



## Wars and Psychology: A Critical Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

In this article we try to answer the question what the contribution of psychology is to the prevention and deterrence of wars. It should not be forgotten that in the twentieth century alone almost every year a new war started somewhere in the world. Added up over many centuries, the number of perpetrators, victims and witnesses must be immense. The bold thesis launched here is that almost every family (through living relatives and ancestors) on earth carries a story about a war and what that war has meant to the family and ancestors. This article uses a literature review. This study teaches us that psychology, too, as a scientific and practice-oriented study, lends its ears to big money. This took off in the United States of America where psychology gets a huge boost around the two world wars in the twentieth century. In this article, that psychology is also called negative psychology, a psychology that views the human mind and human behaviour primarily from the perspective of "misery. This is mainstream psychology. Fortunately, it is not all doom and gloom. Humanity is saved by positive psychology where hope, resilience and sources of power of (groups of) people are central. The psychology or Transformation and Reconciliation developed by Tutu and Tutu is a wonderful example of this. In short, the contribution of psychology to the monitoring and maintenance of peace can be called meagre. Indeed, on top of all that, psychologists will have to deal with the "laws" of epigenetics. A solution will have to be found for the "cruelty" transmitted through DNA by wars from person to person. One possible research direction in this regard is the study of intergenerational trauma. Central to this is the right to self-determination of every human being and every group of human beings.

**Keywords:** war psychology, positive and negative psychology, Transformation and Reconciliation, Russian War

Many people on earth have been subjected to atrocities by governments, militias and terror groups. Today, we also have private military companies, commercial armies of veterans and former Russian officers of the military intelligence agency (GRU) and federal security agency (FSB)<sup>1</sup>, such as the 'Russian' Wagner Group that pillage, murder, torture and rape relentlessly in Syria, Libya, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the "little green men" in Eastern Ukraine. Different words are in vogue for these atrocities. Well-known words are genocide, war, invasion and occupation.

This article is not about these individual and collective atrocities themselves. But it is about the contribution of psychology before, during and after these atrocities. Best known to the public at large is the therapeutic care given to veterans. Less well known is the psychological and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.csis.org/nfpf/russian-private-military-companies-syria-and-beyond>

sociological research on perpetrators of, for example, genocidal regimes. In this article, a distinction is made between victims, bystanders and perpetrators. Bystanders may assist victims or support perpetrators in committing individual and/or collective atrocities. The article also asks whether psychology is also committed to promoting peace on earth or whether psychology is primarily reactive.

### DEFINITIONS OF WARS

In practice, there are many definitions of war (Van der Dennen, 1980). In principle, wars can arise between nation states and also between parties in the same country or between peoples in different countries.

“War is a species in the genus of violence; more specifically it is collective, direct, manifest, personal, intentional, organized, institutionalized, instrumental, sanctioned, and sometimes ritualized and regulated, violence. These distinguishing features and dimensional delineations are not limitative. It should be perfectly clear, however, that war, or the state of belligerence, is a very special category of violence (Van der Dennen, 1980).”

Wars are also taking place in former colonised countries where Western powers have drawn borders with compasses and rulers and this across peoples. A war is also defined on the basis of motives. An example of this is the current war of Russia against the Ukraine (official launch in February 2022). This war was preceded by the war in the Crimean peninsula (excluding the Ukrainian-ruled part of the Arabat Peninsula). Crimea was annexed by Russia in February-March 2014, as part of the Russo-Ukrainian War) of Russia against Ukraine, with a call to restore the pre-1917 Great Russian Empire (Russian Revolution). This imperialistic Great Russian Empire was established by Russia, which colonised the nomadic peoples of Siberia and other parts of Russia from Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Russian atrocities have been documented in Russia since Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584).

“Now that Russia again attacks a neighbour - after, to stay with the last century, Japan (1905), Poland (1919), Finland (1939), the Baltic States (1940), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Afghanistan (1979) and Georgia (2008) - the question arises: is there a Russian *Sonderweg*? Is there such a thing as a 'typically Russian' form of state, whereby one's own population is oppressed and neighbouring countries are invaded. And if so, how did this come about? (Funnekoter, 2022)”

Finally, wars are also defined on the basis of their genesis. For example: ‘due to the construction of unnatural reservoirs, my country does not have enough water to irrigate its agricultural land’. Van der Dennen (1980) makes this large number of definitions clear with the following remark:

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<sup>2</sup> *Sonderweg* is the designation for the thesis that Germany had its own anomalous development from aristocratic rule to democracy. Most characteristically, in the nineteenth century, the acquisition of economic power by the bourgeoisie did not result in the acquisition of political power. That remained in the hands of the princes and the nobility.[1] This is said to have caused the persistence of a preference for authoritarian leaders and ultimately made possible the rise of National Socialism and the associated horrors of the Holocaust. The *Sonderweg* thesis has been criticized for assuming that the existence of a *Sonderweg* presupposes the existence of a normal, obligatory path to democracy. Link: <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonderweg>

“Even casual inspection of the literature reveals the following, incomplete, list of ‘war’ terms: limited war and total (or all-out) war, cold war and hot war, local war and world war, controlled and uncontrolled war, accidental war and premeditated war, conventional and nuclear war, declared and undeclared war, aggressive or offensive war and defensive war, general war and proxy war, international war and civil war, tribal and civilized war, preventive or pre-emptive war, protracted war, absolute war, war of liberation, war of conquest, war of commerce, war of plunder, revolutionary war, political war, economic war, social war, imperialist war, guerrilla war, psychological war, strategic war, counter-insurgency war, dynastic war, monarchical war, ritual war, agonistic war, sacred war, instrumental war, genocidal war.”

“Singer and Small (1972), and Deutsch and Senghaas (1973) call according to Van der Dennen (1980):

“war” any series of events that meets the following three criteria:

**Size:** it results in at least 1000 battle deaths (not counting, therefore, the indirect victims through famine, lack of shelter, and disease).

**Preparation:** it has been prepared in advance, and/or is being maintained, by large-scale social organizations through such means as the recruitment, training and deployment of troops the acquisition, storage and distribution of arms and ammunition, the making of specific war plans and the like, and

**Legitimation:** it is being legitimized by an established governmental or quasi-governmental organization, so that large-scale killing is viewed not as a crime but as a duty.”

This article is not only about the role of psychology before, during and after a war but also about the role of psychology before, during and after a period of peace.

The President of the American Psychological Association -Major Robert M. Yerkes- wrote in 1918 an article with the title “Psychology in Relation to War”.

“In Europe, psychologists have served conspicuously in the great war but psychology has done little. In this country, for the first time in the history of our science, a general organization in the interests of certain ideal and practical aims has been effected. Today American psychology is placing a highly trained and eager personnel at the service of our military organizations. We are acting not individually but collectively on the basis of common training and common faith in the practical value of our work. At the first call American psychologists responded promptly and heartily, therefore the length to which the development of our work has progressed and the measure of service which has been attained.”

Mockingly, the definitions of peace are as follows:

“These formulations are reminiscent of Ambrose Bierce’s sardonic definition of “peace” as: “a period of cheating between two periods of fighting” (*Devil’s Dictionary*), or Orwell’s famous dictum from 1984: “Peace is War.”

“Notions of some limbo between war and peace are either contradictory or unintelligible”. Or, as it was stated in classical times: “Inter bellum et pacem nihil medium (Wells, 1976).”

## Wars in the 20th and 21th century

“Conflict took place in every year of the 20th Century; the world was free from the violence caused by war for only very short periods of time. It has been estimated that 187 million people died as a result of war from 1900 to 1980. The actual number is likely far higher (Van der Dennen, 1980).”

The UK has Imperial War Museums (IWM). On their website<sup>3</sup>, the following text is shared for English involvement in wars.

Boer War, 1899–1902

**First World War, 1914–1918**

**Russian Civil War, 1917–1922**

Third Afghan War, 1919

**Irish War of Independence, 1919–1921**

Irish Civil War, 1922–1923

Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939

Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-1939

**Second World War, 1939–1945**

Jewish insurgency in Mandatory Palestine, 1944-1948

**Partition of India, 1947**

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1948 onwards

**Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960**

**Yangtze Incident, 1949**

**Korean War, 1950–1953**

**Kenya Emergency, 1952–1960**

**Cyprus Emergency, 1955–1959**

Vietnam War, 1955–1975

**Suez Crisis, 1956**

**Brunei Revolt, 1962–1963**

**Indonesian Confrontation, 1963–1966**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/timeline-of-20th-and-21st-century-wars>

|                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aden Emergency, 1963–1967</b>                     |
| <b>The Troubles, 1968–1998</b>                       |
| <b>Falklands War, 1982</b>                           |
| <b>Gulf War, 1990–1991</b>                           |
| Sierra Leone Civil War, 1991–2002                    |
| <b>Bosnian War, 1992–1995</b>                        |
| Kosovo War, 1998–1999                                |
| <b>War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014</b>                 |
| <b>Iraq War, 2003–2011</b>                           |
| Libya Conflict, 2011–present                         |
| <b>Syria Conflict, 2011–present</b>                  |
| <b>Yemen Conflict, 2014–present</b>                  |
| <b>Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2014–present</b> |



**Figuur 1: Mass Wars of the 21th century (source Helion Company)<sup>4</sup>**

“The origins of the mass of wars fought in the 21st century can be found in all sorts of armed and political conflicts and other unresolved issues dating back to the 20th century. While religious extremism seems to be the principal reason for most of the wars raging in the Middle East, south-western Asia, Africa, and even parts of South-East Asia, other factors rapidly growing in importance include private interests, corruption, nepotism, dwindling natural wealth and the lack of prospects for the inhabitants of those regions.

While most wars of the 20th century were fought by conventional forces or involved a confrontation between a conventional force and one or more insurgent armies, warfare at the beginning of the 21st century is undergoing a fundamental change. The combination of factors

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.helion.co.uk/periods/21st-century.php>

like tensions lessened by the end of the Cold War, the proliferation of the mass media and its impact on public perception, growing competition for dwindling natural resources, but also the general war-weariness, has resulted in widespread proliferation of so-called 'proxies', especially in the form of non-state actors. Whether in Africa or the Middle East, even in Asia, Europe and Latin America hardly any of the modern armed conflicts are fought without even the liberal democracies or private interests engaging in proxy-warfare."

Helion Company – World Leading Publisher of Specialist Military History gives an overview of wars in the 21st century: Israel-Palestine crisis (2021), Turkish coup d'état attempt (2016), Yemeni Civil War (2015-present), Gaza War (2014), Operation Pillar of Defence (2012), Libyan Crisis (2011-present), Syrian Civil War (2011-present), Boko Haram (2009-present), Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009), Second Lebanon War (2006), Iraq War and Insurgency (2003-2011), Global War on Terrorism (2001-2013), War in Afghanistan (2001-2014), Second Intifada (2000-2005), Second Chechen War (1999-2009), Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002), Operation Epervier (1986-2014) and France in Central African Republic (1979-2015).

So far, only cold statistics have been presented on wars. My assumption is that most citizens, wherever they are in the world, have come into contact with wars as witnesses, victims and/or perpetrators. Each family may have its own narrative about one or more wars. I myself was brought up with the war trauma's of my parents' families, the European Second World War, the Asian Second World War and the genocide (1965-1966) by Suharto in Indonesia. My father was head of mathematics and physics department at the Military Academy in Indonesia (Akademi Militer). Some of his former students were killed during Suharto's coup. I live in the era of terrible military interventions by the United States, the EU and Russia in Iraq and Iran (the various Gulf wars), Syria, and many wars in Africa. As I write this article, Russia's second war against Ukraine has been going over 100 days<sup>5</sup>. The first Russian war against Ukraine was called the Crimean War on February 20 in 2014. This war also continues in Russia's contemporary war against Ukraine.

What, in my experience, is the crux of those family stories about wars? Here I will sketch it on the basis of the stories of my own parents. First of all, for me as a child, it was an unfathomable sadness of the older generation about what had happened to them. I do not only mean the people they loved, who died or were wounded. I am also referring to the total disruption of their lives and those of other family members. Houses and homes were sometimes razed to the ground. I am also referring to the atrocities that my parents and their family members experienced and witnessed. For example, my mother told of her time in a camp in what is called the Bersiap period (1945-1947) that with the last of her mother's jewellery they were able to buy a little rice in the camp to survive. My father, on the other hand, told stories about Amsterdam citizens robbing Jews who were queuing up to be deported to one of the extermination camps. As children of my parents, we went to visit the children of murdered high-ranking Indonesian army officers. At these meetings, the pain of loss was felt by the children of these army officers and by my parents.

As a child, you don't have a frame of reference to place these stories, also because our parents, their friends and relatives talked about this experience as if it was 'a big exciting adventure'. Of

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/at-100-days-russia-ukraine-war-by-the-numbers/6601899.html>

course, it was nothing of the sort. Their stories were steeped in horror, horror that was not talked about. Through literature and newspaper stories, we ourselves had to reconstruct the narrative presented to us as children. Now that I am old, I myself have come to understand through David van Reybrouck's (2020) book *Revolusi* exactly what my parents experienced in Indonesia. Every day, my narrative is also being coloured and reconstructed.

### **PSYCHOLOGY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER WAR TIME**

Part three of this article is about the core theme, namely what is the role of psychology before wars, during wars and after wars? Has psychology developed distinctive interventions for victims, witnesses and perpetrators and their families? Finally, at the end of this chapter, an answer is sought to the following question: 'Has psychology thought about calming the dark energy that has been unleashed on us as earthlings through (repeated) warfare? Only by calming that energy does the likelihood of another war decrease. A wonderful example of this is the message that the Dalai Lama spreads about the occupation of his country by the Chinese government.

"Every event, the Dalai Lama recalled, has different sides. We have lost our land. and become refugees, but this has also given us the opportunity to see more things. Personally, I got the chance to meet more and different spiritually-trained people, like you and also scientists. This new opportunity arose because I became a refugee. If I had stayed in the Potala in Lhasa, I would have remained in what is often called a golden cage: the Lama, Holy Dalai Lama. He now sat up stiffly as he should have done if he had been the caged spiritual head of the Forbidden Kingdom. A Tibetan proverb says: 'Wherever you have friends is your homeland, and wherever you receive love is your home' (Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu, 2016, pp. 49-50)."

### **Reflections on socio-psychological interventions during genocidal wars**

This paragraph is based on the work of the well-known Amsterdam psychoanalyst and Professor of sociology Dr. Abram de Swaan, who wrote the English-language book *The Killing Compartments and their perpetrators* (2014). This book, which deals with mass destruction and violence, mainly by men, points to various sociological and psychological principles used by the perpetrators of this violence. From an insightful framework, Abram de Swaan, pays considerable attention in his book to compartmentalization, a deliberate creation by rulers and regimes of oppositions between WE and THEM (THEM must be eradicated). Finally, wars are also defined based on their origins. De Swaan (2014) distinguishes between a macro-, a meso- and a micro-sociological perspective as well as a psychosocial perspective with which he tries to answer the question whether the perpetrators of these genocides are dispositional or situational genocidal? What does de Swaan (2014) tell us in his book about the contribution of psychology and sociology after genocides? Genocide is the most heinous targeted war against national, ethnic, racial or religious groups.

"Genocide <sup>6</sup>was first recognised as a crime under international law in 1946 by the United Nations General Assembly (A/RES/96-I). It was codified as an independent crime in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention). The Convention has been ratified by 149 States (as of January 2018). The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has repeatedly stated that the Convention embodies

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

principles that are part of general customary international law. This means that whether or not States have ratified the Genocide Convention, they are all bound as a matter of law by the principle that genocide is a crime prohibited under international law. The ICJ has also stated that the prohibition of genocide is a peremptory norm of international law (*or ius cogens*) and consequently, no derogation from it is allowed.

In the present Convention, 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:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

In his book, De Swaan (2014, pp. 26-53) discusses the well-known prejudices about (genocidal) perpetrators. The first prejudice is that these people are insensitive to the suffering of others or even enjoy it. This turns out not to be true. After all, this lack of empathy is found in 5% of the population, which is comparable to the number of non-empathic (genocidal) perpetrators. The second prejudice studied by the Swaan is: "Befehl ist befehl". He does this on the basis of Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments. Milgram's research shows that obedience to an authority or superior should not be underestimated. Although a significant proportion of his test population was disobedient. In other words, when translated into (genocidal) perpetrators, it cannot be automatically assumed that they always obey their superior. On the margins of Stanley Milgram's experiments, he also discusses Philip Zimbardo's prison experiments (jailers and prisoners) that are precisely about group conformity, a psychodynamic view of people's group behaviour. This discussion leads to the conclusion that in committing mass violence, group conformity must also be examined. This conclusion corresponds to what is drawn by Jonathan Haidt (2012), namely that group rituals can 'suppress' individual characteristics. De Swaan's (2014) commentary on research into the mass murder Nazi-German commando Battalion 101 fits seamlessly with Jonathan Haidt's (2012) conclusion. Battalion 101 are ordinary Germans who were not fit for army, police or military police. According to De Swaan (2014, p. 42), these studies provide the decisive evidence of the then current context on individual choices and actions. Through that 'growing' in that context, the disposition to kill on command increases. De Swaan elaborates on this in socio-psychological terms using the concepts of identification (with one's own group, Battalion 101) and disidentification (with the Jews to be slaughtered). De Swaan also shows that the socio-psychological concepts of inclusion and exclusion are crucial in this process. According to de Swaan (2014), these are part of the much broader process of social and psychological compartmentalisation, a necessary condition for mass destruction. None of this would have been possible without ordinary people each making 'small' contributions to the mass violence. That ordinary 'criminal' man in the Second World War is beautifully documented in the novel 'The Sorrow of Belgium by Hugo Klaus (1983)'.

This wonderful work by Professor Abram de Swaan illustrates that social scientists try to get a grip on questions such as whether the person who commits war crimes is essentially a bad person. But also questions such as what facilitates people committing murders in wars. De

Swaan (2014) answers these questions for the genocides in the twentieth century. This demonstrates that social sciences are committed to explaining the behaviour of enablers of mass violence in genocidal wars. The question that now remains is whether psychologists and social scientists also put themselves in the position of being able to observe the events leading up to and following a war. To answer that question we will have to look into the history-books of psychology and social science.

### **Psychological interventions before and during a war**

Pickren et al. (2010, Chapter 8, p. 208) writes jubilantly about American psychology after the Western World War II. He calls that period the Golden Age of American psychology. His book is about the history of psychology. That American Golden Age came about because of the enormous investments of the American Defence Department (federal funding) in psychology. The reason was the American involvement in the Second World War in Europe with 50-70 million deaths. The Americans did not want to enter the Second World War unprepared, as they did in the First World War. This time, the psychologists wanted to be able to provide well-prepared and efficient services to the American army that went to war in Europe against the armies of the Germans and later against the armies of the Japanese in the Asian Second World War.

“Psychologists’ involvement in World War II not only provided abundant professional opportunities but also changed the character of post war psychology, its relationship to the state, and its relationship to society in deep and far-reaching ways.”

What were the developments of psychology in America through World War II? Crucial at the time were selection and placement of soldiers. That process was led by Walter Van Dyke Bingham, a psychologist we would now call an organizational and test psychologist. Under his leadership, the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) was developed. This became the most important selection instrument during the Second World War.

“The AGCT was presented as a test of general learning ability, which was influenced by both inborn ability and educational experience Pricker et al. (2010, p. 211).”

The famous psychologist Henry Murray (1893-1988), on the other hand, used assessment to select highly intelligent citizens for planning work in the army. Murray became famous for developing the Thematic Apperception Test. Psychologists (we would now call them social-psychologists) were also concerned with training. Pilots were selected to be trained.

“Funded by the Civil Aeronautics Authority and coordinated by the NRC, this project focused on selecting the most capable men to receive pilot training but also addressed the issues of performance under stress, measurement of successful learning, and instruments for selection and classification (Pickren et al. 2010, p. 211).”

Furthermore, as weapon systems became more and more complex, human and experimental psychology came into the picture. After all, interventions had to be considered that would reduce the risks of 'incorrect' use of weapon systems.

"The design of increasingly complicated weapon systems, tanks, and aircraft brought with it a higher probability of human error, the costs of which were both deadly and expensive (Pickren et al. 2010, p. 211)."

It should not be inferred from this effort by American psychologists that they did so uncritically. The straw that broke the camel's back was the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The famous psychologist Gordon Allport puts it this way:

*"Gordon Allport (1897–1967) reminded his colleagues that although psychology might benefit from the war, the nation would not necessarily benefit from the kind of psychology practiced in the service of the war. Inevitably, relationships among individual researchers, private universities, and government agencies were being transformed as psychologists (and many other social scientists) received large-scale funding from government bodies for the first time. This created a maelstrom of conflicting agenda's that permanently changed the face of social science research in the ensuing decades (Pickren et al. 2010, p. 212)."*

Huge numbers of veterans, wounded or not, came back from the Second World War. In total, America (total inhabitants in 1939: 131,028,000) suffered 407,300 victims during the Second World War<sup>7</sup>. Many families lost children. A total of 11,260,000 civilians were conscripted, 318,274 soldiers were killed or missing and 565,861 were wounded. These numbers of wounded and dead soldiers, as well as their families, called for psychological counselling. This is now known as veterans' health care.

"By 1945, 450 clinical psychologists were serving in the army, and they were spending an average of 25 percent of their time treating patients (Pickren et al. 2010, p. 212)."

"During World War II, the number of psychiatric casualties among American soldiers alone was high: 2 million men were rejected for military service, and during the fighting 500,000 psychiatric casualties occurred, most of whom suffered from what was then called war neurosis or combat fatigue (Pickren et al. 2010, p. 215)."

### **Classification of violence against civilians**

Laia Balcells and Jessica A. Stanton (2021) focus on violence against civilians during armed conflicts/war. They do so from the perspective of what purpose violence has and what kind of violence takes place. The note they placed on their article is: "in measuring patterns of wartime violence against civilians, a common challenge confronting research is the unavailability of reliable data." Without wishing to detract from this study, I would like to make the comment that a war without allies is impossible. Sympathisers are to be found on both sides, those of the occupier and those of the target group (country, population or tribe). Very well-known in this context are the spies. But without the efforts of individual citizens on one side or the other, a (genocidal) war would be impossible.

"Social psychologists<sup>8</sup> use the term **violence** to refer to *aggression that has extreme physical harm, such as injury or death, as its goal*. Thus violence is a subset of aggression. All violent acts

<sup>7</sup> [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slachtoffers\\_in\\_de\\_Tweede\\_Wereldoorlog](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slachtoffers_in_de_Tweede_Wereldoorlog)

<sup>8</sup> <https://opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/defining-aggression/>

are aggressive, but only acts that are intended to cause extreme physical damage, such as murder, assault, rape, and robbery, are violent. Slapping someone really hard across the face might be violent, but calling people names would only be aggressive.”

Possibly, the label of motivational psychology where motives of behaviour are investigated fits here, especially when the question arises as to what kind of intention lies at the root of the violence. Social psychologists use the following terms to distinguish intentions to commit violence: a) emotional or impulsive aggression, and b) instrumental or cognitive aggression. Separately, they also indicate that random aggression exists (Steinmetz, et al. 1996). Toch (2017) shows random aggression in his book on Violent Men. This book is about men who are prone to committing violent behaviour.

“Motivation psychologists<sup>9</sup> usually attempt to show how motivation varies within a person at different times or among different people at the same time. The purpose of the psychology of motivation is to explain how and why that happens.”

This article of Balcells et al. (2021) elaborates on that by looking at the type of violence that occurs during armed conflicts/war. The obvious distinction is between intentional and unintentional violence. It can be assumed that this distinction originates in criminal law. After all, the perpetrator is held to account more harshly for intentional than for non-intentional acts. “We review the literature and advocate moving beyond the language of the micro- and macro-level divide, instead focusing on the determinants of violence against civilians at five different levels of analysis: international, domestic, subnational, organizational, and individual (Balcells et al. 2021).”

Classification of violence against civilians is of crucial importance, especially against the background of the recent Russian wars in Syria, Crimea and now the whole of the Ukraine. Literally, what is popularly called "fumigating the population" is or was used by the Russian (hired) army against Syria, Crimea and now Ukraine. By murdering, torturing, raping and injuring the population of the land under occupation, the occupying power hopes that the government will give in and resign. Or, as is the case in Syria, that the ruler Bashar al-Assad does not resign.

“This article of Barcells et al. (2021, p. 48) also pays attention to violence that is driven by social processes at the group level - including performative processes that lead to what Fujii (2013) calls extra lethal violence - as well as opportunistic violence that "soldiers initiate to advance their own interests, impulses or social status" (Manekin, 2020, p. 7). Violence as an 'organisational politics' differs from the previously mentioned forms of violence in that the leadership of an armed group orders or authorises violence against civilians (Wood, 2018).”

In section 3.1, De Swaan (2014) focuses on genocidal violence that is the result of organisational politics. He describes this through the They-Them opposition and institutional compartmentalization of the population. Below is a classification of war violence against civilians.

Table 1: Classification of violence against civilians

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<sup>9</sup> <https://positivepsychology.com/motivation-theories-psychology/>

| Key distinction                                            | Basis of distinction                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Violence versus restraint                                  | Repertoires or forms of conflict behavior involving harm to civilians versus repertoires or forms of conflict behavior involving efforts to limit or prevent harm to civilians                                                   |
| Intentional versus unintentional violence                  | Repertoires or forms of violence that involve deliberate harm to civilians versus repertoires or forms of violence that involve nondeliberate harm to civilians (collateral damage)                                              |
| Violence as policy versus violence as practice             | Repertoires or forms of violence commanded or authorized by armed group leadership versus repertoires or forms of violence not commanded or authorized by armed group leadership                                                 |
| Strategic versus opportunistic violence                    | Repertoires or forms of violence initiated by armed group leadership to fulfill military or political objectives versus repertoires or forms of violence initiated by soldiers to advance personal interests                     |
| Lethal versus nonlethal violence                           | Repertoires or forms of violence that involve killing versus repertoires or forms of violence that harm civilians without killing (e.g., sexual violence)                                                                        |
| Indirect versus direct violence                            | Repertoires or forms of violence inflicted by armed groups unilaterally using heavy weapons versus repertoires or forms of violence inflicted by armed groups in collaboration with civilians using small arms                   |
| Selective versus collective versus indiscriminate violence | Narrow targeting following a selection process at the individual level versus targeting following a selection process at the collective or group level versus broad targeting of civilians without following a selection process |

“As Valentino (2014, p. 91) points out in his survey of the literature on wartime civilian targeting, most scholars agree that violence is not ‘irrational, random, or the result of ancient hatreds between ethnic groups’. Valentino identifies two dominant narratives: a war narrative, emphasizing how war creates incentives to target civilians; and a political narrative, focusing on why political elites sometimes promote violence. The recent wave of research on violence against civilians complicates and broadens these narratives, identifying a range of structures, actors, and processes (Balcells et al. 2021)”

The remaining question in this paragraph is: Do emotional and psychological factors play a role in war violence? Is it mainly before, during or after a war and is it aimed at preventing or addressing violence against civilians? Soldiers as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence during war are a separate chapter. They too are human beings and are entitled to attention from social scientists, also in the hope that their political leaders understand what suffering they can cause to the soldiers' families and parents by deploying soldiers in a war. Barcells et al. (2021, p. 58) state that emotional and psychological factors usually go together with more socio-psychological factors, such as strategy and material and structural opportunity, but also group processes, such as socialisation (see also De Swaan, 2014) and social ties, social pressure and social norms. Balcells et al. (2021, p. 58) outline the following relationships between emotions, psychology and war violence against civilians. First, there is anger as a reaction to previously committed violence in the non-initial phase of a war resulting in renewed murder and mayhem, as occurred during the genocidal civil war in Rwanda (1994) between the Tutsi and Hutu peoples. Secondly, anger that is aroused by humiliating civilians, as regularly happens in Palestine, which can even lead to more violence in one's own ranks. Finally, these authors outline the concept of appetite aggression that is the result of disturbed socialisation processes aimed at dehumanising the other, as occurs with child soldiers.

Irrespective of the above, attention should also be paid to the use of the Internet and social media in wars (Marinho, 2015). This could possibly be called mass psychology. Mass psychology is part of social psychology and studies collective behaviour of groups of people in public space. A contemporary example is Russian communication, which calls Russia's invasion

of Ukraine an 'operation'. Other examples are the narratives spread via the Internet about the motives for starting a war. But that is not all. As part of internet warfare, companies and government institutions can be prevented from functioning via the internet. But the most dangerous part of internet warfare is the reinforcement of the oppositions between WE and THEM. After all THEY are bad and WE are good. These narratives legitimise structural violence of WE against THEM. The conscious creation of oppositions between THEY and WE through narratives is underlined in the research of Lopez (2017), which shows that the available information about the OTHER makes people decide whether or not to participate in a conflict.

"Data from two survey experiments are presented, in which subjects were given scenarios depicting offensive or defensive aggression and were told to make decisions, for example, regarding their willingness to participate in the conflict, their opinions of others who did not choose to participate, and their expectations benefit. The results indicate that humans do indeed distinguish readily between these two domains and that their willingness to participate, as well as their emotional responses toward others, is highly contingent upon this informational cue in adaptively relevant ways."

### **Wars and positive psychology**

Positive psychology makes us long for contributions of psychology that reduce wars and violence of wars. This section is devoted to exploring this implicit "promise". In short, may we conclude that this promise has been fulfilled?

What immediately comes to mind is 'sharing'. Knowledge sharing is an important prerequisite for achieving peace. All parties must be aware of each other's arguments. Only then is there a chance that the conflict -the war- will die out or at least be able to be brought to a halt. It may be possible to draw on the insights of Bishop Desmond Tutu († 2021) and his daughter Mpho Tutu (2014). They show in their book on forgiveness that we as humans may choose.

Choosing from revenge or forgiveness. Their insights are patterned after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>10</sup> (1995) in South Africa. Below in Figure 2 are the principles of the fourfold path for healing ourselves and the world. Clear from this figure is that at least two paths are open after the experiences of hurt, harm and loss following a conflict such as a (civil) war or the oppression of a group of people (in South Africa the black people). After all, pain can lead to revenge or the decision to heal. The latter can only heal if both parties listen to each other's stories, however horrific they may be. Only after forgiveness (equivalent to acknowledging the shared humanity) can change or transformation occur. The latter is not easy. Following Figure 2, this is elaborated on tentatively.

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<sup>10</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa (TRC), courtlike body established by the new South African government in 1995 to help heal the country and bring about a reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations that had occurred during the period of apartheid. Its emphasis was on gathering evidence and uncovering information—from both victims and perpetrators—and not on prosecuting individuals for past crimes, which is how the commission mainly differed from the Nürnberg trials that prosecuted Nazis after World War II. The commission released the first five volumes of its final report on Oct. 29, 1998, and the remaining two volumes of the report on March 21, 2003. Link: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission-South-Africa>

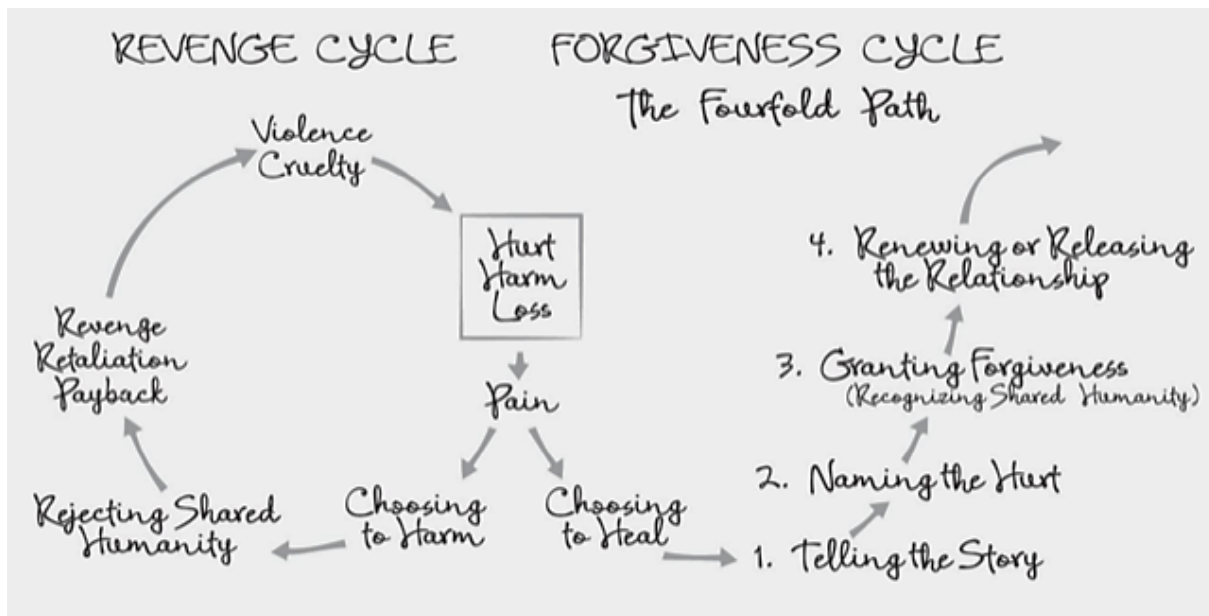


Figure 2: Revenge and Forgiveness Cycle (the fourfold path)

Tutu and Tutu (2014, p. 157) come up with a summary of how a person's relationship can be renewed or let go of. Their text is written in the singular. However, war involves large groups of people taking each other's lives, especially now that modern weapons are so advanced, such as the Turkish drones (Bayraktar), that people thousands of miles away can decide to kill another group of people. In short, Tutu and Tutu's (2014) schema will require translation into group-based interventions.

### “Renewing or Releasing the Relationship

1. The preference is always to renew unless there is a question of safety.
2. Ask what you need from the perpetrator in order to renew or release the relationship.
3. You may need an apology, an explanation, a tangible object, or to never see that person again.
4. When you renew a relationship, it is stronger for what you have been through, but it is always different.
5. By renewing or releasing a relationship you free yourself from victimhood and trauma.”

An almost natural experiment in the spirit of Tutu and Tutu (2014) takes place in Lukashivka, a village in northern Ukraine<sup>11</sup>. Forced by the war, Russian soldiers live with the Horbonos family in the basement of their house. The Russian soldiers allowed this family to go to their own house.

“At first, the Horbonoses were too scared to talk to their Russian housemates. The soldiers, for their part, always clung to their guns. They rarely left the cellar unless called to duty, fearful, like their hosts, of the artillery barrages overhead as the Ukrainian and Russian armies battled for the area surrounding the nearby city of Chernihiv. After several days of this, however, the two groups began to get to know each other, initially discussing what felt like neutral subjects,

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/putin-war-propaganda-russian-support/629714/>

such as food, and popular Ukrainian recipes. The Horbonos family learned that the five soldiers were military mechanics. Among them was a captain, the youngest of the group at 31.

At first, the captain fervently repeated Kremlin propaganda: He and his compatriots were in Ukraine to rescue the Horbonoses, he said; the soldiers were fighting not Ukrainians but Americans; this wasn't a war, but rather a "special operation." Once it was over, they could all live happily under Putin's rule, he said.

Irina would push back. She didn't need rescuing, she would say. There were no American soldiers or bases in Lukashivka, or anywhere in Ukraine. She didn't want to live under Putin. When the captain said that he had been told Ukrainians were barred from speaking Russian, she told him they could speak in any language they chose. (I spoke with the Horbonoses in Russian.)

Gradually, he was worn down, confronted not simply with Irina's protestations but with the grim facts of the war. In the conflict's early days, he was buoyant, believing conquest to be imminent. He would rush into the cellar, declaring, "Kyiv is surrounded! Chernihiv is about to fall!" But as the weeks went by, and neither Kyiv nor Chernihiv fell, his mood soured. At one point, Sergey told me, he had to show the captain where Kyiv was on a map, leaving the Russian surprised to learn that it was not anywhere nearby, as he had assumed, but nearly 100 miles away.

The other soldiers were less fervent than their captain. Two retreated into cynicism, unwilling to trust reports or information from either Russians or Ukrainians. The one whose face was burnt was as fervently anti-Putin as the captain was pro-. He openly cursed the president, calling him a goat. He had never voted for Putin's party."

What do we learn from this natural field experiment? The bottom line is that Ukrainians and Russians engage in conversation with each other on this and that. After all, they live together in the same basement and prepare food for each other full of appreciation for each other's recipes. The Russian soldiers tell the Ukrainians that they have come to their village to liberate them from the "Nazis" (as if Nazis still exist). The Ukrainian family hears these stories with bewilderment and tries to refute the story. Thus a shared narrative emerges through which these warring parties endure with each other. According to Tutu and Tutu's (2014) diagram, they have reached step three on the fourfold path of forgiveness', recognizing each other's shared humanity. Critics will say, yes that is just one example among many where things go thoroughly wrong. Nevertheless, I believe that this example shows that we as humans can rise above our own opinions, provided that the sharing of information (without immediately criticizing it) is at least fulfilled.

But that's not all. The above example is about the war itself. So not before and not after the war. That doesn't mean those options have been ruled out. A great example is the following study (Shoshani, 2020):

*"This study evaluated the effects of a positive-psychology intervention on adolescents exposed for a lengthy period of time to war-related stressful events as a result of the violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Participants were 2,228*

*adolescents from four schools in southern Israel. In a quasi experimental repeated measures design, pre- to post-test modifications in the intervention (n = 1,120) and control (n = 1,108) conditions were assessed in adolescents exposed to low or high political-strife related life events. Analyses revealed significant differences in changes over time between the intervention and control groups in psychological symptoms, subjective wellbeing, perceptions of the Palestinians' hostility, compassion, trust, willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians, and hopes for peace. Mental health and subjective well-being significantly improved in the intervention group over time and declined in the control group. The intervention group participants showed a significant increase in motivation for conflict resolution, compassion toward the Palestinians and hopes for peace, whereas the control group participants showed a significant decrease in beliefs about conflict resolution and hopes for peace. These results underscore the contribution of positive-psychology interventions to adolescents in war-affected regions."*

The three examples outlined testify to applications of positive psychology. A psychology where resilience and sources of strength in human organizations, such as extended families, tribes, communities, are central (Steinmetz, 2021). A psychology where hope and future prevail over despair, fear and doom ("end of the world is near"). Hope is central to the concept of Traumatic Growth<sup>12</sup> (Richard Tedeschi, and Lawrence Calhoun, in the mid-1990s ) and the Mark of Abel developed by Professor Dr. Jan J.M. van Dijk (2006). We human beings can pull ourselves out of the mud with the help of others.

According to Frydenberg (See Steinmetz, 2021, p. 92: 2017, pp. 14-15), positive psychology is: "About having experiences that are valued, having a sense of wellbeing, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past), hope and optimism (for the future); and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about having a capacity for love and endeavour, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent and wisdom. At the group level, it is about civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance and work ethic."

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This article focuses on the question, "what is the contribution of psychology to wars, particularly to the prevention, deterrence, negotiation to end, and recovery of the 'wounded' community in a literal and figurative sense. The answer to that question may not be florid. Critical contributions by psychologists to achieve the above goals seem to have degenerated into the opposite. Psychologists contribute massively to the war efforts of armies, governments, and institutions that direct those armies. This development began when psychologists got wind of the situation during and after World War I and II. The U.S. Department of Defence invested huge sums of money in war psychology at the time. That psychology consisted of recruiting proper soldiers and army officers for a multitude of army jobs, such as logistics, training, getting acquainted with combat dynamics, etc. But that's not all, psychologists were also used to work with engineers to create weapons that soldiers, pilots and marines could operate. In addition, psychology and psychiatry have become increasingly focused on mental health, as large

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma>

numbers of soldiers, airmen, and marines returned home during World War I and World War II with mental health problems as a result of their wartime experiences. That mental health service is now known as trauma<sup>13</sup> therapy for veterans. Around World War I, trauma was called shell shock<sup>14</sup> (Charles Samuel Myers, 1915) or war neurosis<sup>15</sup> (Freud, 1915).

Incomprehensible to me is the fact that psychology does so little to prevent and halt wars, also because in the twentieth century a new war started almost every year.

"The word<sup>16</sup> 'psychology' is derived (original definition) from two Greek words, 'psyche', meaning the mind, soul or spirit and 'logos', meaning discourse or to. study. These words combined produce the '**Study of the mind**'."

"Psychology (modern definition) is **the scientific study of the mind and behaviour**, according to the American Psychological Association. Psychology is a multifaceted discipline and includes many sub-fields of study such areas as human development, sports, health, clinical, social behaviour and cognitive processes. Saul McLeod, updated 2019."

"APA<sup>17</sup> definition of Psychology: the study of the mind and behaviour. Historically, psychology was an area within philosophy and emerged from it (see epistemology). It is now a diverse scientific discipline comprising several major branches of research (e.g., experimental, biological, cognitive, lifespan developmental, personality, social), as well as several subareas of research and applied psychology (e.g., clinical, industrial/organizational, school and educational, human factors, health, neuropsychology, cross-cultural). Research in psychology involves observation, experimentation, testing, and analysis to explore the biological, cognitive, emotional, personal, and social processes or stimuli underlying human and animal behaviour. The practice of psychology involves the use of psychological knowledge for any of several purposes: to understand and treat mental, emotional, physical, and social dysfunction; to understand and enhance behaviour in various settings of human activity (e.g., school, workplace, courtroom, sports arena, battlefield); and to improve machine and building design for human use."

Possibly all of the above definitions about psychology are primarily about how humans react to what goes wrong in life. Implicitly, it seems to deny that much can go wrong in a human life on the way from birth to death. Words such as stressful life events have been coined by psychologists for this as if these experiences are exceptional. This psychology is also called negative psychology. Irreverently, we could say that negative Western psychology has domesticated "human" reality. That is, psychology has been subordinated to the norms of the Western world (Gordon, 2021).

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<sup>13</sup> **Trauma** is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions. Source: <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma>

<sup>14</sup> <https://isgeschiedenis.nl/nieuws/shell-shock-psychische-klachten-bij-soldaten-in-eerste-wereldoorlog>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/war-neurosis>

<sup>16</sup> <https://ap.lc/vtv2h>

<sup>17</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/psychology>

Fortunately, psychology does not focus only on doom and gloom. Psychology that recognizes that human beings and their fellow humans are more than just half a glass empty. That humanity can also be viewed from the perspective half a glass full. This view of psychology is also called positive psychology. Hopeful against this backdrop is the work of Professor Dr. Abram de Swaan (2014) who shows us that before and during a war there are potential entry points for positive psychology. De Swaan (2014) shows how leaders, governments and dictators actively alienate people before and during wars. One of the techniques is to split humans into "WE" and "THEM". This is also known as compartmentalizing. Even worse is when the other -'THEM'- are dehumanized. We see an example of this with Liberian child soldiers. To them it was said: 'if you meet someone in the jungle, remember that it is chicken or ant. So you can just kill them (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 143). A third technique that is also widely used is telling "fake stories" about the other person which has become easier because of social media. A fourth technique is drill, march, sing songs and use coarse language. Positive psychology may be able to provide us with tools to stop all of these alienation techniques and then redirect them into a positive transformative connection between humans and human (social) organisations.

Positive psychology exudes hope and believes in the sources of strength and resilience of human beings in their existential groups. This psychology seeks salvation in recovery and transformation. This is beautifully illustrated in Tutu and Tutu's (2014) fourfold path. That path begins with telling each other what has happened and how it came to be. Then a group of people can choose from revenge or choose to heal. This path also includes asking the other what you need from her/him (an implicit right to self-determination). I hope that this reconciliation positive psychology offers us ways to prevent or stop wars. To be successful in this, positive psychology will also have to find an answer to man's obsession with weaponry.

A side note to that belief in the potential success of positive psychology in stopping or slowing down wars should not be missed. Such are the "laws" of epigenetics. These laws show that a person or group of people cannot inflict suffering on another with impunity (Steinmetz, 2021, p. 2).

"It is a fact that human conditions and circumstances influence the human DNA that is passed on to posterity. This goes through the mechanism of methylation. This mechanism is used by cells in the human body to put genes in the "off" position. Human conditions and circumstances are abstractly formulated, poverty, hunger, disasters and wars."

Popularly translated, methylation can result in "ingrained" cruelty. 'Inbuilt' because it is not immediately visible but new behaviour can result in 'cruelty'. In short, the question on the table for positive psychology is how can we rid humans of this "cruelty"? Tutu and Tutu (2014) say in this regard that this requires "Renewing or Releasing the Relationships". Which is only possible if the requirement: "Recognizing Shared Humanity (Granting Forgiveness)" is met.

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