in case survivors would tell about their trauma and losses, and ‘[e]xistentially, it is the fulfilment of the urgent moral obligation expressed by many survivors’ (Solomon, 1998: 71). However, even if a survivor would be able to free themselves from their zombified status, those who can and should listen to them are often unable to do so, as they cannot believe the unbelievable—a phenomenon described as a conspiracy or curtain of silence (Feingold, 1980: 304–305). The will to nothingness, the anti-creation of a victim that ‘failed’ makes survivors feel avoided, denied, betrayed, alienated, and kept silent (Solomon,

1998: 71). This disbelief signals that ‘genocide as a state practice makes it difficult for participants to recognize the phenomenon—those performing the executions no less than those being executed’ (Horowitz, 1997: 221). An existentialist victimology should strive to comprehend genocide survivors, their (existential) silence and risks to social death and survivor guilt. In doing so, a critical lens on genocidal victimhood ought to include victims of any type of mass violence that aims for total annihilation, and requires to broaden the scope by reflecting on the genocide concept and genocide laws and treaties.

Genocidal effects of the genocide concept

Finally, an existential, critical victimology of genocide should dissect the legal concept of genocide and its effects itself because of its politicised nature. After all, international genocide regulation defines a genocide, its perpetrators, and its victims, and may very well exclude other events that may be considered genocidal. Since its relatively recent conceptual birth, genocide has had a wide range of conceptual difficulties.

The word ‘genocide’ has not been in existence for very long: it was coined by the jurist Lemkin between the two world wars. The thing is as old as mankind and so far no society has existed whose structure has prevented it from committing this crime. In any case, genocide is a product of history and it bears the mark of the society from which it comes.

(Sartre, 1968: 13)

Raphael Lemkin (1944) introduced ‘genocide’ during the Second World War and, therefore, during an almost unique (Arendt, 2006; Rosenbaum, 1996) and one of the most destructive genocides of them all: the Holocaust. Since then, the conceptual complexity of genocide brought about numerous (ongoing) debates in the international community which have made the understanding of genocide a challenging, if not impossible, task (Beachler, 2011; Herman and Peterson, 2010). In particular, genocidal *intent* has been and still is problematised; it is *the* defining legal element in determining whether mass extermination is genocidal or not (Bedau, 1973; Lang, 1990). Genocidal intent ought to be considered an essentially contested concept (Gallie, 1955), that is ‘used quite generally and loosely, while in other contexts, for instance in international criminal law, it has been used in a strictly limited sense [...] adequate definition and conceptualisation are still being carried [out]’ (Zwaan, 2008: 61). Genocide is thus also a politicised concept, shaped by specifically Western (political) philosophies on violence, massacre, and human rights violations and codified in a (seemingly) strict legal definition of genocide that was introduced by the United Nations (UN) (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002; Horowitz, 1997). The UN used Lemkin’s concept to provide Article 2 of the Convention

on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), according to which:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

(*ibid.* 280)

Once an event fulfils any of the five conditions, it will be legally acknowledged as a genocide, obliging each UN member state to prevent and intervene according to Article 1 (*ibid.*). However, Article 1's phrasing could be considered quite general, if not (purposely) vague, which complicates the very obligation for intervention (Van den Herik, 2007). It has been suggested that decisions regarding genocide 'prevention or intervention have more to do with policy and/or moral choices than with the law,' reflecting 'not weaknesses in the Genocide Convention (prevention) or in the UN Charter (use of force) that constitute the greatest obstacles to timely resolute responses, but narrowly conceived interests of UNSC member states, and mainly the five permanent ones (P-5)² (Mayroz, 2012: 93).

It has been argued that the genocide concept is particularly favourable to the global West and its democratic regimes and considered an intrinsic, functional result of enlightenment, rationalisation, modernisation and the state as an institution itself (Bauman, 1989; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002; Horowitz, 1976; Sartre, 1968). Reflecting on the dangers and threats of enlightenment and its myths of rationality, Horkheimer and Adorno argued (2002) that 'the birth of Western history and of subjectivity itself from the struggle against natural forces, as represented in myths, are connected in a wide arch to the most threatening experiences of the present' (*ibid.* 217), the most threatening experience being genocide. Or, as Shuster explains, 'the whole gamut of Western thinking is perhaps complicit or, at the very least, intimately close to the practice of genocide' (2010: 12); meaning genocide is not a stand-alone horrific event that deviates from the chain of events of modern Western civilisation, but instead, it is an atrocious phenomenon that forms a structural component of enlightenment and modernity itself (Bauman, 1989; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002; Shuster, 2010; Zwaan, 2001). It is an evil that *hides within* and *drives* the sovereign state (Horowitz, 1997); in other words, it is (part of) the existential core of Western liberal democracies. The politico-legal context of genocide seems to uncover that 'every clash of civilisations really is a clash of underlying barbarism' (Žižek, 2009: 150).

Whether it was crusades and colonisation in the past or peacekeeping missions in the present, state ideologies that drive economic and sociocultural ‘improvement’ of their societies (also at a global level), have served to disguise the worst human rights violations committed by those states. For example, the United States’ acts of war from Vietnam to Iraq to bring peace and democracy to regions outside of the United States, have been considered genocidal, yet never (legally) acknowledged as such (Herman and Peterson, 2010; Sartre, 1968). The invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States and its allies have taken millions of Iraqi lives; however, public debate, the international community, and media rather framed Saddam Hussein’s regime as genocidal (justifying the United States invasion to begin with) than to acknowledge ‘the real bloodbath engineered by the United States [...] only enemies of the United States can commit the crime officially labelled “genocide”’ (Herman and Peterson, 2010: 38). Based on this, it could be argued that once it is internationally and legally established that a conflict is ‘a genocide,’ those who are supposed to stop genocide (entitle themselves to) use genocidal violence. This is another important paradoxical phenomenon that requires an existentialist, critical victimology of genocide.

Conclusion: Genealogical orientations for an existentialist victimology of genocide

In concluding this chapter, it is suggested to merge genocide studies, existentialism, and victimology and to integrate theoretical, methodological, and empirical knowledge on ‘the systemic and structural nature of genocide [victimhood]’ by ‘explor[ing] the deepest, most structural, and systematic causes for conflict’ and by providing ‘a particular genealogy [of genocide ...] one that can be explored via its underpinnings in a complex network of philosophical commitments and positions’ (Shuster, 2010: 14). In doing so, victimology should start to explore the possibilities of genealogical studies of the aforementioned key dimensions (but not limited to!) involving genocide survivorship of nothingness, the genocidal human condition, and genocidal effects of genocide laws and politics. Genealogical studies allow for an understanding of victims’ lives in their broader historical, sociocultural context, preferably, including biographical material, archival studies, and analyses (O’Neill et al., 2015). It is about focussing on the individual and heterogeneity of phenomena and capturing ‘auto/biographical narratives as sources, revealing how human subjects constitute themselves’ (Tamboukou, 2013, p. 88). Victimologists can explore the survivors’ sociocultural lives and histories, in a way, making them remember kinship, group, and cultures they were or, hopefully, are still part of (Quinlan and Hagen, 2008). It is then about exploring especially what is still intact of their social identity, instead of what is lost, as well as about trying to uncover which identity/identities of the victim can be revived. This way insights are gathered on how physical and

cultural annihilation leads to a zombified life and how to pull someone back from a zombie status by moving beyond (mere) legal solutions and exploring further reconciliation through, for example, theatre and music (see chapter by Hoondert in this book). Genealogical analyses of politico-legal histories of the genocide concept, its place in international laws, and its (discriminating) effects, aim to provide a critical victimological answer to the question: for whom does the genocide concept ‘work’ (not) and why (see chapter Lohne in this book)? An existentialist, critical victimology of genocide may then be achieved, unfolding cobra-effects of genocide laws and regulations in which the very legal tools and bodies that define a genocide and its perpetrating governments allow for other governments to get away with genocidal violence; it leaves behind hidden genocide victimhood (primary victimisation) and thus unacknowledged victimhood (secondary victimisation). Critical discourse analyses of chosen morality, normativity, laws, and politics (cf. Borrows, 1992; Hansen, 2013; Schmitt, 2005) to codify the prevention of and combat against genocide may provide the necessary insights for an existentialist victimology.

Notes

- 1 Translated from Dutch.
- 2 The United Nations Security Council has five permanent members (P-5): China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

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