



CRIMINOLOGICAL
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*We must persist!
Towards a Global
Criminology of War*

Guest Editors:
Teresa Degenhardt & Hannah Wilkinson

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Editorial: About the Possibility of Critical Spaces

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We are immensely proud to publish this special issue on the criminology of war, guest edited by Teresa Degenhardt and Hannah Wilkinson, probably the most lengthy and timely issue of *Criminological Encounters* thus far. In the editorial preface to the previous issue, we asked what critical criminologists can do to talk about war (De Backer et al. 2023)? Referencing Williams (2015), we argued that a criminology reproducing inequality and power imbalance is profoundly uncritical. For critical scholars, it is essential to focus on inequalities and power imbalance, for example, to study the events in Gaza and Sudan, to name them genocides as experts have done, in order to ask the fundamental questions: who allows such atrocities to take place? And who is benefiting from them? This, in turn, invites us to reflect on our own roles as social scientists, asking whether we are being vocal enough and whether we are doing enough to call out the culprits.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that these very questions sparked an intense debate in the 2025 Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology between – mostly – young scholars in a precarious position championing a firm stand and other, often more senior, academics opposing such a position. While Fatsis (this issue) and Vasiliou et al. (2026) discuss what occurred *during* this turbulent discussion, and what has been the role of the Board of the European Society in that moment, in this preface we want to draw attention to the debate that took place *after* this turbulent General Assembly.

In the courtyard of the American College of Greece, the venue of that conference, a group of disillusioned scholars got together “to plot, plan, strategise, organise, and mobilise”, to use American rapper and activist Killer Mike’s call after the police killing of George Floyd. During the conversation in that courtyard, a need surfaced for a truly critical space within criminology and the analysis was made, at least by some of those present, that the European Society of Criminology was unfit for this purpose. People wondered: should we create our own critical space, or should we stay in the mainstream and combat prejudice, hypocrisy and other evils from within?

There are downsides to either position: critical spaces in the margins risk becoming obsolete and/or echo chambers of like-minded people, while in the mainstream, it may become increasingly impossible to *have* critical spaces, while at the same time making those voices in the mainstream look complicit and double-faced. Dalton (2016) provides an interesting answer, when discussing the locus of queer ideas within criminology: “perhaps the either/or position about inhabiting the margins and engaging with mainstream criminology is not as contradictory.” He argues that the margins may be a suitable space to inhabit in order to *nurture* critical ideas: “having done so, one might then depart the margins to engage with mainstream criminology (...). Having achieved this objective, one must necessarily retreat back to the fringes of the discipline to ensure that the vitality of queer ideas continues to inform one’s thinking” (p. 31).

Michel de Certeau (1984), in his essay *The practice of everyday life*, theorises this spatial metaphor of the centre and the margin in the dyad strategy-tactic, showing how power dynamics are spatialised, or how spaces are embedded in power dynamics. In his argument, the powerless usually do not have a space of their own. In fact, one is powerless *because* one does not have a place from which to operate. What he calls a tactic is an “action determined by the absence of a proper locus. (...) the space of a tactic is the space of the other. (...) It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy (...). It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep” (p. 37).

The space of the powerful, to tap into another metaphor, is the castle from which the king operates. The powerless are like poachers, catching hares on the king’s estate but having no place of their own where they can retreat to grow stronger. Taking this metaphor back to the discussion about critical spaces in criminology, one can criticise Dalton’s argument for being too romantic. Perhaps (re-)convening in the margins is not so much a matter of nurture, as it is an act of mere survival, since the poacher doesn’t have a space to stockpile their winnings. Whatever the answer to that question, it invites us to investigate what key infrastructures are necessary to provide safe and critical spaces.

Engaging one last time with the metaphor of the poacher, one can observe that the crucial criterion appears to be *ownership* of space. The difference between survival and nurture is the deepfelt sense that one is at home, that one *belongs*, is safe from harm, and has a space of one’s own. Perhaps in that

sense, and under that condition, Dalton is right. If and only if we can build places in the margins with enough autonomy, safety and self-governance, critical spaces can be spaces of nurture. To build such places, however, is an uphill battle, as most infrastructures and dynamics in the field are geared towards maintaining the status quo and protecting the powerful. To build critical spaces, we can only find shelter by investing in protective social groups willing to stick together in the professional context of a greedy institution, as Coser (1974) calls it. In the words of Francesca Albanese: we are frail and we are weak only if we are isolated.

Criminological Encounters has tried since its inception to be this platform for critical exchange, by being radically open-access, not-for-profit and independent of the big scientific publishers, while not being linked to any of the discipline's networks and platforms. We have tried to build a more inclusive environment in academic publishing by giving reviewers a more rewarding role in the process by offering open review and the opportunity to publish a commentary on the manuscript they reviewed. We have also invited guest editors to reach out to practitioners in the field, in order to make debates in academia less privileged and more embedded in lived realities on the ground. We also invite various less classic formats, such as commentaries, opinion pieces and arts interventions. This interest to bring "other" voices to the debate is crucial for the project of the journal – that is one of the "encounters" that the name refers to.

But maybe most importantly, throughout the years we have developed a clear editorial vision concerning the work we publish. Issues in previous years have focused on critical pockets of criminological thought such as urban (Persak & Tulumello, 2020), green (Bombardi et al., 2022) or affective and sensory criminologies (Young et al., 2023), or have zoomed in on the work produced in peripheral and non-anglophone regions such as Latin America (Bailone et al., 2021).

We are happy to announce that also the next issue will continue down that same path. Lambros Fatsis and Karen Graham are preparing a special issue with the title "Towards an Anti-Racist Anti-Criminology," focusing on calls to decolonise academia and on Southern, postcolonial, or decolonial perspectives recently explored within criminology as well as in neighbouring disciplines in the social sciences. Yet, the new issue of *Criminological Encounters* will try to go one step further, to investigate how criminology can learn from non-disciplinary, and perhaps anti-criminological insights, inviting scholarship *on* rather than *within* criminology. The issue will also invite anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and antiracist work from beyond the academy: works of literature, film, music, prison memoirs, political and social commentary, or even flyers/posters from community organising initiatives, struggles and campaigns (past or present) are all welcome.

More details about this call will be announced shortly. For now, we sign with solidarity,

Mattias De Backer & Lucas Melgaço, editors.

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Editorial for the Thematic Section: Towards a Global, Anti-Colonial Criminology of War, Genocide and Resistance

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We write this preface to the special issue of *Criminological Encounters* about war at a time in which the news – both traditional media and social media – are pervaded by images, videos, sounds and voices from people in the midst of brutal conflict. We believe there was never a time in which the experiences of militarized violence, displacement, and destruction were ever clearer or more accessible to people living outside areas of conflict. Armed violence is currently spiralling across multiple ongoing conflicts including, but not limited to, Afghanistan, Congo, Ethiopia, India, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen ([Geneva Academy, 2025](#)).

Several conflicts have reached the threshold of genocidal violence – the intent to destroy populations in whole or in part ([United Nations, 1948, Article II, UN, 2025](#)) – the ‘crime of all crimes’ (Rafter, 2016). War and genocidal violence are raging in Sudan ([de Waal, 2025](#); [Shah, 2025](#)) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([Mohammed and Siguru Wahutu, 2025](#)), most heavily in areas where Western corporations are profiting from the mining and extraction of natural resources such as cobalt, used to form smartphones and other screen based technologies (Koubi et al., 2014).

The brutal genocidal violence by the Israeli government in Gaza and in the West Bank has created a wide global movement in support for the Palestinian civilians ([Morrison, 2020](#)). Israel’s violence is still considered a difficult topic for discussion in the Northern Hemisphere ([Green, 2023](#)), in spite of concerns about genocide raised by scholars (Green et al., 2023; IAGS, 2025) and authoritative international governmental organizations and courts (ICJ, 2024; [ICC, 2024](#)); multiple reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights on the Palestinian Territories (Albanese, 2024, 2025); as well as those from prominent Israeli organizations (such as [B’Tselem, 2025](#)). The definition of this violence as genocidal or indeed even just as in violation of international criminal law remains contested. As Cohen (2001: 157-9) demonstrated almost 25 years ago, Israeli atrocities have long been denied and facilitated by techniques of neutralisation, accepted also by international bystanders. The issue is not one that started in October 2023, as the Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Gutierrez made clear in his statement in October 2023 ([UN, 2023](#)): it is to be placed on a long continuum of “suffocating occupation” and ethnic cleansing (Abdullah, 2019; Pappe, 2024; see forum section on Gaza and Palestine in this special issue).

Indeed, part of what led us to co-edit this special issue was a shared frustration with watching, often with despair via the images on our social media feeds, as the international laws, treaties and organisations responsible for preventing and responding to such grave breaches of international law and human rights continue to fail through inaction, denial, but also harassment. The active facilitation of violence through the arms trade and political-military involvement in atrocities, or through intelligence gathering (Overton, 2025; [Sabbagh and Abdul, 2025](#)), raises many concerns for criminology. Combined with the mass reach of companies and state-corporate interests benefiting from war (Ruggiero, 2007), the weak international frameworks to hold states and corporations accountable contribute to how the environment and ecosystems continue to suffer mass devastation (O’Sullivan and Walters, 2016; White, 2025) – in ways which transgress human-made borders, harming the future of the planet as a whole.

The situation in Ukraine, subject to international adjudication as a possible genocide ([ICC, 2023](#)), also reveals the connections between military violence and the extraction of valuable resources ([Baranowski et al., 2025](#)), as well as centring the East as an underexplored site of colonialism ([Piacentini and Slade, 2023](#); Tlostanova, 2018; see interview with Shevtsova, 2025) and providing renewed concerns about nuclear wars.

Commissioned by *Criminological Encounters* ([De Backer, Melgaço & Volinz, 2023](#)), this special issue aims offer critical insights both into the discipline’s scope to analyse such violence, and to create space to evidence current atrocities and resistance, particularly in the Global South ([Wilkinson and Degenhardt, 2024](#)). ‘Global South’ is used geographically and as a conceptual tool for the global inequalities in resources and power (Carrington et al., 2019: 165). As this special issue demonstrates, there is no doubt that these facets of war and dynamics of state-corporate power are played out in an increasingly globalized context – and must be analyzed and evidenced as such.

The original contribution of this special issue to a criminology of war centres on its global and transnational, anti-colonial approach to the continuums of state-corporate violence and oppression. Through deploying a decolonial lens, the collection offers renewed visibility to the ways in which criminalisation, as a state tool of power, continues to illegalise peoples and silence resistance, intellectual and critical thought, and solidarity. Criminalisation through the creation and selective enforcement of law allows states to control the narrative around their violence, and to actively deny and conceal interpretations of violence emerging 'from below'.

What do we Mean by 'War'?

Aware that Criminological Encounters has a wide range of readers, we thought it would be useful to produce a summary of the broad literature on war. Far from this being an exhaustive summary, it includes what we think are relevant contributions to contextualize the current special issue.

In its most basic form, war can be defined as 'an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will' (Clausewitz, 1984 [1832]:101). War should be critically analysed as an ever-present continuum of violent politics and processes, angled towards the consolidation and expansion of power. War, or at least the threat of it, always lurks beneath law and order (Foucault, 2003), and is woven into political discourses of 'freedom' and 'security'. Order has long been maintained through processes of 'othering', often directed towards racialised communities (Bauman, 2013). Wars are therefore engrained into how we perceive our identities, borders, and trajectories. War also continues to be an inherently gendered practice, which supports and magnifies gender orders through specific ideas of masculinity and femininity, and crucially through the deployment of sexual and military violence (Nikolic Ristanovic, 1996; Buss, 2009; Enloe, 2014; 2023; Cockburn, 2001; 2007; Kirby and Henry, 2012). It is not possible to perceive war and peace as entirely separate.

In the twentieth century, wars were typically fought between states, as these were the primary institutions organizing our social life (Giddens, 1985). Yet war can be both *interstate* and *intrastate*, fought by a range of state and non-state actors, and rarely with similar powers (Kaldor, 1999; van Creveld, 1991). Political and military analysts such as Kaldor (2013) and van Creveld (1991) have noted that the state has lost centrality in contemporary wars. Civil wars, proxy wars, and forms of disintegration of the state are linked to the blurring of the traditional distinction between civilians and military, illegal and legal war activities. In these forms of conflicts, often animated by 'identity politics', the female body with its reproductive capacity can become the centre stage, and war may quickly metamorphose into genocidal violence.

Whether these constitute effectively 'new' forms of wars is still contested (Berdal, 2003; Banta, 2019). But what is clear, is how prominent armed groups, some within and outside the borders of the nation state, private militias and mercenaries are now able to be more easily seen animating wars, which are at times played out by asymmetrical powers, endowed with sophisticated technologies. This said, through a decolonial lens, these 'new wars' can also be seen as a continuation of the old, with more advanced weaponry and communications (McGarry and Walklate, 2019b).

Recent technological revolutions and (dis)information technology have enabled thinking of war as something that may be conducted efficiently 'at a distance' to the West, through claims of 'high precision targeting' and soldiers better protected from the risk of death. Yet these same technologies can result in more civilian deaths, usually framed as 'collateral damage' (Rasmussen, 2006). The use of unmanned aerial vehicles and the recent incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) targeting have further complicated the regulation of warfare by obscuring chains of responsibility and by bringing the destructiveness of warfare to another level (Kaucz, 2025). Years of negotiations and international attempts to ban destructive weapons are thus now increasingly challenged.

At an ideological level, wars and genocide operate through narratives and political machinery which involve the de-humanization of 'unwanted' or 'dangerous' peoples – 'enemies' – who are often illegalised, and violently ripped from homes and lands while being killed and destroyed (Bauman, 1989; Alvarez, 2008). In this sense, war and genocide should be understood as entangled with forms of framing collective

grievances against specific populations, who are thus progressively racialised and criminalised (Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, 2009; Shaw 2003). These ideologies do not stop or originate within the border of the nation state and its organised forces, they are often long processes intertwined with colonial legacies that are difficult to deny (Mullins and Rothe, 2008; Al-Hindi, 2025).

Towards a Global Anti-Colonial Criminology of War

In line with our aims to offer a 'global' approach to the criminological study of war, we approach 'war' as a continuum of organized violence, rooted in ideologies of racialization (Gandesha, 2020), greed (Bonger, 1916; 1936), and destruction (Fromm, 1941), which inevitably flow beyond the nation state, harming the planet in the process. We do not wish to argue that the globe is a uniform place. Quite the opposite, we strive to highlight the unevenness of material conditions and opportunities. However, it is now undeniable that there are global infrastructures that are availed, built and developed by corporate powers and powerful nations.

These forms of wars often have neo-colonial roots. Colonialism refers to harmful ideologies and state-corporate power structures which use racialized categorization, humiliation, and violence to dominate peoples, lands, and extract resources for capital gain (Morrison, 2019; Rojas-Páez and South, 2024; Fanon, 1963; Cesaire, 2000 [1950]). Colonialism is inherently destructive. Both as an ideology and violent organization of power angled towards 'growth with no limits' (Whyte, 2020: 69), colonialism depends on oppression, conflict, and erasure, with war as its main tool of enterprise. As Mullins and Rothe (2008) showed, most of the conflicts in the African continent were linked to expanding the power of Western colonial states.

As with domestic 'crime', international laws can only signal some forms of harm in war, and can be used expeditiously to legitimise forms of neo-colonial expansion within the Global South, by intervening in globally under-resourced parts of the world through military power as a form of police power (Neocleous, 2014; Iyase and Folarin, 2018, see also Degenhardt, 2023). Western narratives and visions of military conflict as a way to address issues of 'disorder' as 'foreign policy', coupled with the tactical and spurious uses of international law, fundamentally enabled the launching of even more militarized violence, mostly by Global North states intervening in Global South states, expanding forms of governance beyond the state (Holmqvist, 2014; Duffield, 2007). The prominence of drones or unmanned aerial vehicles in warfare further allowed talking of war as a form of 'policing', individualising wars against 'bandits and criminals' (Dal Lago, 2003; Mueller, 2004).

The 'war on terror', launched immediately after the 9/11 attacks by a Coalition of States led by the US and UK, is a primary example of this form of militarised 'policing'. Political discourse of 'risk' was used to construct Muslim groups and individuals in different countries as 'criminal' (Mythen and Walklate, 2016), with 'punishment' often delivered through targeted strikes, but also through sustained military aggression such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, Western state-corporate powers were pursuing violently destructive forms of resource and capital extraction (Coulter, 2005).

A critical criminological approach to war should recognise the 'global' reach of current forms of violence and its entanglement with forms of past domination, or how the past reverberates unevenly across present nations and spaces. To us, a 'global, anti-colonial criminology' should therefore involve tracing and mapping the responsibility of colonial powers, systems and structures, through their material and intellectual, sometimes visible and sometimes invisibilised legacies. This requires evidencing the continuum of war, atrocity and denial by global superpowers, multiple states and various connected actors, armed groups and corporations - whether directly or indirectly through complicity and facilitation of armed violence. It must also recognise that colonialism still lives in the present. Current wars, humanmade borders, and armed violence over natural resources cannot be understood fully without anchoring analysis to these colonial histories and ongoing sites of occupation.

The following sections present summaries of the special issue contributions across three overarching themes: war as a continuum of violence; activism, resistance and protecting the power of protest; and

the role of criminology amid times of war and genocide. The special issue concludes with an artistic intervention with Ashtar Theatre and *The Gaza Monologues*, to then leave space to the forum dedicated to Palestine and Gaza.

War as a Continuum of Violence

A strong thread across many of the special issue contributions concerns the connection between different processes, actors, and institutions involved in strengthening and consolidating the violence of war and genocide beyond the battlefield. Violence is magnified by the carceral logics and politics of deportation, denial of human rights, citizenship, and financial support for vulnerable communities, particularly those crossing borders to seek refuge and asylum (Soliman, 2021; Esposito et al, 2026 forthcoming). Private actors concur in these violent efforts through their own channels of sanctioning, prohibitions, and denial of space or financial support, or conversely through their own material enabling actions. The objective of domination, which is fundamental component of war, is therefore achieved by a multitude of means, that extend beyond the use of weapons and militarized violence, to reach into different aspects of social life - most evidently through international systems of criminalization, policing and incarceration.

Brunilda Pali and Polly Pallister-Wilkins (2025) in their piece strongly emphasize the need to analyze the interconnection between the violence suffered by the Palestinians and the criminalization of the Palestinian solidarity movements by states and academic institutions. Their analysis moves from the case study of the Netherlands where undercover officers and police violence, including the bulldozing of students' encampment, were deployed within university to curtail legitimate educational events or protests in support of Palestinians civilians. Even if not comparable to the horror inflicted to Palestinians, these forms of violent attack demonstrate how Palestine has become a public (dis)order and security issue for Western states (on this topic see also Curreri and Piche, 2025 and Fatsis, 2025 in this issue). Pali and Pallister Wilkins further connect the disciplining and self-censuring of educators in universities, and the suppression of intellectual debates, to both the legacy of the 'war on terror' and the new forms of authoritarianism.

The question of academia as a place for intellectual thought is not new to the current crisis of liberal democracies and the incoming forms of authoritarianism and popular ethno-nationalisms. Dina Belluigi's (2025) article traces what remains of the practices of surveillance, intimidation, pressure, and effective erasure of dissenting academic citizens in some past histories of authoritarian countries in Africa. Through a series of art images and photos, Belluigi (2025) reveals the archiving of such practices and juxtaposes current forms of commemoration of well-accepted historical intellectual thought, to less well-known forms of censoring. This contribution from critical education studies is a powerful reminder of the continuums of violence and repression in periods of conflict and war, and of how universities respond, afford, or indeed (mis)represent academic dissent even in times of so-called peace. Ultimately, Pali and Pallister-Wilkins and Belluigi powerfully remind us that while the university can be a critical site of dissent, refusal and resistance to state violence, it is also a site of surveillance, policing and criminalization amid the (re)ordering of the world, contributing to the maintenance of entrenched geopolitical interests and established hierarchies.

Mehrdad Emami and Paola Rivetti (2025) provide a timely critical account of the ways in which the discourse on what they call "gender disorders" plays out in imperial wars and regime change. The recent crisis between Israel and Iran was a paramount example of how neo-colonial and imperial venture are often supported by narratives in which women's protection appears as the objective of a military operation. Exposing the ways in which gender is a crucial component in the militarization processes, Emami and Rivetti show how the local women's struggle against the hijab was opportunistically exploited to advance the need for regime change. Further, the piece underscores how some women may support these gendered narratives to ally opportunistically to the foreign forces.

The interview with Maryna Shevtsova (2025) also reminds us of this dimension when she argues that we need to analyze the Russian aggression of Ukraine through a feminist perspective, giving voice not just to women in Ukraine, but also women in the larger Russian Federation. If much literature focuses on the

uses of sexual violence as a weapon of war, Shevtsova suggests that the violence of masculinised military conflict further cascades into people's personal lives in many ways, increasing the prevalence of domestic violence. Maryna argues we cannot limit the analysis of sexual violence to the experiences of women, and instead need to include the specific experiences of LGBTQI+ communities, as well as men's forced conscription. Gender also appears as a crucial feature when the Ukrainian's government invisibilises the care work many women are expected to carry out when men leave to fight (within and outside the mainland), to instead emphasise the number of women enrolled in the military or in government. And yet, there are continued issues of sexual harassment in the military for women, showing once again the profoundly patriarchal nature of military institutions.

Recounting her experiences of studying the gendered regimes that war demands to pursue fighting and endure the pain of militarised societies, Ruth Jamieson's interview (2025) speaks clearly of the need to be more aware of the connections between war and colonialism. Ruth starts by underscoring the continuities of war in terms of acknowledging the impact the violence of war has on different generations. It was in relation to her own personal trajectory that we see the impact of wars on future generations, through contact with the wounded from the second World War in a local hospital in Canada, and the ways in which the pain of a politicised mother's quest to see her son became visible to her as a young person. This interview, full of insights and ideas, is a stark reminder that our research projects often emerge through our private lives, and of the need to be persistent in following our own interests.

Connecting war to gender regimes and forced displacement, the article by Neela Hassan (2025) discusses the ways in which Afghani refugees' deservedness was related to either the deployment of Canadian forces in Afghanistan or gendered constructions of vulnerability, particularly for women. Seemingly recognising their nation's role in exposing people to possible retaliation by the Taliban Government, the Canadian policy effectively instrumentalised the refugee convention for the country's military operations. Further, Hassan (2025) exposes through her media analysis how women's construction as 'vulnerable and deserving' follows typical colonial (mis)representations of Muslim countries. This construction at the same time romanticized women's resettlement in Canada and reinforces racialised and gendered tropes. Importantly, Canada thus maintains its own profile as a 'civilising nation', while denying its role in the forced migration of some populations.

In the short opinion piece by Halil Ibrahim Bahar, we can see the most direct and pernicious ways in which refugees from countries harmed by conflict are criminalized and exposed to the violence of some politically motivated groups on social media in their countries of arrival. We are particularly grateful to Bahar for sharing his experience with us as a persecuted scholar, and for contributing to our special issue in collaboration with his daughter, Hacer Bahar, when he was no longer able to access his work because of detention. In their piece, they are critical of the politics of the Turkey state towards refugees from Syria. Hate speech and criminalization of refugees are prevalent in Turkey, as in many countries. To Bahar and Bahar (2025), instead of supporting Syrian refugees, the country is actively withholding support - effectively allowing some vocal political groups to scape goat and criminalize these populations as the reason for politically induced socio-economic struggles. The scapegoating and criminalization of Syrian refugees and the violence they are subjected to digitally, and in person, is well captured by this short piece, reminding us of the role that state criminalization may have on those who are deemed not to belong and crucially, to those who dissent.

Activism, Resistance and Protecting the Power of Protest

Within our attempts to encourage a global anti-colonial criminology of war, it was important to include research documenting activism and resistance. International requests for financial and military support co-exist with anti-war activism and civil initiatives to boycott institutions and corporations involved in conflicts (see PACBI, 2023 and Fatsis, 2025). The difficulty of intervening in complex contemporary conflicts concerns the criminalisation of mass mobilization and restrictions to freedom of speech (Selmini and Di Ronco, 2023, see also Pali and Pallister-Wilkins, 2025), including within academia. Despite growing public debate and the strong feelings and emotions around these issues, local governments and institutions are increasingly using criminalisation to disrupt activism, strangle voices of resistance and

limit necessary democratic space (Cristiano et al., 2023). Some of the articles in this special issue speak more directly about these dynamics than others.

June Hwang presents research around the criminalisation of activism and protest, through a case study of resistance to the arms industry in South Korea. The article demonstrates how the criminalisation of protest is used as a weapon to uphold powerful political and private economic interests, while international treaties fail to sanction the states and companies involved in supplying arms to those committing genocide and crimes against humanity. Hwang (2025) argues that arms fairs must be studied as a criminogenic site of warmaking, where the brutality of war is sanitised as a 'benign enterprise' for 'public good'. Further, Hwang argues that resistance to the arms trade is integral to disrupting the normalisation of state-corporate violence and the continuation of global capitalism through the profitable business of war.

Lucrezia Curreri and Justin Piché (2025) argue that we also need to pay attention to other forms of silencing. Looking beyond debates and intellectual engagement, they demonstrate that there is a 'sonic silencing' of protests in support of Palestine in Ottawa, Canada. The selective use of noise ordinance by-laws in Ottawa, to criminalise Pro-Palestine protest noise and fine activists for using megaphones, reveals how the Canadian state attempts to maintain the 'dominant sonic order' of public space by keeping anti-colonialism 'silent', while permitting the noise of a wide range of other activities. They advocate that critical criminologists must deploy their research to aid community-led organising and engage in activism to collectively defend rights to freedom of speech and assembly, rather than uphold and facilitate agendas of the state.

The issue of Palestine has produced some fierce conflict around what can and cannot be said not just at government level but also by journalists, in universities, in the streets; as well as who is allowed to speak and whose perspectives are projected. Fatsis (2025) provides an important account of the recent attempts by the European Society of Criminology to silence and disrupt anti-genocide activism such as the call from Criminologists for Palestine (2025) (included in the forum on Gaza and Palestine in this special issue). The debate over Israel's violence is such a fierce contestation that in some parts of the world, governments have resorted to the politics of criminalization of protests specifically supportive of the Palestinian cause (see Germany for instance but also the UK and the US). These aspects require new reflections on what it means to be doing criminology, provoking a renewed need to investigate the traditional question of how conflict can contribute to our understanding of the 'criminal question', as well as the political (mis)uses of criminalization.

The Role of Criminology Amid Times of War and Genocide

At the basic level, our teaching of criminology involves the problematization of what constitutes 'crime?'. Whether on an individual or international scale, 'crime' is the socio-political construction of certain behaviors and acts as deviant, involving the specific articulation of a behavior as "criminal", and then its potential apprehension by the police, adjudication by the courts, and a range of punishments. All these processes and institutions involve their own selective processes.

As critical criminologists have long argued, criminalization has been most prominently a tool of the powerful, mostly directed 'downwards' towards unwanted, vulnerable, 'undesirable' peoples, and often racialized communities constructed as 'suspect' (Hillyard, 1993, 1994; Scraton, 2007; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2011; Chambliss, 1994; Boukli and Kotzé, 2018, and Canning and Tombs, 2021, and Weis, 2023). Further, Moore (2014) evidences how 'modern' systems of crime and punishment were often developed and finely tuned in the colonies first, usually during periods of war, occupation and armed conflict, before being 'brought home' to Western countries in the form of laws and policing (Brown, 2014). Punishment and the police were and still are used to effectively rule the colonized (Wacquant, 2025). A proper consideration of the crimes of the powerful therefore involves looking beyond the limited socio-political processes involved in the criminalization of some behaviours deemed to be conducive to harm, especially when state and corporate powers are involved.

While Kramer and Michalowski (2005) argue that we could turn to international law as a guide to identify

crimes in which states are involved, international law is deeply affected by political dynamics which involve not just the state and its institutions, but multiple states, their geopolitical interests, and their corporate allies. The apparatus of international law, and its new iteration as international criminal law, although representing an important milestone in some respects, as it attempts to sanction individuals for state crimes and forms of mass atrocities at a global level, it is still linked to the exercise of power of some Global North/Western states (Lohne, 2019; Hagan and Raymond-Richmond, 2009).

The international legal structure itself, as it stands, is therefore very problematic and in need of revision as it follows its own selective processes by which powerful nations can wrestle in and out of justice as it suits (for a comprehensive account see Koskeniemmi, 1990; Makau, 2017 but also recent interventions such as Clarke, 2020; Marinello 2024). Stan Cohen's (2001) pioneering work on the states of denial shows how states, perpetrators, witnesses and sometimes even victims neutralise violations of human rights, through rationalizations that reinterpret harmful acts in ways that are acceptable. Conscious of the limits of law in identifying criminal activities in which the state itself may be involved, Green and Ward (2004) highlight the important role of civil society, social movements and criminology in labelling actions by the state that are harmful, independently from them being technically and/or legally criminalized.

To stimulate critical thinking and discussion, we often tell students that killing – the most evident and harmful form of law breaking – whilst constructed as murder in civilian law, is permitted in war and even encouraged. Thus, labelling processes are key in enabling or disabling social censure (Becker, 1963). Violent actions in war are often understood as something other than violations of norms (See Degenhardt, 2023). They may be 'camouflaged', as Albanese (2024) states in relation to the effective re-interpretation of international humanitarian law by Isreal (see also Badalic, 2019 on similar processes as part of the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and Pakistan).

Similarly, the destruction of infrastructures, the theft of goods and resources, economic expropriation and environmental damage are all actions accepted if not praised in war (Whyte, 2007). It is our very culture of war and heroism that needs changing (Ruggiero, 2005). Soldiers become political 'heroes' for enacting harmful behavior that is represented as 'beneficial' or 'necessary' in the contexts of war. Although soldiers are usually highly trained to overcome the prohibition of killing, many still find it difficult to kill, along with struggling with the embodied harms of dehumanisation, war and colonial occupation long after leaving battlefields (Wilkinson, 2025, 2026 forthcoming). It is for that reason that we could study, according to Jamieson (1998b), the ways in which states or authoritative groups reverse moral order to demand that individuals pursue harm and violence as practices of redress or domination through armed conflict.

Following the eruption of conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, many academics have produced important work on the study of war, especially after the launch of the 'war on terror' and the war of aggression in Iraq, with its predatory practices of economic extraction (Hagan, 2003; Hagan and Raymond-Richmond, 2009; Mulling and Rothe, 2008; Hagan et al., 2015; Braithwaite, 2020). The study of war from a criminological perspective is linked to the need to better understand the ways in which dynamics of prohibition of violence can be weakened for those who participate in violence, and the need to study mass gendered victimization and the changing forms of social control in societies at war (Jamieson, 1998a, 1998b, 2002).

In recent years, McGarry and Walklate (2015; 2016 and 2019a) have substantially contributed to establishing a criminological study of war as part of the curricula. Despite contesting the label of "criminology of war", as 'it risked becoming yet another intellectual enclave of criminology' if aligned with state institutions and agendas (McGarry and Walklate, 2017), they nevertheless argue that war has been studied in the field of social sciences and criminology for some time – more often in conjunction with "the emergence and cessation of war, conflicts and genocides" (2019: VII-VIII), rather than as a continuum. To these authors, the study of war/crime nexus should be an "inter and intra disciplinary endeavor" (Di Pietro, 2016 cited in McGarry and Walklate, 2019a). We concur with this analysis that the study of war is not of pertinence of just criminology, many are studying it critically in political sciences, sociology, psychology, anthropology, international law, international relations and transitional justice, but we stress the need to affirm the value of studying war also through our disciplinary tools and theories

(see also Hagan, 2015; and Jamieson in this issue).

As John Hagan (2015) underlines, criminology has the capacity to contribute to the study of criminal wars and the accrued breaking of law in the conduct of violence and in the post-conflict phase, through extensive qualitative and quantitative social science. We echo our esteemed colleague in saying that criminology has a responsibility to contribute to understanding where, how and why these supreme forms of criminality occurred (Hagan, 2015: 3-4), and to evidence the harms they produce. This special issue is an attempt to contribute to this endeavor.

Stephanie Di Pietro (2025) speaks directly to this argument when arguing criminologists need to consider more carefully the aetiology of the crime-war nexus, and more specifically, the criminogenic effects of war in the life course of children and young people. The impact of war goes far beyond the more evident violence of killing and destruction typical of warfare. It is inscribed within the individual strains a person may suffer as a result of changes in their family structures, the attendant mechanisms of trust/mistrust, and the fall of institutions. Di Pietro argues that considering these dynamics between the individual and macro dimensions in the context of war would improve our ability to reconstruct societies and support people's resilience after war.

The article by Fatima Rodrigues (2025) relates back to one of this special issue's main objectives, demonstrating how criminology can be effective at studying the connection between war and its colonial past and present. The ongoing InJUSTiceWar project investigates Portuguese colonial violence in Africa (1961-1974), through analysing the crimes committed by Armed Forces combatants and held accountable within the Territorial Military Courts in Angola and Guinea. The analysis brings to the fore once again the ways in which colonial powers use states of exception to justify violence against liberation movements. Further, Rodrigues (2025) reveals that studying law breaking within contexts of war and colonial occupation can reveal racialised hierarchies etched into the very legal frameworks which claim to provide justice and peace.

Using two case studies of 'child soldiers' in war, Ian Marder (2025) argues that studying criminology through war examples creates space to apply the criminological gaze 'upwards', and trace how power and social control run through systems and institutions, often in contradictory ways. For example, the socially constructed categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are quickly eroded in the context of war. Importantly for this special issue of *Criminological Encounters*, Marder's article reminds readers that criminology should not be a discipline of study contained to classrooms or lecture halls. He argues that Criminology programmes should be designed to be carried onwards and outwards, to build knowledge in ways that allow students to re-shape the world in ways that reduce intersectional harms, oppression, exclusion and suffering – especially in contexts of war and state violence.

All these articles concur more broadly that war is a fertile terrain in which to study behavior that is usually censured, not just in relation to the reversion of the broader cultural landscape and its impact on individuals, but also in relation to changing forms of organization, social bonds, and importantly tracing the commission of criminal behavior to more powerful institutions and actors in the present, past and future. As Ruggiero explained in his multiple commentaries and essays, the study of criminology cannot be severed from the study of the powerful, their economic interests and their discursive apparatuses (see Degenhardt and Scalia, 2025). War needs to be criminalized as one of the most egregious forms of violence, as its harms affect people on all sides (Ruggiero, 2023) and is damaging the planet we all call home. Criminologists need to interrogate the 'justifications' for war and document the violent impact it has.

In the current context of increased state-corporate militarization, proliferating genocidal violence, and threats of nuclear wars, criminology cannot remain silent. The harms in wartime far exceed the gravity and scale of criminalised behaviours in so-called peacetime. As criminologists, we have a responsibility to inform students and the public of the facts, through our knowledge and critical analysis on these issues. Further, we cannot maintain the separation between violence within the state and violence outside national borders, as typical of the discipline in its most administrative form. We should actively deploy

our research skills and theories to these mass harms which for long time were left to the margins of the discipline. Mobilising our knowledge to uncover data and interpret it through available theories will not just increase our knowledge of criminalisation in general, but hopefully contribute to the exercise of tracing colonial violence across time and space. We must not choose to keep quiet or keep academically sleeping-walking in denial while people in so many parts of the world are affected by the most destructive forms of violence, in which our institutions are complicit.

Artistic Intervention – Roaa Ali and Priya Sharma, with ASHTAR Theatre

Funded by the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham and the Faculty Strategic Research Equipment Fund (SREF) at Queen's University Belfast, Roaa Ali and Priya Sharma were commissioned to work with ASHTAR Theatre group, based in Palestine, on an artistic intervention for the special issue. Ali and Sharma (2025) discuss three pieces of performance art from *The Gaza Monologues*, which have been performed worldwide since 2010 to document, witness, remember and make visible Palestinian voices and experiences under Israeli occupation and genocide.

This artistic intervention, including extracts from conversations with ASHTAR's Iman Aoun and Edward Muallem, makes clear how life amid continued violence and the sensory assaults accompanying such violence disrupt time and the most intimate spaces, stretching and shortening the days of Palestinian families trying to survive and exist among the destruction. As Ali and Sharma (2025) write, *The Gaza Monologues* is an arts-based framework of justice, 'designed to counter erasure', serving as both archive and a site of political action. Importantly, the work of ASHTAR exists in the gaping space left by the gross failures of international law.

We are immensely grateful to have been able to include extracts from ASHTAR's performances alongside Ali's and Sharma's reflections on the pieces within this special issue. It must be noted that supporting artists through university research funding, especially those working amid active conflict zones, takes an immense amount of labour to overcome what can be a frustrating number of institutional barriers and administrative requirements. But it can be done. And it should be done. For art has the power to contribute so much to criminology, especially where words alone cannot always do justice to the full complexity of human experience and the harms flowing from the systems and institutions which should exist to protect life, not facilitate its erasure. Please do engage with the artistic intervention and as Ali and Sharma's conclude – amid such violent constructions of 'ungrievable life' (Butler, 2009), 'the question remains: as witnesses, what will we do?'

Researchers' Positionality, Limitations and Contributions of the Special Issue:

We are both aware of the privileged positions from which we write and feel this should be openly acknowledged. Hannah was born in Northern England and Teresa in Northern Italy. Current redundancy schemes aside, we both work in relatively well-funded institutions: the University of Nottingham, England, and Queen's University Belfast, a part of the UK positioned effectively in the island of Ireland. These intuitional affiliations have, quite literally, afforded us the role to guest-edit this collection through their provision of some research time and funding to support the artistic interventions, even in neoliberal academia. We appreciate that many colleagues do not have such research freedom and financial support. We are anti-war academics who engage in activism, trade unionism, and organized solidarity and protest within and outside our academic work. We are also conscious that while we aim to approach war through an anti-colonial and intersectional lens, we are based within the colonial heart of war in the UK and are both white skinned cis women, trained (albeit for different lengths of time) in the task of writing for the Anglo-Saxon speaking world.

Acknowledging the criminological toolbox has been grounded in Northern and Western analysis, and at times problematic hierarchies of power, we called for researchers of the Global South (the Global majority) and early career academics to contribute to this issue of *Criminological Encounters*. It is a privilege to have been able to work with some incredibly talented PhD students and early career academics over the last 18 months. Representation from the Global South and indigenous perspectives have been difficult to

secure within the timescales of academic publication processes. This lack of engagement may well reflect limitations in our circulation of the special issue call for papers. It could also reflect a valid distrust of 'criminology' – the study of 'crime' – which is rooted in Western colonialisation (Agozino, 2024), where law has been, and is still being used to facilitate violent occupation, racialised categorisation, segregation, criminalisation, exclusion, detention, concentration and destruction of peoples in the pursuit of capital gain. As such, there are many wars and genocides which are unfortunately not analysed within this special issue. We hope, however, to have enabled new voices to provide their analysis of contemporary and historical conflict dynamics.

We have also experienced several attempts to curtail academic freedoms from within the publication processes. Some pieces submitted to the special issue have been subject to intense peer-review criticism and rejection, at times in highly unprofessional ways. Several reviewers have denied recognition of valid contemporary evidence presented in certain articles submitted to the journal, such as critical analyses of ongoing genocides and international inaction. This has been frustrating and a potential insight into the institutional and cultural (colonial) academic barriers placed around scholars of the Global South and Indigenous communities (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). These actions have prompted us to intervene, and at times, involved an ethical active stance from the editors to disregard those reviews and instead to provide constructive reviews to the authors who wished to make their cases.

From inaction around gross violations of international law, to the forceful detention and imprisonment of refugee and asylum-seeking communities as 'criminal' - the law 'mostly works' for the powerful. While these systems and processes of criminalisation in contested contexts of war are very old, centring the global connections between current and historical violence as a continuum of colonialism offers a new direction for the discipline. The ability to witness and evidence atrocity in real time via smart phones and an increasingly globalised world allows criminologists to see and analyse the colonial machinery of war and denial in action, where they were once able to be concealed and only unpacked when weapons fell silent and survivors' stories were offered a space to be heard.

'Crime' is created in political arenas, meaning criminology is in great part about locating where power lies. Academia is indeed a site within which attempts to silence the truth are a real threat. Many university institutions are in the process of cutting critical programmes and the arts, placing many academics in precarity. An anti-colonial approach also means moving with solidarity and supporting collective action, within and outside institutional walls. From the research we do and the funding bodies we work with, to the ways we treat our colleagues and the people who take part in research, we encourage criminologists old and new to recognise the power we hold as a discipline. As Becker (1963) prompted us to always consider, 'who's side are we on?.'

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Thank you to all authors and reviewers who have contributed to this issue. It is fantastic to see your hard work in print. Thanks also to several authors for presenting their articles at the European Society of Criminology conference in Athens this year, particularly amid such turbulent and precarious contexts for academics researching war, genocide, and documenting state violence.

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contact with Priya and Roaa, and for offering advice about criminological activism.

To continue the legacy of our recently departed colleague and friend, Vincenzo Ruggiero, we hope that this collection of work inspires more researchers to turn an active eye to towards state violence and to developing a global, anti-colonial criminology against war. If knowledge is power and unity is strength, we must persist to use the interdisciplinary armoury of a criminological toolbox to intervene in war and state harm wherever possible. For silence only ever benefits the oppressors.

Finally, thanks must go to each other, for continuing to show up and extend ethics of care to us and authors throughout this project, while we've both been navigating a web of personal and global pain. It's been a privilege and a pleasure to guest edit this special issue. We hope it's worth the wait!

Hannah and Teresa

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**CRIMINOLOGICAL
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THEMATIC SECTION





Criminalisation of Intellectual Thought: Representations for Consciousness about Dissent, Resistance and Remembrance

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Keywords: Academic freedom, representation, archive, visual, oppression, lawfare

Abstract: Critical engagement, with that hidden or obscured, requires countering discipline-sutured scholarship and ways of seeing. Taking cognisance of the gaps, omissions and distortions when institutions archive themselves – particularly dark histories of social and political oppression – this article calls on critical scholars to trace continuities across past and present regimes of control on intellectual lives and thought. In this extended photo-essay, imagery and scholarship reverberate across time and place as markers of visibility in the context of broader anti-colonial, anti-war and anti-apartheid movements. The first part centres three African contexts' responses to the memorialisation of past intellectual resistance enacted during various struggles in the Cold War period: Ghana, Uganda and South Africa. The second part traces cross-cutting continuities with contexts historically associated with British colonialism - including India, Palestine, Sudan and the USA – to surface repressive tactics enacted in, and on, the digital and global university. These include technologies of surveillance and erasure; cultures of exclusion, sanction and censorship; and the reappropriation of discourses, frames and rights *against* freedom. Considering the role of neoliberalism in particular, this article contributes to understandings of the criminalization of dissent, both through the weaponisation of state law, and through the strategic and selective wielding of university policy, memory and culture.

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Ethical clearance was awarded by the School of Social Science, Education and Social Work Research Committee (REF: 037_2223) for the 'primary data' included herein, that being the visual components (photographs) by the author. Care was taken not to capture the faces of individuals, and to document public spaces of institutions. Permissions for the reproduction of additional images were secured.

Introduction: Expanding the criminological imagination to the study of the university

Authoritative public institutions, such as the law and the university, exert control. The former regulates the social. The latter forms and de/legitimises the social, through its educational function, as it forms and de/legitimises knowledge through academics' intellectual authority and institutional authority. Imposition of authority by such institutions on ways of being, doing and thinking should always be questioned. Such critical questioning should not only arise when such impositions are overtly enacted, such in acts of repression, conflict or war. They should also be raised when unequal power is normalised through control on that constituted as a 'threat' to the stability of the existing order, and when weaponised in covert and invisible ways at the thresholds of oppression and injustice. Responding to this journal's call to "expand the criminological imagination around a 'criminology of war'" (Wilkinson & Degenhardt, 2024, n.p.), this article focusses on past and current dynamics at the intersection of these authoritative institutions. Drawing from contexts grappling against oppressions from the raciological ordering of the world, it considers the weaponisation of the law and the university for the purposes of adversely limiting the lives and conditions for intellectual dissent and dissenters; in addition to the unregulated ways in which intellectual dissent and dissenters are created, constructed or subjugated as undesirable or criminal Others, including through (new) media. To address the fragmentation, stratification and downplaying of global, connected concerns about the university, this article includes plural considerations of contexts historically associated with British colonialism. In so doing, the oppression of dissenting scholars and scholarship are situated within broader anti-colonial, anti-war, and anti-apartheid movements. Provocations are offered about how forms of representation, including the visual, may (in)form how to "research, resist and heal harms" (ibid).

The subject of the article is *the study* of adversity against dissent. It considers representations of the refusal, resistance and complicity practiced by people within universities facing repressive forces or living under oppressive conditions, and their legacies. Connections between scholarship, lives and conditions are reflected in 'Free to Think', the title of the series of annual reports of the organisation *Scholars At Risk* (<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/free-to-think-reports/>). What is signalled in that title, firstly, is that 'thought' is a more expansive definition of intellectual freedom than professional academic freedoms. One might recall Jacques Derrida's (1983, p. 17) radical assertions that "'thought' [is] a dimension that is not reducible to technique, nor to science, nor to philosophy" or even the institution of the university. Secondly, the 'to' in title affirms the importance of conditions for the enactment of intellectual creativity and criticality. The title's efficacy is its unstated negative framing. Cast as a shadow over that simple phrase about freedom, are the spectres of unfreedom: threats, constraints and war.

Judith Butler¹ (2022) drew attention to how intertwined critical thought is, for living beings, with the conditions of possibility for knowledge. She did so to encourage bridging the separation between the concern for the fate of subjects of enquiry (such as gender studies in the USA and India, threatened through shut downs, defunding, censoring), and concerns for the fate of 'endangered people' (such as through marginalisation, discrimination, fear, sanction, persecution, torture, criminalisation, displacement, death et cetera). The writing of socially marginalised critical scholars has long bridged such separations. Linking contempt for Black bodies and Black-originated theory with continued racial oppression and policing, Tate (2024) extends theories about social death that Sylvia Wynter (1994) articulated, to stifling social marginality and the delegitimation of intellectual thought within contemporary UK, USA and Canadian academies. Underpinning much African scholarship have long been strong relations between the struggles for freedom with academic freedom, intellectual freedom and epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Due to the continuation of the problematic origins of the university as a modern/colonial institution on that continent, such critical relations were only in part informed by the institutional regimes of the colonial university, the nationalist university, the developmental university and the neoliberal university (Zezeza, 2024).

Questions about how to go about studying and producing knowledge about institutional and agentic responses to the criminalisation of intellectual thought, continue to be raised in fits and spurts. Responses

1 During this paper's review cycles, Butler had direct experience of living as an object of enquiry due to her critical scholarship and public intellectualism, while positioned within an institution undergoing erosion of its autonomy from external (state) interference. Evoking a period of US history, she is said to have described the institution's transfer of information and academic citizens' names to state authorities as "practice from the McCarthy era," in a letter to the university's legal teams (Levin, 2025).

are impoverished by the lack of cross-disciplinary and trans-national academic historic consciousness. In the critical hope this may be addressed, this paper contributes provocations through counter-visibility. As a critical scholar of the university, in the sub-sections below I draw attention to dominant disciplinary assumptions about 'the university' and outline why a polysemantic approach to the criminalisation of dissent is appropriate to chart this expansive terrain. I then outline existing problematics inherent to studying the phenomenon, including where attention is/not paid, and the (un)sustainability of critical scholarship and the institutional archive. Recognizing that critical engagement with that which is hidden, obscured and haunts requires countering the norms of discipline-sutured scholarship and dominant ways of seeing, the form of the paper then slips into thinking with imagery. The first part of the extended photo-essay centres three contexts where memory and culture, about intellectual dissent in the past, have been wielded in the present. This is followed by a second part, where the continuations of adverse controls to dissent and dissenters in those contexts are considered, and commonalities raised across additional contexts, to reckon with the digital and global nature of the neoliberal university.

Intersecting Criminology and Critical University Studies

As in many disciplines, when criminologists turn their attention to which objects to study *within* the university, the foci are usually (1) the university's function of (higher) education within teaching/learning of criminology, and (2) concerns about ethicality within the academic canon (Rothe et al, 2022). Dominant threads in the latter are similar to current debates in other disciplines in the Minority World/Global North. Neoliberalism's effects as an erosion on criticality within the discipline is one, which projects a nostalgic view of the modern/Western university as benignly good (e.g., Winlow, 2022). Another is discrimination practiced by academics themselves (for instance, Jacques & Wright, 2010) as part of wider systemic problematics in the discipline. This includes relations with internal-external authorities, such as the state and coloniality/colonialism (Dimou, 2021; Glynn and Breen, 2024). Worthy considerations, what these unwittingly reinforce are myths of the idea of the university as operating on stable ground. Protections, then, are asserted by its insiders (such as the professoriate, as trustees of knowledge and as stewards of education) to ensure those 'good' and the 'good/s' within, are defended against acts of harm, threats and infringements of rights, distortions of policy, and weaponisation of law, and against the reneging of disciplinary and institutional responsibilities (e.g., DeKeseredy et al, 2023).

Many academics have, however, been dis-abused of idealised notions of universities and of academic citizens. This may have been through their lived experiences of studying or working within institutions, the critical work of movements and scholars arguing for abolition (Ben-Moshe, 2018; Boggs et al., 2019), or the various iterations of the critical study of the university by those in the Global South/Majority World (Belluigi & Keet, 2024) or those excluded in the Minority World (Singh & Vora, 2023). This article is situated within such traditions which recognise the site and state of the university as always-already in contestation and conflict. Because conflict is enacted variously and experienced to differing degrees, proportionality is needed in the claims and in the response-ability of scholar-insiders on this subject. Not only are there differential impacts - on thought and on lives - from the threats and actions of sanction, intimidation and destruction of intellectual dissent and intellectual dissidents. There is also the danger of illusions of symmetry (Baer, 2009) which mask intersectional inequalities and geopolitics between individuals, groups and institutions in the contextual conditions they operate (Korkman, 2022).

The title of this article is 'the criminalisation of intellectual thought', foregrounding that judicial warfare is crucial to criminalise dissent. Dissent is the virtue central to the critical function of the university. As polysemantic terms - 'criminalisation', 'intellectual thought' and 'academic freedom' are shaped by context - neither single nor definitive definitions are asserted in this paper. Rather, to begin to fully comprehend the operationalisation of authoritative institutions against intellectual dissent, what is required are expansive, nuanced and transdisciplinary exploration of continua and thresholds. In this paper, I engage with how such exploration might extend from considering grand systems of oppression and petty enactments of repression against dissent and dissenters, to their impact on the socio-cultural, political, economic and psychological conditions for intellectual thought and life. The contraction 'lawfare' (law + warfare) has thus been used. It is a term coined within the discourse of the US military-industrial complex in the early post-Cold War period, that has now been extended and adapted to many parts of the world (see Vegh Weis, 2023), including as a counter-force. In the post-digital age, lawfare is unrestricted, extending across the dimensions of legal, media and psychological warfare (Liang & Xiangsui, 1999). It has been argued that lawfare as a tool was born for political coercion within geopolitical dynamics

dominated by imperialism and ‘post’-colonialism (Comaroff, 2001). There imperialism used “criminal codes, its administrative procedures, its states of emergency, its statutes and injunctions and court orders, to discipline its subjects by means of legible and legal violence” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2007, p. 144). Yet, covert relationships between universities, inter-national security and intelligence agencies preceded this emergence, established for British imperialism, and then supported with additional investment during the Cold War period (Diamond, 1992).

Lawfare may be enacted through the (ab)use of state or institutional policy craft, though not exclusively. This may include legal, judicial and organisational disciplinary instruments to undermine adversaries, including in the name of ‘protecting’ ideals, those in power, and those claimed to be vulnerable. While domestic repression may be inherent to authoritative regimes, repressive tactics enacted by countries seemingly liberal or democratic have also targeted citizens, non-citizens and those beyond their borders (Pinos & Hau, 2022). The effects may be ‘strong’: loss of contracts, employment or funding, censorship, bans, fines, imprisonment, exile, execution. They may be ‘weak’: involving coercion, reputational damage, delegitimization, victimisation, silencing, scapegoating. Due to the global and post-digital nature of the contemporary university’s ecologies and economies of knowledge and international academic mobility, lawfare may be wielded for the purposes of accomplishing geopolitical objectives, including transnational repression. Lawfare has, however, also served as a counter-force to challenge the abuse of rights and to rebuke legal infringements at institutional, national and international levels – including by academic citizens. And repression may inadvertently catalyse backlash and politicisation.

Problems Inherent to the Study of the Criminalisation of Dissent

To engage ethically with how the imagination of scholars and scholarship may stay with the uncertainty of troubled realities, requires reckoning with existing assumptions and problematics in the field of enquiry. In this section I briefly highlight problematics within the dominant gaze in related academic scholarship and activism, and within the institutional archive.

Civil society organisations, social action groups and academics writing outside their disciplinary areas, pay attention to university matters when altered from ‘normal’ states, such as in cases of clear violation of human rights or academic protections, particularly but not exclusively by authoritarian or belligerent states. Criminalisation of dissent in such cases involves distortions, manipulations and mobilisation of state or international law. For instance, until the end of 2024, local academics who crossed the Syrian border post-2011 became ‘terrorists’ of the very state that had repressed their freedoms as citizens and as academic citizens under Assad’s regime (Milton, 2019). Within the period of that war, Turkish academics drew attention to how Erdogan’s characterisations of counter-terrorism masked not only the crackdown on their dissent by mobilising state law but also universities’ complicity, when instituting disciplinary measures on their seemingly errant staff (Baser et al., 2017). Such extreme weaponisation of state law are discussed in reference to cultural and scholarly representations in Ghana, Uganda and South Africa in Part I, expanding to petty and grand mobilisations of systems and technologies of power in Part II.

As alluded to the section above, intent focus on lines demarcating what are/not *legal* criminalisations of intellectual thought, may push gradations which colourise the conditions for oppression and targeted repressions into the periphery of scholarly vision. The lines of demarcation already get much attention. This is despite such laws and rights having been drawn on shifting sands by those who have the power to renege upon nation and international frames. This has again been demonstrated in responses to the scholasticide and genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The gaze of much attention within Minority World academia is currently being paid to infringements to, and related debates about, the rights of their academic citizens to freedom of expression (particularly student protests, including in this Special Issue); to academic freedom (as a liberal entitlement to harm unfettered or as a practice of dissent); and to institutional autonomy. Rights-based structures should be preserved and strengthened. Indeed, lawfare can and has been mobilised by civil society actors. However, asymmetrical power impacts such lawfare and counter-lawfare in practice, where stronger parties will be favoured by inherent structural hierarchies (Pinos & Hau, 2022). Critical scholarship should be cognisant that the power of such laws and rights falls “somewhere short of freedom” (Salaita, 2020, p. 2).

It is indeed pressing that scholarship on ‘the university’ is produced in such times of harms or crisis, including war. However, the conditions for the sustainability of local scholarship continuing beyond such

framing, including post-crisis and post-conflict, are weak. Critical scholarship about intellectual dissent has long been deprioritised in post-conflict, post-colonial contexts over nation-building, reconstruction and development (Ki-Zerbo, 1986), and peace-making. It has been particularly eroded with the growth of neoliberalism following the Cold War. Additional problematics include the polarisation, divisiveness, disinformation and melodramas that surround threats to freedom (Anker, 2014), crisis and war, which engender attraction-repulsion affective economies. Observing such phenomena in Western academics' responses to Israeli acts in Gaza in 2023, Üngör (2024, p.1) warns that

Moralizing, emotionalizing, legalizing, and politicizing episodes of mass violence is never helpful for a better understanding, and yet, this is all we have seen in the past four months: the politics of labelling, the politics of selective outrage and empathy, and the politics of adjudication.

Local dynamics and insider scholarship can easily become obscured during international fracas (Hajir et al., 2021). External 'consultants' become centred as 'objective' 'experts', trading on privileged positions of naivety which assumes transnational solidarity is without contradictions, such as profit from international victim-saviour complexes (Kappler, 2013). Perverse incentives include short-lived rewards of career inflation from social media likes, speaker invitations and citation metrics buoyed by the fleeting affective attention of academic publics, before compassion fatigue sets in, and the funding glut moves on. The narrative is often highly controlled by conflict- and international development-research funders (Heleta & Cochrane, 2025), diminishing critique (Shah et al, 2025).

A fundamental challenge to sustainability, is that scholarship of the university is not inherent to the university. Paradoxically, the university is remiss in institutionalising the conditions for it, and its citizens, to be studied critically, even in contexts where ideals and myths of its critical function are upheld. Critical voice is all the more limited in conflicted-affected universities (Russell, 2023). Despite being repositories of knowledge about the 'real world' beyond the institutional *muris*, the university rarely routinely archives itself as a social, cultural, political, economic institution. In contexts of political oppression, the preservation of histories of struggle by dissenters and by enactors of harms within universities, is often neglected, with negative consequences for intergeneration learning (Netshakhuma, 2023). Gaps typify collections. Left unaddressed is capacity building for university archivists and librarians isolated, such as from sanctions and boycotts (Haricombe & Lancaster, 1995). In some such contexts, institutional archives have been made defunct and staff decapacitated, even in the most basic functions of records management (Khumalo & Chigariro, 2017). This may be because of the crucial role they can play, as is made apparent in the cases of resistance discussed later in this paper. Unless disrupted, practices established under one regime persist into another. For instance, despite changes to 'access' generally within democratic South Africa, including libraries and national archives, "Apartheid-era patterns of archival use and accessibility have proved resilient" (Harris in Thomas, 2021, p. 300). Tejada (2014, p. 529) articulates well some of the challenges facing scholars, who make enquiries of institutional archives, under such conditions:

Opacities, and more or less deliberate boycotts, are very common: sudden amnesias, missing or destroyed papers, archives that supposedly never existed, banned documents for long periods on diverse pretexts—like protecting the right to privacy of former prosecuted individuals—and so forth. The more political implications for the present and the more informal and illegal procedures used in the past, the more obstacles put up to current inquiries.

A purpose of bearing witness to past and present acts and enactors, even when banal or inglorious, is that such consciousness may contribute the development of counter-hegemonic archives to warn of the potential of dangers of injustices, and of complicity, to come. As importantly, historic consciousness engendered from such critical memorialisation, may be drawn upon to foster fortitude (Hajir et al., 2021), solidarity and action (Hajir & Qato, 2025) for resistance against oppression. In rare cases, such as that of Colombia, official recognition of the harms on and by higher education communities, led to the establishment of archives and scholarship to enable truth-seeking mechanisms, support reclamation and education (Maya Llano et al, 2025). In this paper, memory activism is discussed which emerged from beyond, occasionally within, universities and national initiatives. Connections are made between scholarship and imagery from different contexts, to speak to the nature of archive(s) on the criminalisation of intellectual thought. In the section following, I outline my thinking about how and why such visual engagement has value.

Methodological Notes

Committed to re-reading and re-imagining relations and discourses through the visual, in this article I think with imagery and scholarship. Socio-cultural representations are interwoven which span the gamut of conditions for intellectual thought and practice, from remarkable commemorations and artefacts of past resistance, to quotidian life and space on campus. Connections are made across geographic contexts, in a bid to de-centre powerful imaginaries of “the West and the rest” (Hall, 1992, p. 141).

To think ‘with’ is an approach to visibility as a tool for consciousness about what is in/hyper/visibilised, envisioned and imagined; and vigilance about image-manufacture, opacity and erasure. This recognises, but complicates, scholarly and cultural histories about the right to look (Mirzoeff, 2011). Reconsideration of visibility within the photograph and its production within a number of African contexts, have complicated dominant scholarly assumptions about the essentialisation and inevitability of the violence of ‘colonising camera’ (Hartmann, Silvester & Hayes, 1998) and the problematic gaze (Akil, 2016). Ambiguities in the image’s relationship with visibility and agential practices of local agents have included contexts such as Mozambique (Thompson, 2021), Bengal, India (Roychoudhuri, 2024) and post-Apartheid South Africa (Thomas, 2025). I noted ambiguity, too, when it comes to the study of the dark sides of universities. From a critical systematised review of journal articles published across the world since the cessation of the Cold War, I found that ‘the visual’ had been drawn upon as source, method and methodology to evoke the unseen and that made unsightly (Belluigi, 2025). These included study of that represented in archives, in grey literature, by academic citizens and by institutions. Within criminology, too, visibility in the carceral state has been excavated through counter-visual methodologies (Schept, 2014).

Presented in the genre of an extended photo-essay, dialogue between purposively-selected images, observations and scholarship in the section below, are constructed with a visual sensibility to reach across time and place *through representation* as markers of visibility: (in)sights into the criminalisation of thought; regimes and technologies of surveillance; and cultures of exclusion and social sanction in the university. The oscillation between image-(con)text is not intended to be exhaustive. Nor is it intended to be representative of ‘findings’ about the breadth or depth of the dynamics at play. Rather, the two parts in the following section distinguish between imagery related to the past and to the present. In the first part, 7 images commemorate imperfect acts of refusal and resistance, which were enacted under conditions that are now widely recognised as having been both generally unjust and oppressive, with specific targeted repressions of intellectual thought. The photographs capture responses by institutions, collectives and individuals within African contexts – Ghana, Uganda and South Africa – to state lawfare against dissent and intellectual dissenters during periods of social and political repression that intersected with the Cold War. Tracing legacies and continuities across those contexts and others in Part II, 6 images allow for raising additional emerging concerns about contemporary conditions at the thresholds of the criminalisation of dissent.

Dramatic visualisations of academic freedom are prone to possible (geo)politicisation (Mackinnon, 2022). I have thus been cautious in my selection of imagery that visualise erasure in the past and present. Two images were published by an artist-academic and 1 by the independent (African) press, as they had unprecedented access to visual material not recorded within institutional archives or produced for commemoration. This raises questions about the public/ private nature of visualisation. The majority of images (9 of 13) were produced by the author, as part of series of visual studies of the cultural infrastructure of institutions and their surveillance technologies, taken over the past decade. Unaltered photographs, they capture aspects of institutional spaces that are in plain sight, and accessible to both local and non-local academic citizens. The privileges and protections I exploit are those related to the relative lack of sanction and professional risk of my current position as a South African academic employed at a Northern Irish institution.

Part I: (In)sights Into the Past

In the form of an extended photo-essay, this section evokes the long, complicated and dirty relationship between universities, inter-national security and intelligence agencies (Schleck, 2022). Scholarship on modern Western university histories has explored dynamics on campuses within the ‘superpowers’ when the Cold War was in full swing (Lewis, 1988). That interest extends from state interference in institutional autonomy; through to the social science’s service to international intelligence gathering (Solovey &



Dayé, 2021), specifically anthropology (Price, 2011) and area studies (Cumings, 2002). In Anglophone African contexts, the rise of such relations was in parallel to late colonialism. Renewed energies for US-Commonwealth 'soft power' relations in the 1950s-1960s periods of decolonisation (see Anyanwu, 2010; Ashby & Anderson, 1966; Campbell, 2010), reached its zenith of organisation with technological surveillance and institutional interference at the height of the Cold War (O'Brien, 2010). Intertwined with struggles against colonial occupation and wars for independence from 'white' rule across Africa, were concomitant and counter innovations in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for political resistance (Garrett & Edwards, 2016). This section explores three such contexts – Ghana, Uganda and South Africa - for the (in)sights they offer into how dynamics of weaponisation and resistance in the past are remembered.

(In)sights From Ghana

The photographs in Figures 1-3 were taken in the last home and resting place of W. E. B. Du Bois in Accra, a refuge gifted by the first president of independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. Du Bois was a casualty of anti-communist surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the USA in the early stages of McCarthyism (Sinitiere, 2020). His civil rights activism for the rights of African Americans, support of independence from colonialism in Africa, and protests against the nuclear arms race, were associated with Communism and considered 'un-American' (Burden-Stelly, 2023). Despite some vindication through the US courts, ultimately bureaucracy was weaponised in lawfare by the US state department to render him stateless (Lanham, 2017).



*Figure 1 Visual commemorations of resistance in Black history include leaders from USA and the African continent, in the foyer of the W. E. B. Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan-African Culture.
Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Accra, 2023).*

In the Ghanaian centre dedicated to his memory, Du Bois' academic identity looms large in the representations of his personhood. His academic regalia are displayed in life-size dioramas. Wreathes of campus fraternities surround his grave, indicative of the significant African American tourist industry to the Centre and country. Important for a figure who actively critiqued and countered the propaganda of historical amnesia within US national narratives and education (Sinitiere, 2016), a floor-to-ceiling poster for "Black Resistance Month" was displayed in the foyer when I visited in 2023 (Figure 1). A trio of raised fists of Black Power, in the pan-African colours of resistance, emerge from a ground beneath portraits of political leaders. That space connects his living quarters with rooms commemorating male and female leaders from across the African continent, and an active library.

Significant space in the Centre has been dedicated to commemorating writing as resistance. This includes Du Bois' scholarly works, displays of his manuscripts organised in vitrines, and the retention of his personal library (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Viewed from a passage in his home, is the entrance to the 'Du Bois Library', above which hangs a framed portrait of Du Bois speaking at the United Nations. Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Accra, 2023).

Curators have preserved the desk at which he wrote, a selection of his published scholarship, and the filled bookshelves which include the books he gifted visitors (Figure 3). Commemorations such as these draw attention to the continuation of his practice as an intellectual and an objector to oppression despite significant personal-professional attack, including discrimination within US academia and repressive lawfare by US state intelligence services. They remind visitors that much of his scholarship, in the country of his birth, was purposely unpublished (Guy & Brookfield, 2009) and hidden away from public view and dissemination (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, Britt, 2018) to erase him from the EuroAmerican canon (Morris, 2015). As one of the founders of US sociology and African/a Studies, Du Bois' work and life is now extensively taught and written about across the world (Al-Hardan, 2022).



Figure 3 A close-up of his publications 'In Battle for Peace', 'Souls of Black Folks', 'Black Reconstruction' and 'The Gift of Black Folks', with papers retained as bookmarks possibly inserted by Du Bois. These are shelved below a row of 'Books W. E. B Would Give As Presents to Accra Visitors', as noted on a display label.

Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Accra, 2023).

The institutional autonomy of universities is an enabling fiction, that during the Cold War period could not be maintained. Universities across the world were infiltrated by spies and informants. Surveillance technologies, at the cutting edge of innovations, were applied to information gathering and for counter/intelligence by various parties. On the African continent, these were not only weaponised against academic citizens perceived to be acting against the interest of 'white' rule in the then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (Zimudzi, 2007) and South Africa (Ashby, 1960). They were also a feature of regimes attempting to 'cast out' infiltrators and dissidents within a number of the independent states. So dire do these histories of the conditions for academic freedom seem, that some Africanists argue that since independence, diaspora seems to have provided more safety than institutions within the nation-states of intellectual dissidents' birth (Zavale & Langa, 2018). As had been the case for Du Bois.

(In)sights From Uganda

"The Dark Ages" in the history of the one of oldest East African public universities, was recently memorialised in bronze as when "professors and students were persecuted and many went into exile" (Figure 4). At that time in the history of Uganda's independence, the institution had been infiltrated by a spy web across all levels, including personnel from the State Research Unit. Measures had put into place "intended to cow Makerere [University] into total submission to [Idi] Amin's reign of terror" (Karumaya, 1978, p. 48).



Figure 4 On the lower marble tier of the large Makerere@100 Monument, which commemorates periods of the University's history and was designed by its academic citizens, the sixth bronze plaque is inscribed with '1972-1981 The Dark Ages'. Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Kampala, 2024).

The insider's account of Karaza Karumaya offers rare glimpses into the pressures placed on university librarians, and as such I have retained their words as excerpts within this section. This was in the national context of the destruction of Uganda's recorded history in national archives and government offices by the military government of the then president, Idi Amin. Censorship bans on international publications were imposed with such severity that "the law had to be obeyed or heads would roll" (Karumaya, 1978, p. 48).

When Amin criticizes a publication, the criticism is tantamount to an immediate ban which prohibits the importation, circulation or reading of the material concerns. The prohibited literature may not be fully specified. Most orders banning publications are so vague that nobody knows, not even the Ministry supposed to enforce the law, what is actually involved. The law, however crude, must be obeyed without question. The problem with 'blanket' censorship is that every consumer of information is automatically compelled to censor what he reads. (ibid)

The implications of such blanketing was that "the University had to censor or be censored". However, the shift in the positioning of responsibility to the institution, proved the loophole to exploit. Material was locked up in a strong-room by the so-called chief censor of the University Library, with high-risk, privileged access. That enabled the "sanction-busting practice" of secretly smuggling selected prohibited materials to be photocopied, covertly circulated and safely disposed (Karumaya, 1978, p. 51). When heightened tensions and increased suspicions led to the demand that the censored material be handed over to the "President's men", where academic citizens assumed they "would be lost forever to the University", decisions were made to surreptitiously practice refusal. Material of crucial academic value was hidden, with others offered up as "casualties for censorship". When spies leaked information of this plot and of a privately-stored collection, the staff at most risk of exposure made a dire decision "for the luxury of keeping alive". In a tragic twist, the precious material was "set on fire" (Karumaya, 1978, p. 55). The librarian-author makes explicit associations with European fascists' burning of books (commemorated in Figure 5) in the article's title. Such mnemonic associations continue to be evoked in titles of texts by librarians (see the recent 'Burning of the book' by Oxford's Bodley Librarian, Ovenden, 2020) to connect with, and build on, historic consciousness of threats to the criminalisation of intellectual thought.

The article itself was an act of defiance by an academic citizen for memorialisation. It was published in the late 1970s, during Amin's reign, outside of the country by a Zambian journal publication.

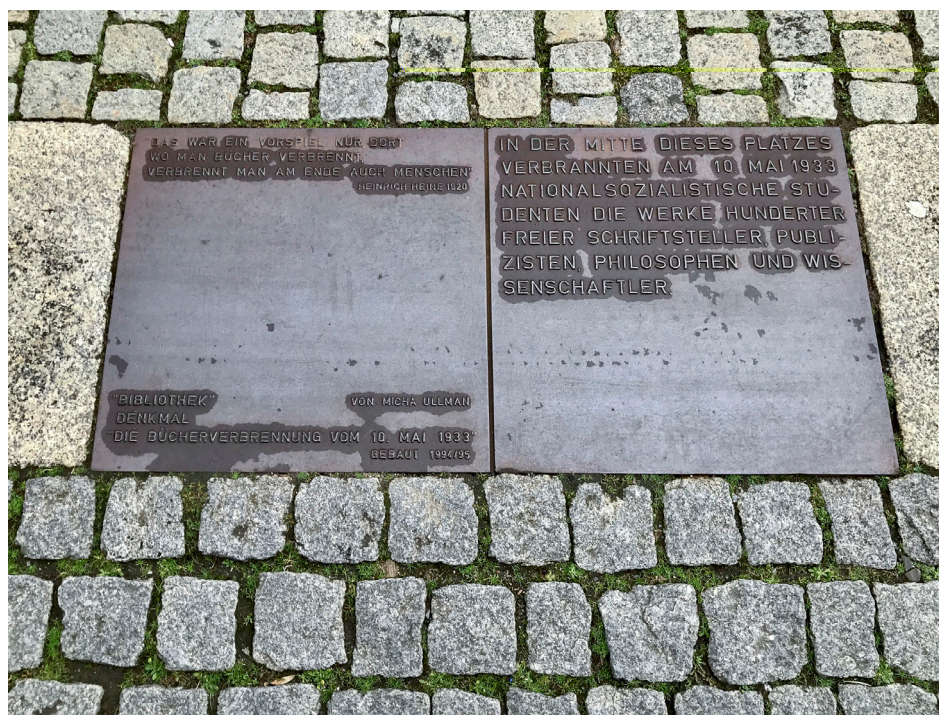


Figure 5 Books identified by the librarian Wolfgang Herrmann were burnt by professors and students of Humboldt University in Bebelplatz, Germany in 1933. This bronze memorial marks the site on the ground where this public destruction happened, about an institution which continues to be associated with idealised notions of the modern Western university, the so-called 'Humboldt model'. The site is wet with rain in this image, evocative of the Begräbniswetter [Funeral weather] that Erich Kastner observed on the actual night.

Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Berlin, 2020).

(In)sights From South Africa

In contrast to the story of acts of resistance recounted above about Makerere University's librarians, Apartheid South Africa's distorted political ideologies were strongly held by those within the library profession. The library was conceived "as an important instrument to control undesirable literature" (Dick, 2012, p. 98) where, overwhelmingly, librarians "collaborated with state authorities in book burning" to stifle dissent (Dick, 2012, p. 93). Such internal censorship *exceeded* compliance to the regulations of the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963.

The South African 'case' has particular value for observing state oppression as racism enacted *through* the academy. It allows for tracing the ways in which the modern/ colonial university's delegitimation of systems of Indigenous intellectual thought were continued, morphed or disrupted by agents and institutions, when the state criminalised thought that served the interests of Indigenous freedom. Early on, law in South Africa had been manipulated to allow for monitoring intellectuals, including academic citizens engaging in 'illegal activities', through listening devices and interception of communications. The intelligence agencies exercised their powers by intimidating, torturing and incarcerating suspected persons for periods of time without trial; holding them under house arrest; banning them from entering educational institutions; and displacing them from the country, into enforced exile. Moreover, the work of banned persons was also banned, stunting the dissemination of their thought by criminalising reproduction and citation.

Yet, a practice of visualising resistance to the banning of persons and published works, and of acts of censorship, became established in the editorial practices of some South African intellectuals and the left-wing press (Le Roux, 2015). Instead of complying passively to erasure, that which was in contravention of the law was retained in marked black redactions, and in some instances published annotations were recorded of such control, to raise readers' consciousness of such petty imposition of lawfare against thought (Figure 6). Significant danger was posed by the intelligence agencies (the 'Security Police' or 'Special Branch'), who were linked with the CIA and allied agencies.

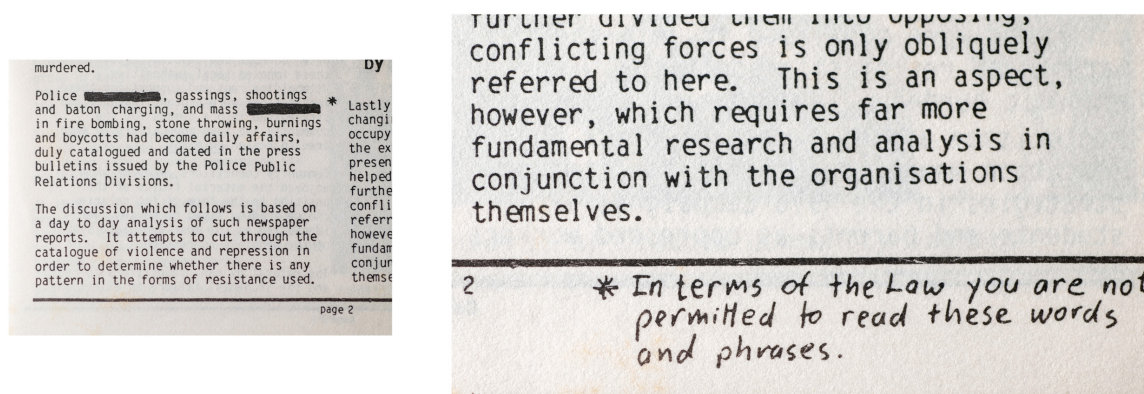


Figure 6 Marking (left) and annotation (right) by editors of *The Democrat* (1996 in Meistre 2025, p. 14) made explicit the Apartheid state's enforced control on disseminating dissent.

Visuals such as these (Figures 6 and 7) have particular value in a context with large gaps in its archives generally, and its visual history particularly, as alluded to in the introduction. Erasure at the end of that regime included the "partial or complete destruction of archives containing information about Apartheid-era crimes", with continued obfuscation of truth-seeking mechanisms, where "the cases of activists who were tortured and murdered have been suppressed for political reasons" (Thomas, 2021, p. 299)². Writing about the case of private digital activism to commemorate the once student activist Ahmed Timol and advocate for justice, Thomas (ibid) notes how

there is no visual record of those who were murdered, and documents relating to their lives and deaths are either non-existent or difficult to find. The absence of a coherent, let alone large-scale, state-funded digitization project to make the visual history of the anti-Apartheid struggle accessible online makes independent digitization and safeguarding initiatives like that created by Timol's nephew, Imtiaz Cajee, all the more important.

The profound significance of such erasure in archives, both in sanitising collective memory and in distorting truth, was recognised in a dedicated section on the matter in the final report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1998, vol. 1, ch. 8, and vol. 5, ch. 8), informed by the work of social justice archivist Verne Harris (2002). Yet, the controversial decision by the post-Apartheid government to pass a bill classifying sensitive documents inaccessible on national security grounds, has not only denied truth-seekers but also created new conditions which "criminalise academia" (the title of the paper by Duncan, 2018).

The 'afterlives' of regimes of power post-conflict, such as petty and grand Apartheid in South Africa, reverberate in its current systems of policing (Kynoch, 2016) and universities, including their libraries. In a bid to address this, higher education has become an active space for socio-cultural and epistemic 'transformation' (birthing the now prolific South African Higher Education Studies, SAHES), in addition to socio-demographic and institutional restructuring. Less scrutinised from *within* universities has been their histories in relation to the criminalisation and sanctioning of dissent, and the dirty politics of complicity of institutions and academic actors with state security information gathering. This is a part of the 'black hole' of scholarship on Apartheid, where that regime seems to continue to have an alienating effect on local historians (Miller, 2013) and scholars of universities. There was no public truth project about intellectuals - academics and institutions were absent from the critical eye of the TRC, unlike the approach taken in Colombia (Maya Llano et al., 2025). The terrain has been left mostly to exposés by journalists, and recently a flurry of autobiographies of prior student and staff activists, and confessions of turned informants, planted spies and their 'handlers'.

Smudging clean delineations between victims and perpetrators, dissidents and collaborators, is Brent Meistre's ongoing study into the artefacts (Figures 6 and 7) gifted to him as a young child from his father, the then head of the Security Police in a university town. The items had either been confiscated from

² Families of victims of Apartheid-era crimes in 2025 opened cases for constitutional damages against political figures, including the second democratically-elected Black president of the country, for their interference in justice. For more, see The Foundation for Human Rights (<https://unfinishedtrc.co.za/constitutional-damages-case/>).

activists and intellectuals, including academic citizens of Rhodes University, or used for training purposes of security personal. Writing about the complications of his positioning in that very university, less than two decades later as an artist-academic, Mestre raises insights about 'being' an implicated subject (Rothberg, 2019).



Figure 7 This photograph is of the back of a postage stamp from Mozambique in Mestre's collection. Visible are fibres, human hair, and double-sided adhesive gauze which typically would have secured flat items, such as microfilm or concealed messages (in Mestre 2025, p. 68).

Mestre's contribution complicates scholarship on intergenerational lineages in families impacted by state political surveillance, such as resisters on the right side of history still 'living in the file' (Pendakis, 2017). Intergenerational insights reveal asymmetries of power over time, which may reveal themselves through compliance, co-operation, resistance and individual-collective remembrance. Such asymmetries emerge in studies of intellectuals beyond academia too, in various contexts and periods of time. As early as late-Tudor/ early-Stuart England, for instance, Ben Jonson's account offers fascinating admissions of the pleasure-pain experience of being an informant and an intellectual under surveillance (Miele, 2023).

Connecting (in)sights to 'Advanced' Democracies

Utilising ocular metaphors, Elamine (2021, p. 113) argues that "in addition to the common investigation of academic freedom, [as] visible aspects, a further investigation of the topic must take into account the invisible aspects, especially related to knowledge production and dissemination in social sciences". The three contexts selected above each raise questions about how such visible aspects, in the past treatment of dissent and dissenters, are represented in the present. I conclude this section by briefly extending the considerations to less visible residues in contexts considered advanced democracies in the Minority World.

Extending well beyond their knowledge production and 'science diplomacy' is the cultural impact of academics' social engagement in shaping, and also avoiding, public dissent. For instance, a recent paper considered the active role played by Spanish academics in the late period of the Cold War about NATO and nuclear culture; in contrast to their lack of involvement in deliberations about disarmament and transnational peace efforts (Quaggio, 2024). Similar questions about contrasts in attention, investment and geopolitical asymmetries were raised in the introduction to this paper, and re-emerge in my discussion of current tensions and dynamics in scholarship in Part II. Another context of interest, connected to British colonialism, is Northern Ireland. Social avoidance about subjects viewed as 'contentious' during the period of ethno-national conflict known as 'The Troubles' (Taylor, 1988), has now extended to disengagement

with local racism and xenophobia in the periods since (Belluigi, 2024). Public intellectualism in that context, such about the possibilities of constitutional change by human rights professor Colin Harvey (2025), faces the mobilisation of online trolling and death threats, serving political ends. Institutional objections and protections have been weak in response.

Within contexts of social division, academics and universities walk criss-crossing tightropes. The legitimacy of the institution is in part dependent on the public's perceptions of its impartiality (Irwin, 2005). However, such trust-building is inevitably tested in conditions of fragile fiscal autonomy with purse-holding public authorities, donor and investors; relations which have been further complicated in the post-Cold War period with neoliberal defunding of public (higher) education. What is often unseen, is this "picture of contemporary structural limits to academic freedom in advanced democracies" (Kölemen & Vatansever, 2023).

Part II: (In)sights Into Continued and New Concerns in the Present

Conditions for the criminalisation of dissent in the present are considered in this part of the paper. Unexamined in scholarship is the extent of continuity – from the past to the present - in state legislation of intelligence agencies' powers of interference, surveillance and policing of academia, such as discussed in Part I. This is despite the ubiquitousness of national and institutional espoused discourses of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, which remain weakly framed in law and weakly operationalised in practice (Börzel & Spannagel, 2025). In addition to continued mobilisation of legal and psychosocial processes, are digital and online mobilisations of security, surveillance and related technologies.

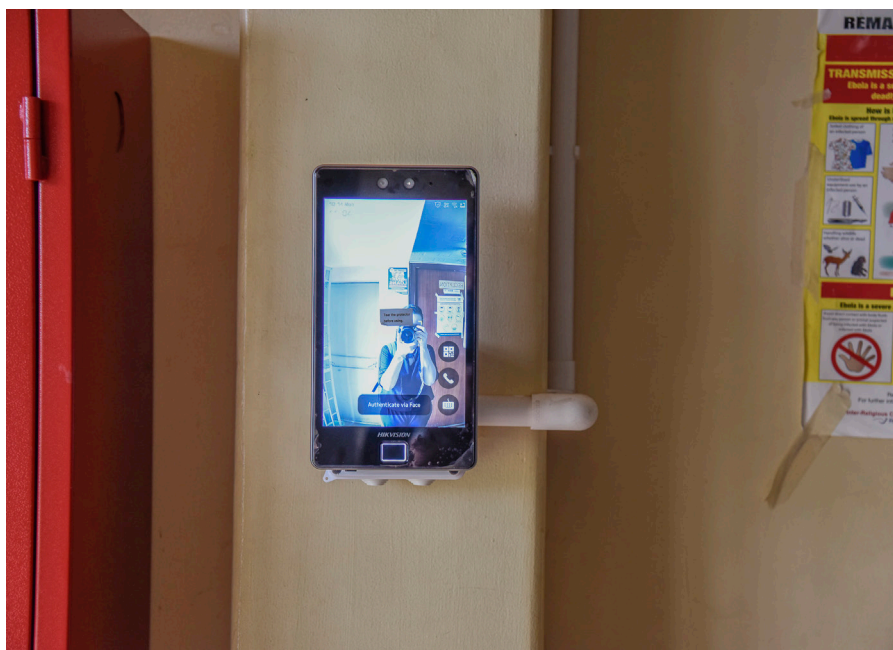


Figure 8 Facial recognition technologies are installed at entry and exit points in many of the buildings of Makerere University that hold political significance. Here the author is captured photographing the device. Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Kampala, 2024).

To trace such continuities, I begin this section with a return to Makerere University in Uganda that featured in Part I. In its College of Education and External Studies, is a room marked as once belonging to Nwalimu ('Julius') Nyerere when he read for a teaching diploma. Nyerere later went on to take leadership of independent Tanzania as its first president. Monitoring of people's movement entering and exiting buildings which commemorate persons (Figure 8), is claimed by security personnel to be justified. Unlike the rigours of data legislation in public discourse in the Minority World, the right to information on how such 'private' data is used, held, shared or protected is not actively implemented in many Majority World contexts. In that University's aptly named Ivory Tower Building, security mechanisms that the author directly encountered included the same audiovisual technology as pictured in Figure 8; uniformed, armed security guards at the building's openings; and at least one heavily armed, bullet-protection padded, balaclava-clad guard posted at a high vantage point some distance away. In isolation, this may not seem

that nefarious. However, the spotlight of the state is severe in contemporary Uganda, where ill-defined law continues to be weaponised as a means to expunge society of ideas, persons and social groups deemed undesirable. Recently this involved the tightening of repressive regulations for sexuality rights. The offence of the “promotion of homosexuality” was appealed by activists on the basis that it violates “freedom of thought, conscious, and belief” (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Local academics early on raised concerns of the chilling effect this law would have on “subjects such as decolonial theory, queer theory, feminism and gender studies”, where risk-aversion may reduce them to “no-go zones” within Ugandan universities (Kemigisa, 2023).

(In)visibility in the Digital University

Scholarly concerns about the criminalisation of dissent extend well beyond so-called ‘conflict zones’ and conditions of state authoritarianism, extending into places at ‘peace’ and those extolling liberal notions of democracy. In the name of protections against criminality, universities’ physical and virtual campus spaces have become increasingly securitised.



*Figure 9 Fingerprint recognition technology, as both an actual and metaphoric barrier controlling access to higher education and university libraries, features in the art film *You Are Not Authorised* (Wilby, 2025) created for a project about the intersections of intellectual and social marginality in the Indian academy.*

Concerns about technology extend from direct and meta-surveillance, through to how they are studied. Gluck-Thaler (2023, p. 259) raised concerns that, in the context of surveillant AI, “the stakes of an ahistorical analysis are especially high” because “scientific knowledge production on classification has been coextensive with the maintenance and production of racial, gender, and social hierarchies”. The film-still in Figure 9 evokes the relation between existing casteist, religious, gendered inequalities (Brayne, 2022) and prejudices in Indian society; and the conditions of seemingly banal, impersonal, technologically-mediated barriers and monitoring within academic institutions.

Securitisation measures, which enforce exclusion or target specific social groups within the academy, are in operation across the world. UK counter-terrorism, for instance, targets those perceived to be Muslims within institutions of education (Breen & Meer, 2019) and higher education (Gearon, 2017). When it comes to wider European universities contemporary securitisation, Gearon (2019) traces the continuities with global intellectual neocolonialism. These, in addition to immigration monitoring and control of external migrant academic citizens, add further complexity to the relations of the institution with state securitisation and intelligence (Gearon & Parsons, 2019). Yet to be explored are the qualitative experiences and effects of ‘crimigation’ controls (Bhatia et al., 2024) and the climate they create within academia. Recent public attention to the US curtailment of access, and the deportation, of academic dissenters against the genocide in Gaza, in addition to India’s silencing of dissenting academics in the diaspora (Lai, 2025), may encourage more of such research.



Figure 10 Cameras perched high up, on a campus road of Savitribai Phule Pune University, go unnoticed amongst the aesthetics of flora and a monument to one of the country's past celebrated leaders.
Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Pune, 2025).

Objects of study are most often the policing of protest and social movements (Naegler 2022; Selmini & Di Ronco, 2023). The images in Figures 10 (India), 11 (South Africa) and 12 (Scotland) document everyday surveillance technologies on campuses of contemporary liberal democracies.



Figure 11 With an inspirational institutional slogan on reimagining the future in the background, the austere modernist architecture of the University of Johannesburg is pockmarked by security cameras.
Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Johannesburg, 2018).

Rather than limiting scholarly interest to actual interference in peoples' lives or specific acts and events, there is importance in considering the dominating *potential* of surveillance practices on campuses (Huynh-Watkins & Newell, 2024). Often regulated (at least in the Minority World) by commonsensical claims about protection and privacy - framing who has the right to observe or record visuals on campus and who is authorised to limit such recording - questions should be raised about visibility and authority, much like those raised about aesthetics and policing (such as Wall and Linnemann, 2014). Reflecting on a study of the "liminal" surveillance tested by authorities for a single event on a USA campus, Boersma (2013) encouraged more criticality about dynamics behind such temporality.



*Figure 12 Erected on poles for aesthetics and security are powerful lights and a camera, in front of the facade of the historic hospitals which make up University of Edinburgh's main campus.
Photo: Dina Zoe Belluigi (Edinburgh, 2025).*

(In)visibility in the Global Academy

As noted in this paper's introduction, geopolitical differences in responses to the deterioration of conditions for intellectual dissent continue to be marked. Public intellectualism about wars in places peripheral to the Western gaze may see little to no uptake. One example ongoing at the time of writing is the 'forgotten war' of Sudan. Since 2023 there has been significant destruction to the infrastructure of universities. The burning of a university library was described as "the stabbing of Sudanese memory" (Al-Hajj cited in Thomas, 2023, p. 41). It had also archived the largest local collection of photographs of Sudanese history, which had not been digitised. I have thus chosen to reproduce one of the few visual documents of that destruction, that came to international attention through a post on social media and then reproduction in the alternative press, as the last image of this photo-essay (Figure 13).



Figure 13 Witnessing destruction, this photograph was published via a social media post and brought to wider attention by the Africa-based publication The Continent. Above it in enlarged text was, "In the grounds of the Omdurman Ahlia University, in the Sudanese city of Omdurman, there is a library filled with rare books, handwritten manuscripts and historical documents. That library no longer exists" (Jadallah & Jones 2023, p. 11). Photo: Dalia Eltahir/X (Khartoum, 2023).

In contrast is attentiveness to the ‘European’ situation of Ukraine-Russia; and the centring of repressions to freedom of speech in the USA, UK and Germany. I focus here on critique of Israel’s military actions in Gaza since October 2023. Writing of the knowing flouting of the conditions for academic freedom in his US university, which suspended and then reinstated him, Fúnez-Flores (2024, pp. 14-15) argues that these machinations make “evident the intimate relationship between material and symbolic domination, between political economic domination and epistemicidal settler colonial projects”, which reflect “the intimately entangled relationship Western universities have historically had with colonial and racial capitalist projects”. Such machinations have long included the use of bureaucracy, legal threats and online harassment to silence academic critique of Israel (Landy et al., 2020). Legal mobilisation has been a characteristic of law-based advocacy by both proponents and objectors to the global Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinian rights (Handmaker, 2020). Most recently, in the USA, lawfare has involved appropriation of discourses and weaponisation of governmental institutions established to protect against discrimination and further “civil rights” (see for instance, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the US Department of Education, 2025). At the time of writing this paper, laws were being wielded by the US state to threaten, blackmail, extort and thereby interfere in institutional autonomy. Earlier cases, of discourses exploiting sensitivities about anti-Asian discrimination, saw university administrators enacting internal threats to academic autonomy on US soil, in support of foreign interests for transnational repression (McLaughlin, 2025). Yet, despite the messiness of such dynamics, it is still the power of lawfare *against* current dynamics that are being invoked for US university administrators, because “the first level of counter-narration for administrators is the lawsuit. Lawsuits tell stories” (Newfield, 2025, n.p.). And indeed, the stories of state surveillance of dissent and assumptions about power recounted through such processes, do much to bring some of the hidden processes and thresholds of criminalisation to light.³

Prior warnings about thought, discourse and frames being reappropriated against freedom (such as in Derrida 1983, p. 17), thus once again (re)emerge. Writing about such appropriation for dis- and mis-information, conceptual clarity is offered by Jackson and Kreis (2023). They distinguish ‘counter-ing’, as resistance to dominating power of oppression and injustice, from ‘defensiveness’ in responses to the troubling of current/ prior dominance that are dysconscious of the histories and the realities of inequality.

I bring this part to a close by briefly connecting the digital university and the global university, to touch on how these have offered counter-spaces for resistance. As was the case for Makerere’s librarian (Part I), the fora of many journal publications continue to be seemingly bound by neither nation nor institution, now extended by their digitisation and virtual platforms. Similarly, new media has enabled digital activism to raise consciousness and build solidarity, such as through “hashtivism” against student disappearance in Mexico (Blanco Ramírez & Metcalfe, 2017). #BlackLivesMatter and #RhodesMustFall extended transnational critique about continuations of institutional racial oppression. #MeToo, #EndRape Culture and others, saw academics’ digital activism wielded against long-standing problematic institutional norms and procedures about gender-based violence in university communities. Online platforms have substantially impacted the ways in which academic petitions have served to apply public pressure to address scholars’ political persecution, and in defence of academic freedom and funding. The significance of such power, however, has raised concerns about their limiting the conditions for debate on contentious issues and, at its most extreme, “ideaside” (Howard-Hassmann & McLaughlin, 2022).

Constraints to agency to express academic dissent about Israel’s genocide in Gaza – within that territory and beyond - have led to unusual extra-mural acts of resistance and expressions of dissent. In one moving piece, a journal article became the site for witnessing killed Palestinian academics by a Scotland-based collaborator (Phipps, 2024); and in another, by former students in diaspora (Sulaiman & Aljamal, 2025). Online fora have also provided spaces for insider academics, within extreme conditions, to engage in public intellectualism. Below is an excerpt from a poetic blog by the physicist Qasem Waleed El-Farra (2024, n.p.):

Now that I’ve raised these questions, I have opened new gates that I can’t close.
Life is different now that Israel has killed my professors. Knowledge feels trapped behind unopenable gates.
My professors taught me the physics of life. Israel, on the other hand, is forcing me to learn the physics of death.

³ See for example *American Association of University Professors v. Rubio*, No. 1:25-cv-10685 (D.Mass), 25-1658 (1st Cir.).

Digital resistance, however, comes with dangers. The searchability of digital material - its content and its meta-data - is aiding the targeting of research on subjects deemed taboo and 'undesirable', and on those whose names appear as authors, signatories on petitions and open letters, and handles in online posts. Journals as international fora for recording dissent have seen increased attacks on articles and entire issues on Palestine (Retraction Watch, 2025). The Trump administration has also imposed measures to limit 'controversial' enquiry (such as gender and sexuality research, Graham et al, 2025; and before that critical race theory and African/a Studies), aided by legislative attacks by right-wing agents (AAUP, 2024). Such assaults emerge in many other contexts too. The nationalist state's crackdown on specific subjects in India (including on Women's Studies), has seen universities increasingly utilised as "vehicles for the propagation of state or corporate educational agendas" (Chaudhuri, 2021, p. 7).

Against this background, we may also want to re-apply Orwell's term for illegal thoughts, thoughtcrime, to the possibility that thought itself – the labour involved in intellectual production, in rigorous analysis of empirical research, in speculative enquiry into politics and society, in reading and interpreting imaginative texts – might become a crime. (ibid)

Concluding Discussion About Scholarship, Remains and Continuities

Responding to this journal's call about criminology's responses to conflict and war, this article has offered provocations about the study of the criminalisation of intellectual thought and the commemoration of dissent. It began by expressing concerns about certain problematics within such scholarship. One was that the central object of interest, in both scholarship and activism, is predominantly on overt, visible displays or acts. These predominantly include foci on dissent or physical policing, violence or repression within periods of 'peace'; and breaches or disclosure of related activity by actors/the state/third parties in contexts of conflict and war. Direct action, solidaristic networks and writing, and refuge, are important ways of responding to threats against dissenting intellectuals and academic communities facing repression, crisis and war. However, an argument put forward in this article, is that the hidden, insidious regimes of oppression of intellectual thought and repressive targeting of dissent, are as important to study. To evoke these, in this photo-essay selected imagery of public cultural infrastructure and from personal archives were arranged in dialogue with scholarly concerns about how the university responds, represents and archives academic dissent.

Specifically highlighted were the relentless of lawfare and the banalities of technological surveillance, which receive relatively less, and less consistent, scholarly attention when about the university. Looping across the time periods covered in this paper, are repeated yet morphing cycles of continuities in criminalisation enacted on Black academics. Part I began with the refuge and commemoration of Du Bois, the first African American awarded a doctorate from Harvard University, who faced significant discrimination within academia and lawfare by the US state due to his practices of dissent (Burden-Stelly, 2023). In Part II, I discussed examples where such malicious mobilisation of the law enacted on, and within, universities has extended beyond suspicions and accusations of terrorism. Threats to the established patterns of whiteness in intellectual leadership and staff composition, have continued to be met with the weaponisation of the weakly framed regulations in the academic community – academic integrity, objectivity and even the public good. Lawfare was famously practiced against Claudine Grey in 2023, the first Black president of Harvard (USA), through petty minutiae of similarity detection ('plagiarism') software (Purtill, 2024), weaponising copyright law (Smith, 2021). Weaponisation of technologies is now ubiquitous in the digital university. Additional cases established what was suspected – racism-instigated lawfare against Black academics (Robinson & Shah, 2024), as part of a concerted agenda to weaken equality interventions within US institutions. US-funded right-wing groups have used similar lawfare in attacks on the scholarship of the few Black British academics in significant professional positions within elite institutions in the UK.

A concerning pattern I raise in this paper is that such 'grey' cases in the Majority World, continue to receive less exposure within academic scholarship and activism, and indeed less 'outrage' solidarity gestures transnationally. Revisiting the context of South Africa, which featured in Part I and II, is the recent example of silence in response to accusations against, and vindication of, a sociologist who endured a public smear campaign, institutional disciplinary enquiries, and a Human Rights Commission investigation (SAHRC, 2024).⁴ The far-right, white-identifying, self-proclaimed "Civil Rights" political organisation Afriforum

⁴ The SAHRC report, vindicating Dr Mzileni of the charges laid by Afriforum, was oddly not published for public

weaponised a law criminalising ‘hate speech’. Without irony, it accused a Black academic, Pedro Mzileni, practicing the social sciences within an ‘historically white’ institution that had been established by the Apartheid regime to further the interests of the ‘white’ *Afrikaner volk*’s minority rule of South Africa. It is only through Mzileni’s digital activism that the SAHRC’s report, dismissing the accusation, was made public by Research Professional News. In that press article, the academic makes plain that he considers the case one of “persecution for pursuing the truth about our colonial and Apartheid history” (Mzileni in Biyela, 2024, n.p.).

Press coverage brings some exposure to these dirty politics within and on universities. However, the threat of reputational damage – on individuals and institutions – impacts not only how such lawfare is responded to in practice but also whether, and how, such threats and their qualitative impacts are studied. Institutional image management, scape-goating and under-study serve the intended chilling effect on dissent. Afterlives include invisible effects. Knowledge is stunted. The capacity to theorise, resist and recognise connected histories are impoverished, which in turn may maintain or even reproduce conditions of oppression.

Critical study is required to explore the continuations of legacies of political-intellectual kinship and archiving; of disciplined schools of thinking and of avoidance; and of the regulation of mechanisms of surveillance and subterfuge. A central assertion of this paper is that active vigilance, through scholarship, necessitates looking at what *remains* of conditions in the aftermath of repression, oppression, conflict and war. However imperfect and ineffectual, such research and representation of the afterlives of the criminalisation of dissent is generative of transnational historical consciousness of the acts of resistance and enactors of thought for emancipation.

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access by the Commission. This is despite the organisation having featured the issue on their website as a matter of public interest (SAHRC, 2023), when it was highlighted in a news media source (TIMESLIVE) when it first arose. This author’s email requests for clarity, about this anomaly, were acknowledged in March 2025 by Commissioners; however, over 7 months and numerous email correspondences later, unaddressed was the lack of publication of the judgment or explanation for this unusual occurrence. The Commission actively utilises online publication and talks for public pedagogy. In this case, such publication may have served to assert that there are protections from lawfare wielded to limit the academic freedom to engage on controversial issues.



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From Police Violence to (Self) Censorship: Mapping the Continuum of Criminalization of Student-Led Palestine Solidarity Activism in the Netherlands

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Abstract: This article explores the criminalization of student-led solidarity activism in the Netherlands. Self-identified as the “student intifada” this activism has taken place in university campuses around the world including in the Netherlands and has faced varying levels of criminalization. Through applying a criminalization lens to the student intifada in the Netherlands the article asks questions such as: Through what processes are political ideologies, movements, and acts of resistance, such as BDS campaigns, student-led protests, and broader forms of solidarity, constructed as criminal by political, legal, and institutional actors? What mechanisms, discourses, and tactics are mobilized to suppress these forms of activism, and why? Why is solidarity with Palestinians so often met with accusations of terrorism, antisemitism, or threats to public order and security? And what are the broader implications of this repression, not only for freedom of expression, assembly, and association, but also for the future of political solidarity and resistance itself? In answering these questions, the article employs a “criminalization continuum” lens in documenting the various forms criminalization of solidarity with Palestine has taken in the Netherlands, from arrests and police violence to surveillance, censorship, and stigmatization. Such measures not only mirror the broader global crackdown on political dissent more generally, and on Palestine solidarity activism in particular, but also reflect and reinforce the criminalization of Palestinian resistance itself. We argue that such tactics undermine the democratic principles that universities claim to uphold and perpetuate a culture of intimidation, fear and apathy that endangers critical engagement and solidarity, and call for an urgent and critical evaluation of how universities, governments, and societies at large respond to pro-Palestinian activism, arguing that the criminalization of the student intifada is a litmus test for academic freedom, democracy, and justice.

Introduction

Over the past two years, student protests have taken place across the world calling for an end to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, including an end to apartheid, colonization and the occupation of Palestinian territories. While student activism in solidarity with Palestine is anything but new (Solomon & Palmieri, 2011; Davis, 2016; Ferguson, 2017; Maira, 2018), it has been the genocide in Gaza streamed in real time on news channels and social media and with no end in sight, that has left students around the world angry (Shahid, 2024). As Abdel Fattah (2024) has written, “[e]ach day has been a horrifying chronicle of industrialized genocide, domicide, scholasticide, infanticide, femicide, medicide, and ecocide.” This anger is being directed at universities, demanding they divest from collaborations with weapons manufacturers, disclose all ties to Israeli higher education institutions, and boycott them (Wind, 2024). These demands are situated in a decades long Palestinian resistance, more particularly the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), which in 2004 called for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions, a non-violent appeal aiming to isolate Israeli institutions complicit in state violence and apartheid and to pressure Israel to comply with international law¹. This student-led Palestine solidarity movement, self-identified as the “student intifada”, has taken place in university campuses around the world. From North America to Europe, from Australia to South Africa, students have transformed their campuses into sites of resistance: erecting encampments, occupying buildings and staging protests (Luppu, 2024; Marques, 2024; Marshi, 2024; The People of Hind’s Hall, 2024).

As inspiring as the student-led Palestine solidarity movement has been, as striking has been its repression. Across the world, the movement has been met with punitive tactics of censorship, repression, stigmatization, delegitimization, surveillance and criminalization (Guatri, 2024; Hearst, 2024; CIVICUS Monitor, 2024; Tatour, 2024; Sen, 2024; Hassan & Hellyer, 2024; Fúnez-Flores, 2024a; Bayeh & Riemer, 2024; Achenbach, 2024; Deeb & Winegar, 2024; Chrisafis, 2024; Younes & Al-Taher, 2024; Casey, 2024). Universities, instead of sanctuaries of critical thought, have become sites of suppression, where administrators actively curtail expressions of solidarity with Palestine. This repression has frequently taken the form of brutal police crackdowns, arrests, and institutional retaliation. Beyond direct repression, the movement has also been censored, stigmatized, delegitimized, vilified and as argued in this article, criminalized. Various actors, including a hostile media, politicians, and Zionist lobby groups, have all worked in concert and contributed to this. The intentions and tactics of student organizers have often become objects of obsession for many commentators, endlessly dissected and distorted. Media, higher education institutions, municipalities and governments have framed student-led Palestine solidarity activism as violent, antisemitic and disorderly, frames used to justify its repression. It has been also quite striking to observe how the criminalization of student-led Palestine solidarity activism echoes, mirrors, reinforces and complements Israel’s criminalization of Palestinians and their resistance (Tatour & Tatour, 2023). The repression of the movement has also shed light on the global proliferation and export of Israeli systems of control, including surveillance technologies and policing tactics, ranging from militarized campus security and surveillance drones to protest suppression strategies like mass arrests, blacklists, and legal intimidation (Loewenstein, 2023). A particularly dangerous trend is the growing use of antisemitism accusations to silence Palestine solidarity. Under the guise of combatting antisemitism, governments and institutions have begun cutting funding to universities, conflating antisemitism with legitimate expressions of Palestine solidarity and principled political dissent².

This article focuses on the criminalization of the student-led Palestine solidarity activism in the Netherlands, which we deem to be an interesting case for multiple reasons. First of all, the country has been legally accused of complicity in the genocide in Gaza on the basis that it provides Israel with key components for F-35 fighter aircraft, used in Israeli airstrikes to bomb Palestinians (The Rights Forum, 2023). At the same time, Dutch police and military forces maintain close partnerships with Israeli arms

1 See: <https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/pacbi-call>

2 For example in March 2025, the Trump administration revoked \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia University, citing its alleged failure to protect Jewish students (See: <https://www.acenet.edu/News-Room/Pages/Funding-Cuts-Columbia-Dangerous-Precedent.aspx>). A similar pattern is emerging in Australia, where a new report by the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism recommends withholding funds from institutions deemed inadequate in addressing antisemitism, raising serious concerns about academic freedom and political expression (See: <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/landmark-antisemitism-report-demands-change-from-universities-media-20250710-p5mdve.html>)

manufacturers, including Elbit Systems, BAE Systems³ and Bagira Systems, as well as with the Israeli military and police apparatus itself (Indy Media, 2023). The Dutch government has also faced criticism for its failure to prevent citizens from joining the Israeli military during the war on Gaza (Middle East Monitor, 2024). In October 2024 The Dutch House of Representatives approved a resolution calling on the Dutch government to designate Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network as a terrorist organization and ban its activities in the country, in an attempt to delegitimize and criminalize Palestinian resistance⁴. While the suppression of Palestinian solidarity activism in the Netherlands is nothing new (see for example European Legal Support Center, 2021), in May 2025, the country attracted international attention because of the excessive police violence used to repress student-led Palestine solidarity activism (Al Jazeera, 2024; Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2024; Deutsch, 2024; AP News, 2024; Ngendakumana, 2024).

By focusing on the Netherlands as a case study, this article aims to shed light on how criminalization unfolds along a continuum through a spectrum of tactics that range from overt police violence and arrests to more insidious forms of repression, such as surveillance, stigmatization, silencing and (self) censorship. The research contributes to a growing body of work that raises concern about the increasing criminalization of social, political, and environmental dissent and activism, including of student activism and of the Palestinian solidarity movement (Power, 2012; Bessant & Grasso, 2018, 2019; González-Sánchez & Maroto-Calatayud, 2018; Watts, 2020; Vegh Weis, 2021; Pali, 2022; Selmini & Di Ronco, 2023; Visser & Pali, 2025; Malaj & Pali, 2024). Examining measures that extend beyond police violence and legal punishments and that are “noncriminal in form but punitive in nature” (Selmini & Di Ronco, 2023: 26) helps us shed light on the diverse ways in which Western liberal democracies like the Netherlands suppress activism and dissent while maintaining a democratic façade.

The article begins by clarifying what is meant by a “continuum of criminalization” lens. It then maps how this continuum operates in the context of student-led Palestine solidarity activism in the Netherlands. Next, we provide a brief reflection on the political and ideological forces that in our view drive this intensifying repression, and conclude with some reflections on what its possible implications might be.

A “Continuum of Criminalization” Lens

Criminalization, in its broadest sense, refers to the social, legal and political processes through which certain behaviors, actions, or groups are constructed as criminal, dangerous, illegal, or harmful to society and thus deemed in need of control, punishment, or sanction. The study of criminalization of activism and dissent in Western liberal democracies has largely operated within a narrow legalist framework, focusing primarily on state responses that fall within the explicit boundaries of criminal law. Among the different perspectives of understanding criminalization, we find particularly useful those that conceptualize it as a continuum. This approach captures both the formal dimension, where actions breach criminal law and may result in legal sanctions, and the informal, more diffuse mechanisms of repression. These include the regulation and punishment of behaviors that violate non-criminal rules or social norms, often carried out by a range of actors beyond the state (Selmini & Di Ronco, 2023). Scholars working within this broader framework have highlighted how dissenting voices and practices that threaten dominant political or social orders are subjected not only to overt legal control but also to subtle, and often hidden, forms of punishment, ranging from judicial prosecution to stigmatization, surveillance, institutional discipline, and public vilification (Lacey, 2009; Quilter & Hogg, 2018; McNamara et al., 2018; Vegh Weis, 2021; Selmini & Di Ronco, 2023). Adopting this expanded lens enables us to trace the less visible contours of repression, to make legible the ways in which liberal democracies, under the guise of legality and order, curtail dissent and discipline resistance beyond the courtroom or prison cell.

Applying a criminalization lens to Palestine solidarity activism invites us to address questions such as: Through what processes are political ideologies, movements, and acts of resistance, such as BDS campaigns, student-led protests, and broader forms of solidarity, constructed as criminal by political, legal, and institutional actors? What mechanisms, discourses, and tactics are mobilized to suppress these forms of activism, and why? Why is solidarity with Palestinians so often met with accusations of

³ In 2001, BAE Systems Rokar has been acquired by Elbit Systems (See: <https://elbitsystems.com/pr-new/elbit-systems-acquires-bae-systems-rokar/>)

⁴ See: <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/10/11/dutch-parliament-votes-to-designate-pflp-front-samidoun-as-a-terrorist-group/>



terrorism, antisemitism, or threats to public order and security? And what are the broader implications of this repression, not only for freedom of expression, assembly, and association, but also for the future of political solidarity and resistance itself? While these questions are vast, this article narrows its scope to examine how criminalization materializes in the specific context of student-led Palestine solidarity activism in the Netherlands. Rather than attempting a comprehensive survey, we focus on mapping distinct modes of criminalization through a set of illustrative examples, each chosen to highlight a particular tactic or logic of repression. In doing so, we also offer a brief reflection on the deeper political and ideological forces that in our view drive this criminalization.

Criminalization of Student-Led Palestine Solidarity Activism

Police Violence

In the Netherlands, police violence against university students, staff and other protesting in solidarity with Palestine has become the most visible expressions of state repression. As mentioned previously, the country drew international attention especially during the May 2024 Palestine solidarity protests which took place at the University of Amsterdam (Al Jazeera, 2024; Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2024; Deutsch, 2024; AP News, 2024; Ngendakumana, 2024). When students and staff set up a short-lived encampment on campus grounds, and in the protests that followed the aftermath of its forceful demolition, the response of the police was significantly disproportionate and brutal. Riot police, police dogs and even bulldozers were deployed to dismantle the barricades, beat and arrest the protesters (Loick & Talbot, 2025; UvA Scholars and Staff for Palestine, 2024a; VPRO, 2024). The scenes of violence were traumatic for the academic community and reminiscent of the bulldozers rolling over the rubble of Palestinian homes or of the sight of Israeli security forces beating up and brutalizing Palestinians.

The university's choice to call in the police to deal with the student protests was troubling and signaled deep failure. In opting for displays of force under the banner of "security", the administration cast aside its responsibility to safeguard academic freedom and open political expression in university campus. The crackdown failed to enable dialogue and address legitimate grievances of staff and students (Pallister-Wilkins & Pali, 2024; Loick & Talbot, 2025). It was not surprising therefore that the heavy-handed police interventions did what police interventions usually do in such contexts: amplified tensions, failed to ensure safety and even ruptured the social fabric of the university community. The violence left behind a visibly shaken, betrayed, and angry community (UvA Scholars and Staff for Palestine, 2024a, 2024b). As Dutch Scholars for Palestine (2024) wrote in their press release following the demolition of the encampment at the University of Amsterdam,

"The decision to mobilize police to clear the camp with bulldozers and criminalize students and scholars constitutes a clear breach and breaking of trust between administration and the academic community they are obliged to protect."

At the same time, this violent suppression sent a chilling message: when it comes to the issue of Palestine, universities expect obedience, rather than critical engagement or expressions of solidarity (Pallister-Wilkins & Pali, 2024). Police violence has also occurred at other universities across the Netherlands, including Utrecht University⁵, TU Delft⁶, Radboud University⁷, and the University of Groningen⁸, among others. During more recent protests taking place at Radboud University in May 2025, several students were severely injured. One student was hospitalized due to a police dog bite that caused serious flesh wounds, while another needed urgent medical care, after police injured their kneecap.⁹

5 See: <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2024/05/riot-police-end-utrecht-university-protest-erasmus-closes-doors/>

6 See: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2524627-politie-ontruimt-universiteitsgebouw-delft-acties-gaan-op-andere-manieren-door>

7 See: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2522156-mobiele-eenheid-beeindigt-demonstratie-in-gebouw-radboud-universiteit-nijmegen>

8 See: <https://legalnewsfeed.com/2024/06/19/tensions-rise-at-groningen-university-as-pro-palestine-protests-continue-after-police-clearance/>

9 See: <https://raffia-magazine.com/2025/05/12/i-dont-feel-safe-at-all-intimidation-surveillance-and-police-brutality-social-safety-or-terror-at-radboud-university/>

Arrests, Charges, and Prosecutions

The number of students protesting in solidarity with Palestine in the Netherlands arrested, charged and/or prosecuted remains uncertain. Due to time constraints, we were unable to conduct in-depth research necessary to gather comprehensive data, nonetheless because any accurate and up-to-date information would require access to Dutch law enforcement or Ministry of Justice records, a process that demands significant time, resources, and formal research protocols. As such, the figures we present here are based solely on media reports and should therefore be understood as incomplete snapshots of a much broader picture.¹⁰

In Amsterdam, arrests began as early as March 2024, with 17 people detained, but peaked during the protests in early May, with 169 people detained overnight between May 6 and 7, followed by 41 additional arrests between May 8 and 17. In Utrecht, 95 arrests took place between May 7 and 15. Other incidents included 2 arrests in Nijmegen on May 27, over 15 arrests in Delft on June 3 during a building occupation, and approximately 30 arrests in The Hague on June 4 during a protest at an academic association building.

It is important to highlight that most of those arrested have been released on the same day or night. Nevertheless formal charges have also been brought against some protesters including fines, community service and prison sentences. The charges brought have generally involved accusations of violence, threats, destruction of property, or resisting arrest. One particularly troubling case unfolded in February 2025, when a Chinese student at the UvA was sentenced to two-months in prison for alleged “violence” during a protest in Amsterdam, after clearly being framed by the Dutch media and left without adequate legal support during the criminal proceedings.¹¹

Surveillance

A disturbing pattern of surveillance targeting students and staff involved in Palestine solidarity protests has emerged across Dutch universities. The most common and reported tactic has been the deployment of undercover police wearing keffiyehs and Palestinian flags to blend in with the protestors.¹² At the same time, activists wearing visible Palestinian symbols like the keffiyeh have reported heightened scrutiny such as being photographed, filmed, followed, asked for identification, and in some cases, singled out for intimidation.¹³ For example, students at Leiden University who had been staging a teach-in were intimidated during the event, and later escorted off the campus and followed by security personnel, deep into the city (Reid & Tros, 2023). The university also faced public backlash for employing plainclothes security personnel and even financially incentivizing students to spy on their peers and give “security” reports (Hoger Onderwijs Persbureau, 2024; Vermeer, 2024; Rubio, 2024). These individuals reportedly eavesdropped, photographed students, and in some cases, even inspected personal belongings without consent, raising serious concerns about privacy and trust on campus and prompting strong criticism from The Hague City Party, Amnesty International, Privacy First and the Dutch National Student Union¹⁴ (Havinga, 2024).

In addition to eroding trust within academic communities, such invasive, unethical and illegal tactics disproportionately target students of color and Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim students who have been at the forefront of Palestinian solidarity movement. Racial profiling and extra scrutiny during protests on campuses create an environment where these students feel both racialized and politically marginalized¹⁵ (Bongers, 2024). In a broader context of nationwide tightening of protest rules and crackdown on protest

10 See: “2024 University of Amsterdam pro-Palestinian campus occupations” summary on Wikipedia, which contains a list of all the media that have reported arrests, charges and prosecution at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_University_of_Amsterdam_pro-Palestinian_campus_occupations

11 See: <https://www.at5.nl/nieuws/231152/van-vrijpraak-tot-2-maanden-cel-voor-uva-demonstranten-die-politie-bekogelden>

12 See: <https://universonline.nl/nieuws/2024/05/13/police-violence-on-campus-is-unacceptable-students-are-fighting-for-justice/>

13 See: <https://www.dagelijksestandaard.nl/binnenland/universiteit-leiden-zet-student-spionnen-in-wat-is-dit-voor-bizarre-ddr-praktijk>

14 See: <https://haagsestadspartij.nl/leiden-university-spies-on-their-own-students/>

15 See: <https://dekanttekening.nl/nieuws/universiteit-leiden-bespioneert-studenten-krenkt-vertrouwen/>

rights¹⁶, other universities across the Netherlands have also intensified surveillance. At the University of Groningen, for instance, 12 surveillance cameras were installed on the Broerplein.¹⁷

Censorship and Silencing

Dutch universities have also canceled, silenced, and censored academic discussions, events and teach-ins, while also suppressing various expressions of solidarity with Palestinians. These actions, which infringe upon the academic freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of demonstration of students and staff, have often been justified by the universities as efforts to “mitigate polarization”, engage in “constructive and respectful dialogue”, ensuring a “safe environment” or “safe space” for hearing “the other side” or “the other party” (Bot, 2023). This language has often reduced the reality of genocide to little more than a “war of emotions” (Zbeidy, 2024) and significantly blurred the line between discomfort and actual harm (Rudolph, 2024). Strikingly, these “social safety” discourses used to criminalize Palestine solidarity have originated from diversity agents and offices who have remained silent in the face of rising anti-Palestinian racism. As Lennard (2024) argues, institutionalized liberal diversity politics in Western higher education institutions have too often reinforced structures of oppression rather than dismantled them. In addition to “safety” and “security” reasons, banal reasoning has also been cited such as “logistical constraints”, and tactics such as withholding the event location, event relocation away from central campuses, and altering or removing promotional materials.

Radboud University was among the first to draw national attention for censoring discussions on Palestine. In November 2023, a planned lecture series on the Israel-Palestine conflict was reoriented to focus on academic freedom after the university imposed numerous restrictions, reportedly following complaints from students with Israeli background (Decates & Leise, 2023). The restrictions included postponing the event, restricting attendance to students of social geography, instructing lecturers not to share the event location, and even modifying posters because they featured a watermelon. The organizers criticized the university for its attack on academic freedom. As Michiel Bot, associate professor of Law and Humanities at Tilburg Law School and a speaker in the lecture series, remarked: “The university should not have to give us permission to educate people about this conflict. That is part of our academic freedom.” (ibid.) Scholars also emphasized the importance of addressing uncomfortable topics in education. Anya Topolski, associate professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy at Radboud University, and expert in racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia, emphasized the dangers of censorship:

“It is important to understand how racism works and can even lead to genocide so that we can prevent it. We cannot achieve that if we are silenced from above, especially not in the name of social safety. Social safety concerns misconduct, not whether students learn about uncomfortable topics [...] How can it be that a university censors its experts in conflict studies, racism, colonialism, politics, and history during times of conflict?”

Another event that made the news in the Netherlands was “Architecturing Destruction in Gaza, Palestine”. Scheduled at TU Delft’s Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, the event was abruptly cancelled just two working days before it was to take place (BK Scholars for Palestine, 2024a).¹⁸ The Dean cited vague concerns over “social safety” and the inability to guarantee a “constructive and respectful dialogue” but provided no specific justification for the assessment and decision. The cancellation left the organizers and participants disheartened and angry, but mostly unclear about where the unsafety concerns were coming from. “Was it our safety or the safety of others? Were we the target or the threat?” is what the organizers asked in the BNieuws Magazine, the independent periodical of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment (BK Scholars for Palestine, 2024b). The cancellation was preceded and followed by acts of vandalism, including the tearing down of posters and online harassment and intimidation against the organizers, who were visibly recognizable. The event was intended to host renowned Palestinian scholars discussing the undisputed destruction in Gaza and the role of architecture in this destruction, including one of TU Delft’s own Palestinian PhD students. The cancellation sparked outrage among students and

16 See: <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/en/current/news/directive-for-protests-at-research-universities-and-universities-of-applied-sciences>

17 See: <https://ukrant.nl/cameras-en-schijnwerpers-op-broerplein-tegen-pro-palestijnse-acties/>

18 With the weekend in between, the organizers managed to still hold the event in another location outside of the campus -in an art center called Radius CCA- something that the organizers have considered to be a “displacement”, a reflection of the way Palestinians were displaced from their land.

staff, in whose view it undermined the university's commitment to academic inquiry and solidarity. The organizers asked,

"Was our event and its group of highly qualified and scholarly Palestinian speakers a threat? What was so dangerous about a group of scholars sharing parts of their research into the history of Palestine, the history of the Gaza Strip, and the history of Palestinian refugee camps, backed up by evidence, archival documents, facts, and figures from the ground, citing the reports of various international and humanitarian organizations, such as the ICJ, which has found that what is happening in Gaza is a plausible genocide?" (BK Scholars for Palestine, 2024b).

Similar censorship has been reported at VU Amsterdam¹⁹, Maastricht University²⁰, and others. One of the most common tactics has been quietly relocating events away from central or visible campus locations. A telling example involved a lecture by Professor Neve Gordon, an Israeli Jewish scholar critical of Israeli policies. Organized by Dutch Scholars for Palestine and originally planned for Utrecht University's city center, the lecture was relocated to the Utrecht Science Park under new university guidelines that imposed strict restrictions: pre-registration, security clearance, limits on attendance, and a clear distinction between "educational" and "political" events. More specifically, the guidelines,

"[c]oncern political gatherings in the city centre, such as those about Gaza and Israel. They must now be registered in advance with the Campus & Facilities department or with Security and may only happen in places approved by Security. There is a limit of 40 to 50 participants, with mandatory pre-registration and access control on-site. Finally, a distinction is made between education-related events and political activities."²¹

The university's decision to relocate events related to Israel-Palestine from the city center to the Utrecht Science Park has sparked debate and faculty members and students have argued that the restrictions endanger academic freedom, describing the measures as direct censorship (Spadaro, 2024). According to Alessandra Spadaro, assistant professor of Public International Law at Utrecht University, what is absurd is that "the application of the new rules to Neve Gordon's lecture seems to imply that this was a "political" event, rather than an academic one. However, the topic of the lecture constitutes the object of Professor Gordon's ongoing academic research" (ibid.). While the rationale for the new rules was to "prevent further occupations", according to Spadaro (2024) intentionally linking and conflating academic events with protests is baseless and deeply problematic as it undermines academic freedom.

Self-Censorship

Beyond the overt disciplining of students and staff through institutional crackdowns, securitizing discourse, and visible surveillance, a quieter, but equally consequential, process is unfolding within the academy itself: the internal disciplining of educators (Mertens, 2025).²² Faculty members are increasingly self-censoring and retreating from public and pedagogical engagement with Palestine out of fear. This climate of fear has reshaped the everyday practices of teaching and scholarship. Expressing solidarity, referencing Palestinian history in the classroom, or sharing a critical article on social media can be seen as professionally risky or even career-ending. Some educators have withdrawn from public discourse, abandoned planned lectures or posts, or turned to anonymous writing to voice their perspectives. Academic conferences are becoming quieter on the topic; syllabi are carefully sanitized.

This internal disciplining of educators is not only shaped by top-down administrative interventions but also by the mobilizations of Zionist student groups, whose formal complaints can lead to investigations, institutional warnings, public reprimands, or educators being coerced into apologies. As a result, educators find themselves in a paradoxical position: committed to fostering critical inquiry, yet constrained by fear of institutional reprisal or reputational damage. The stakes are even higher for scholars of Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim backgrounds, whose voices are frequently scrutinized, racialized, and preemptively discredited. For many of them, self-censorship becomes a means of professional survival.

19 See: <https://advalvas.vu.nl/en/campus-culture/teach-in-about-gaza-not-allowed-on-campus/>

20 See: <https://www.observantonline.nl/english/Home/Articles/id/60922/genocide-posters-and-an-occupation-maastricht-feelings-also-run-high-over-gaza-war>

21 See: <https://dub.uu.nl/en/news/pro-palestinian-lecture-moved-due-new-uu-rules>

22 We are very grateful to Charlotte Mertens for her comments on this point, and on the article more generally.

This quite repression, the policing of thought and pedagogy, has far reaching implications and raises urgent questions: Can educators still guide students in thinking critically about empire, race, and resistance when Palestine is rendered a taboo subject? The classroom, once imagined as a space of intellectual openness, collective learning and critical inquiry, risks becoming yet another site of surveillance and silencing around the topic of Palestine (Fúnez-Flores, 2024a).

Stigmatization and Vilification

Student-led Palestine solidarity activism in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, has faced extensive stigmatization and vilification. Rather than being recognized as a legitimate form of political engagement, this activism is frequently cast under a shadow of suspicion, framed as a threat to public order or even linked to extremism. Reports of universities mentioned previously, such as Leiden University, employing undercover security personnel and student informants to monitor campus demonstrations have increased feelings of mistrust and stigmatization among Palestine solidarity activists, undermining the idea of academia as a safe space for political expression. As highlighted previously, Palestine solidarity demonstrations are often subject to stricter scrutiny and policing compared to other forms of protest. Activists have reported feeling intimidated by heavy police presence, restrictions on public gatherings, and heightened monitoring of their activities. This unequal treatment reinforces the perception that Palestine solidarity activism is viewed as a public order and even global security issue rather than a matter of conscience and legitimate exercise of free speech.

Beyond university walls, the media and political establishment in the Netherlands, have further entrenched this hostile environment. Public discourse has increasingly blurred the line between legitimate criticism of Israeli state policies and antisemitism, leading to unfounded accusations against activists.²³ For example, Prime Minister Mark Rutte wrote on social media that “The violence in Gaza is increasingly being blamed on Jewish Dutch people but this is unfair” adding that this “is a form of antisemitism that we must continue to fight loud and clear.”²⁴ While antisemitism must be addressed unequivocally, the failure to distinguish it from legitimate critiques of Israel’s actions enables a dangerous conflation that chills public debate, discredits grassroots movements, and even endangers the lives of Jewish citizens. The Dutch government’s Strategy Against Antisemitism, introduced at the end of 2024, institutionalizes this blurring further. Though framed as a protective measure for Jewish communities, including students, the initiative risks becoming a tool to suppress dissent by positioning criticism of Israeli policies as inherently suspect or hateful. Such frameworks not only delegitimize Palestine solidarity organizing but also erase the presence and contributions of Jewish students and faculty who stand in solidarity with Palestinians. Ironically, they rest on the antisemitic assumption that Jewish identity is synonymous with support for the Israeli state and Zionism, a conflation that many Jewish activists themselves have rejected.

Making Sense of the Criminalization of Student-Led Palestine Solidarity Activism

Why does a country like the Netherlands, internationally reputed to be a ‘tolerant’ country for protest and political and social dissidence, go to such lengths to suppress and criminalize student-led Palestinian solidarity activism? We think there are many reasons for this.

First, there is a historical continuity in the criminalization of Palestinian resistance, which now extends to solidarity movements globally, including in the Netherlands. In other words, Palestine solidarity activism, regardless of its geographic or institutional context, is and has been consistently censored, stigmatized, and repressed (Sen, 2024). While the risks and violence faced by solidarity movements in the Netherlands and elsewhere are not equivalent to the systemic oppression inflicted on Palestinians, these struggles must be understood as interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and spanning across geographies. In Palestine, the surveillance and criminalization of everyday life are pervasive and unrelenting, serving primarily to monitor, control, and dismantle resistance, to delegitimize anticolonial struggle, and deepen fragmentation among Palestinians themselves (Tatour & Tatour, 2023). Moreover, the global proliferation of Israeli surveillance technologies and tactics, such as checkpoints, raids, spy tech, deportations, and militarized policing, field-tested on Palestinians, shows how these systems of control are exported and replicated beyond Palestine, entrenching mechanisms of state violence worldwide, including on Dutch university campuses (Grassiani, 2017, 2022; Loewenstein, 2023).

23 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJWbOoNs480>

24 See: <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2024/05/pro-palestine-protests-are-going-too-far-says-dutch-pm/>

Second, despite this historical and geographical continuity, the hyper-criminalization of Palestine solidarity activism has without doubt dramatically escalated since October 2023 and must be understood within a broader global authoritarian turn (Tanveer, 2025; Loos, 2023; CAGE International, 2023). Across the world, and particularly in Europe, there has been a marked erosion of civic space, where dissent, activism, and solidarity are increasingly surveilled and suppressed (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024; Hearst, 2024; Guatri, 2024). Right-wing and post-fascist parties have seized on the issue to advance wider xenophobic and Islamophobic agendas. Aligning themselves with Israel not only reinforces their standing within the “West,” but also provides cover for cracking down on leftist, migrant, and Muslim communities (Fekete, 2024). This convergence of geopolitical alignment and domestic repression demonstrates how support for Israel is leveraged to actually deepen authoritarian control. Mainstream media throughout Europe more generally, and right-wing outlets in particular, have played an important role in reinforcing Israeli narratives and suppressing Palestinian ones. Rather than serving as a watchdog, much of the media has become complicit in an asymmetrical information war that portrays Israel as a victim defending itself while erasing its ongoing occupation, genocide and apartheid practices (ibid.). This was evident during the Maccabi Tel Aviv events in Amsterdam, where clashes between locals and Maccabi fans were framed as antisemitic pogroms perpetrated by Muslims and Arabs, reinforcing racist stereotypes (Ní Bhriain, 2024).

Third, the criminalization of Palestinian solidarity activism must also be situated within the post-9/11 legacy of the Global War on Terror: the legacy of the Global War on Terror. Civilizational racism, anchored in Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis, continues to shape Western discourse, constructing Arabs, Muslims, and especially Palestinians as inherently violent, irrational, and opposed to “Western values” (Sen, 2024). In this schema which reanimates orientalist binaries, Israel is framed as a besieged democracy defending civilization, while Palestinian resistance is cast as barbaric, a logic that delegitimizes not only Palestinians, but also those who stand with them (Said, 1978). Anti-Palestinian racism in particular plays a central role in the silencing and erasure of Palestinian experiences and those who support their cause. This stigmatization creates a climate of fear, pushing individuals, especially in academia, culture, and activism, to distance themselves from Palestinian issues to avoid reputational harm or institutional consequences. It reinforces the notion that proximity to the Palestinian cause is toxic, abnormal, or dangerous (Ayyash, 2023).

Fourth, and most crucially, support for Palestine is treated as a uniquely illegitimate form of dissent. Unlike other human rights causes, which can often be safely absorbed into liberal frameworks, Palestine solidarity is frequently met with disproportionate repression. This exceptionalism reveals how profoundly the Palestinian struggle threatens prevailing global structures of empire and power. To stand with Palestine is not simply to dissent, but to confront and unsettle the imperial logics that structure global politics. In this sense, Palestinian solidarity emerges not only as a moral stance, but as a radical political act that exposes the fault lines of empire itself. To understand the intensity and persistence of the criminalization of the Palestine movement in the Netherlands, it is therefore also crucial to situate it within a broader geopolitical and historical framework. The Netherlands, as a longstanding NATO member and close ally of the United States, is deeply invested in the post-WWII liberal international order, an order in which Israel has long been positioned as a strategic outpost in the Middle East. This alliance reflects shared interests in maintaining Western dominance in global political and economic structures. The repression of Palestine solidarity must therefore be seen as part of a larger effort to align with and protect geopolitical allies and their interests, even at the cost of democratic rights and civil liberties. On the one hand, repressing Palestine solidarity at home thus aligns with maintaining Western geopolitical cohesion abroad, even at the expense of civil liberties and academic freedom²⁵. On the other hand, the idea of the Netherlands as a multicultural, egalitarian, and “tolerant” society is deeply contested. As Gloria Wekker (2016) and others have argued, this self-image is sustained by a structural denial of racism and a refusal to reckon with the country’s imperial past. The Netherlands’ colonial entanglements continue to inform its contemporary racial and political hierarchies. Within this imperial and racialized framework, the criminalization of Palestinian solidarity is not an anomaly but a continuation of colonial logic, applied in a new register.

Conclusions

The criminalization of student-led Palestine solidarity activism in the Netherlands reflects both a broader global pattern of suppressing dissent and a historical continuity in the criminalization of Palestinian

²⁵ We are very grateful to Max Ajl for his comments on these points in particular and on the article more generally.



resistance. By examining the Netherlands as a case study, this article shows how the criminalization of activism operates along a continuum, ranging from overt police violence and arrests to more insidious forms of repression: from overt measures such as police violence and arrests to more insidious forms of repression including surveillance, stigmatization, and the curtailment of academic freedom through silencing and (self-)censorship. Universities have used existing measures and policies and even introduced new ones that weaponize discourses of security, social safety and antisemitism (Fúnez-Flores, 2024a, 2024b) in order to limit Palestine related events and activities on their campuses, treating Palestine activism and scholarship as a threat and viewing it through a criminalized lens.

Besides deflecting attention from the genocide unfolding in Gaza, these disciplining tactics not only undermine the democratic principles that universities claim to uphold but also perpetuate a culture of intimidation, fear and apathy that shrinks space for critical engagement and solidarity in Dutch higher education (Pallister-Wilkins & Pali, 2024). The chilling effects of universities' responses to the student-led Palestine solidarity activism are tangible for both staff and students. With time, the disciplining and criminalization strategies end up being internalized, leading, as we argued, to self-censorship and even colonization of our minds (Mertens, 2025).

This case study calls for an urgent and critical evaluation of how universities, and the societies and governments they are embedded within, respond to Palestine solidarity activism. It urges a commitment, especially on behalf of the universities, to safeguarding academic freedom, the rights to protest and assembly, and a willingness to meaningfully engage with the grievances that animate student and staff dissent. As recently highlighted by UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Gina Romero, the brutal suppression of pro-Palestine campus protest movements poses a "profound threat to democratic systems and institutions," and universities must act immediately to safeguard the right to peaceful protest (Romero, 2024: 8). Ultimately, just as Palestine has been defined to be the litmus test for the world, for international law and human rights (Sultany, 2022; Albanese, 2024; Sirleaf, 2024), the criminalization of student-led Palestine solidarity activism is also a litmus test for academic freedom, democracy, and justice.

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Constructing the Vulnerable and Deserving Refugee: A Discourse Analysis of News Media Coverage of Afghan Refugees in Canada

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Keywords: Afghan refugee crisis, vulnerability, media discourse, representation, Canada

Abstract: This paper studies how refugee crises are portrayed in the Canadian mainstream media by examining the news representation of Afghan refugees following the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021. In response to the crisis in Afghanistan, the international community, especially member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), launched immigration pathways for Afghans facing the threat of prosecution and violence. Canada, a NATO member that spent over 18 billion dollars fighting in Afghanistan against the Taliban, was one of the first countries to launch special immigration programs aimed at admitting 40,000 vulnerable Afghans at risk of violence and prosecution by the Taliban. This paper bases its analysis on a corpus of 345 English-language articles published by Canadian newspapers between August 2021 and September 2024. The study findings reveal that the media coverage of Afghan refugees in Canada is centered around the figure of deserving refugees, which is constructed in relation to individuals' affiliation with the Government of Canada and their gendered vulnerabilities. In doing so, the news media shifts seeking asylum from a legal right to a matter of deservingness, where refugees need to demonstrate how they are deserving of resettlement in Canada.

Introduction

The four-decade-long conflict and instability in Afghanistan made migration a major component of Afghan society and culture. However, the return of the Taliban in 2021 triggered a significant wave of migration, as many Afghans feared for their lives due to their gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and profession (Commissioner General for Refugees, 2023). Following the start of the United States (US) withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, Canada, along with other member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) involved in the war against terrorism, announced special immigration programs aimed at resettling vulnerable Afghans at risk of persecution and violence, including journalists, human rights defenders, women's rights activists, and former government officials. On August 13, 2021, just days before Kabul fell to the Taliban, the Government of Canada announced a plan to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Afghans, which was later doubled to 40,000. Canada's resettlement program included a special immigration program for individuals who contributed to Canada's efforts in Afghanistan, as well as humanitarian pathways for vulnerable groups such as women leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, persecuted minorities, and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals (IRCC, 2023). Additionally, in 2022, Canada introduced an additional temporary program to resettle 3,000 Afghan refugees without UNHCR status, further demonstrating its commitment to supporting those fleeing Taliban rule (IRCC, 2022).

This paper examines the representation of Afghan refugees in mainstream Canadian newspapers following the Taliban's takeover in 2021. Studies suggest that media reporting and commentary not only provide information about migrants and immigration but also construct people's understanding of what these events mean (Medianu et al., 2015; Mustafa et al., 2021; Van Dijk, 2012, p. 52; Wallace, 2018). It is the media that decides "what news merits coverage, and through its manner of portraying events, it can also shape the acceptable paths of thought concerning a given topic" (Caviedes, 2015, p. 900). Canada was one of the first countries to launch special immigration programs for vulnerable Afghans, welcoming the largest number of Afghan refugees in the world after the United States. The crisis in Afghanistan and Canada's special immigration measures to rescue vulnerable Afghans received substantial coverage in the Canadian media, which reported not only on the situation in Afghanistan but also on public reactions to Canada's response. As such, Canada constitutes a crucial site for exploring how the media represents racialized refugees from conflict-affected countries like Afghanistan. While a number of scholars have studied the media representation of refugees from racialized Muslim countries in the Canadian context (Greenberg & Hier, 2001; Medianu et al., 2015; Mustafa et al., 2021; Omidian Sijani, 2023; Paquet & Lawlor, 2022; Reitmanova et al., 2015; Tyyskä et al., 2018; Wallace, 2018), this study aims to understand how vulnerability and deservingness logic play out and intersect in mainstream media representation of Afghan refugees, particularly after the launch of Canada's resettlement program for Afghans.

To do so, the study examines a corpus of 345 English-language articles published by Canadian newspapers from August 2021 to September 2024 using sociological analyses of discourse. Drawing on Stuart Hall's notions of "regimes of representation" (1997) and "othering, the study argues that press coverage of Afghan refugees shifts protection and seeking asylum from a legal right to a matter of deservingness. In doing so, the media establish a particular "regime of representation", where refugee deservingness is assessed based on individuals' affiliation with Canada's military mission in Afghanistan during the War on Terror and their gendered vulnerability.

Literature Review

The media discourse surrounding refugees and asylum seekers is complex and multifaceted; however, many researchers point to categorization topoi that reduce refugees to "positive" or "negative" labels (Berry et al., 2016; Eberl et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2021; Seo & Kavakli, 2022). KhosraviNik (2010) argues that the categorization of refugees as "positive" or "negative" is problematic because it perpetuates the "us" versus "them" divide, even when the representations themselves are not inherently negative. Many studies on representation of refugees highlight the negative connotations associated with the terms "refugee" and "immigrant," which often appear in discussions framed around issues such as "immigrants and burden," "immigrants and crime," and "immigrants and illegality" (Mustafa et al., 2021). The media not only portray refugees as "unchecked" and "illegal" but has also depict them as "security threats," "criminals," and even terrorists, framing their presence as a potential danger to national safety and social order (Berry et al., 2016; Hameleers, 2019). Studies show that migrants are frequently constructed as

an economic burden and disproportionate consumers of social benefits, posing a threat to the economic stability and sustainability of the host country (Berry et al., 2016; Caviedes, 2015; Davis, 2021). They are also often framed as a challenge associated with race and ethnicity, which is perceived to threaten the cultural and social values of host countries. Such portrayals highlight concerns that the influx of diverse immigrant populations may disrupt established social norms and cultural cohesion (Alba et al., 2005; KhosraviNik, 2010; Semyonov et al., 2004).

Another common frame in media coverage is the victimization narrative, which emphasizes the suffering and hardships faced by immigrants and refugees. The depiction of victimhood is used to create a “sympathetic atmosphere” that encourages public empathy and support for refugees, fostering compassion and mobilizing public opinion in favor of humanitarian aid (Bahtić & Gebauer, 2023). In this context, refugees are depicted as victims of war and conflict, portrayed as “vulnerable bodies-in-pain” lacking basic resources for survival (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Emphasis on victimhood in media narratives about refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants can induce greater empathy among audiences (Mustafa et al., 2021; Seo & Kavakli, 2022). This includes reporting centered on the suffering of refugees, such as escaping war, making the journey to the destination country, and facing challenges upon arrival, including discrimination, lack of resources, and struggles for legal status. Such stories play a crucial role in shaping public opinion about migrants and can even inspire advocacy campaigns and solidarity groups dedicated to supporting their rights and needs (Berry et al., 2016). While it is difficult to separate the impact of media on public beliefs and attitudes from other factors such as education, political ideological orientation, and personal experiences research suggest that the content and perspective of individual stories, the frequency with which particular issues are covered, and the themes that are associated with those issues play a significant role in shaping the public discourse (Berry et al., 2016; Caviedes, 2015). Consequently, in response to evolving public attitudes, policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and charitable groups will encounter increasing pressure to adapt their strategies to align with societal expectations and concerns (Ahrens, 2024).

However, representations that solely focus on refugees’ victimhood often strip refugees of their individual identities, reducing them to mere subjects of sympathy because of their affiliation. Canada’s mission to fight terrorism in Afghanistan rather than recognizing them as complex individuals with agency, resilience, and diverse experiences. In other words, while these portrayals may seem positive, depicting refugees as helpless victims in need of saving ultimately construct refugees as the “other”. Majid KhosraviNik suggests that two key linguistic strategies are employed to represent refugees’ victimhood, which reduce them to the status of the “other”: passivization and collectivization. Through passivization, refugees are portrayed as passive, vulnerable bodies in pain who lack basic resources, emphasizing their helplessness and suffering while overlooking their agency as political beings. Similarly, the portrayal of refugees often depicts them as an anonymous mass of unfortunate individuals, where their unique experiences and identities are overshadowed by a singular narrative of suffering due to the war.

The victimization narrative not only emphasizes the suffering of refugees but also plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of who is deemed ‘deserving’ of empathy, support, and resources. Literature suggests that, in the specific context of refugees, deservingness is often grounded in either human rights or humanitarian rationales. Under human rights rationales, individuals who meet the criteria outlined for international protection, such as those defined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, are deemed “worthy” of protection (Welfens, 2023). In contrast, the humanitarian rationale relies on a “politics of compassion,” where deservingness is determined based on individuals’ suffering and vulnerabilities (Fassin, 2012, p. 13). It is through the “politics of compassion” that we can understand humanitarian practices, as well as the media portrayal of children in refugee camps or asylum-seekers in the Mediterranean, as both aim to activate moral sentiments and generate public support by emphasizing vulnerability and suffering (see Lee, 2015). The media images of suffering, like those of the three-year old Syrian Alan Kurdi’s body on Turkish beach, engage in emotional and political work, producing not only sympathy and empathy but also fear and othering (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016).

Studies show that in the case of migrants, deservingness rationale is also connected to integration and security. For refugees to be perceived as deserving of protection, they must not only provide evidence that they do not pose a security, economic, or cultural threat to the host country but also demonstrate their potential to integrate well (Huysmans, 2000). Natalie Welfens (2023) suggests that security and integration are often framed as two sides of the same coin. To avoid being perceived as a threat to the receiving

state, migrants are expected to be “law-abiding, economically self-sufficient, and culturally adaptable” (p. 5). However, the evaluation of deservingness in contemporary refugee governance is far more complex and multidimensional, as refugees are expected to fulfill multiple, and at times conflicting, requirements to be deemed deserving (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascreñas, 2014; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; see also Tomczak-Boczko et al., 2023). The complex and multi-dimensional nature of deservingness is evident in the media representations of refugees. For example, Maria Kyriakidou (2021) study on deservingness of hospitality is constructed by the media narratives in the context of Syrian refugees in Greece highlights contrasting requirements that determine refugee’s deservingness. Syrian refugees were constructed as deserving not only because they were vulnerable and suffering due to a war beyond their control but also because they were perceived as active agents and individuals with stable jobs and financial resources. In the context of racialized Muslim refugees, these contrasting requirements are often translated into perceptions that young, single refugees are neither vulnerable nor “promising,” while women, children, and families—including men attempting to reunite with their loved ones—are viewed as more deserving (Kyriakidou, 2021; see also Holzberg et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2021) and what Welfens (2023) describes as “assimilable” to the host society.

Overall, compared to the past, Canadian media have become more inclusive in their representation of migrants and refugees, improving both the quantity and quality of coverage. Yet, negative representations of minority groups persist, as “too many media messages remain stuck in the past” due to institutional biases, organizational priorities, and the influence of political orientations (Fleras, 2011, p. VIII). As such, similar to many Western countries, Canadian media often rely on problematized narratives, such as national security, unemployment, scarcity of resources, and fraud and illegality, to describe immigration and integration into the society (Lawlor, 2015). These problematized narratives reflect not only biased representations but also specific framing¹ strategies that shape public perception of migration as a challenge or threat. Examining the content of media framing across Canada, Lawlor’s findings suggest that while framing related to illegality and security peaked between the late 1990s and early 2000s, immigrants have tended to be positively framed regarding social services, the economy and labor market, and diversity from 2004 onward. In Canada, public opinion toward immigration has generally been positive since the 1980s. Data from a 2022 survey by the Environics Institute shows that more than eight in ten people strongly (50%) and somewhat (35%) agreed that immigration is beneficial to the country’s economy, a view acknowledged even by the majority of those who believed immigration levels are too high (Confederation of Tomorrow, 2022). However, data from a 2024 survey indicates a significant shift in Canadians’ perceptions of immigration, with 58% believing that the country accepts too many immigrants and 57% feeling that many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values (Confederation of Tomorrow, 2024).

Although there is a growing body of literature on the representation of immigration in Canadian news media, significant gaps remain in research specifically addressing the representation of Afghan refugees following the Taliban’s takeover. There are important reasons to examine the media coverage of Afghan refugees. For one, Canada was one of the first countries to launch special immigration programs for vulnerable Afghans, welcoming the largest number of Afghan refugees in the world after the United States. The country allocated over \$80 million to fund its special immigration programs for Afghans in the 2022-2023 financial year (Dawi, 2023). Most importantly, Canada is one of the key actors involved in the 20-year-long war in Afghanistan, which has produced one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world. This involvement is particularly significant given that Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan from December 2001 to March 2014 is one of the country’s largest military deployments since the Second World War (Dhaliwal, 2022).

Approach to Enquiry

This research is informed by Stuart Hall’s (1997) sociological analysis of discourse, which understands language not only as a means for representing the social world but also as a means that defines and produces knowledge. In other words, discourse analysis is concerned with how knowledge is produced through language. For Hall, discourse is not purely a linguistic concept; rather, it “governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about... it also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 1997, p. 44). In this sense, all practices have

¹ Framing is the way news stories are constructed to encourage a specific interpretation or reaction from the audience. For more information on media framing, see D’Angelo (2017).

discursive aspects because all social practices entail meaning, and it is this meaning that shapes and influences the attitudes, understandings, and beliefs of individuals as well as entire populations.

The analysis of news discourse and the representation of refugees draws on Stuart Hall's concepts of "regime of representation" and "othering" (1997). Hall suggests that "othering" is produced through representational practices in popular culture, which are repeated, with variations, across texts or sites of representation. The representation of difference and "otherness" is created by reducing racialized individuals to a "few essentials" or simplified characteristics that are "fixed in nature" (p. 257). Racialized discourses define racialized bodies as "different" and are structured by a set of opposing binaries such as "good" and "bad," "civilized" and "primitive," and "familiar" and "exotic" (p. 229). This representation of "difference" between "white" and "black" serves as a strategy to divide the normal and acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable, symbolically fixing boundaries and excluding everything that does not fit (p. 258).

Data Collection and Analysis

To understand the media representation of Afghan refugees, this study focuses on online news media because they provide stable and electronically searchable information. To develop the corpus of Canadian news coverage of the Afghan refugee crisis, I conducted a search of the Factiva database using the following search terms: "Afghan refugees or Afghanistan evacuation or Canada's special immigration programs for Afghans or Afghan refugee crisis or Canada's response to Afghan refugees". The search was further filtered to include articles specific to the Canadian region and covered the time period between August 2021 and September 2024. The Factiva database is a reliable digital archive of news from around the world, consisting of a wide range of sources, including newspapers, magazines, trade publications, and more. I identified 518 newspaper articles related to the Afghan refugee crisis from August 2021 to September 2024. I excluded articles that centered on the resettlement of Afghan refugees in other countries, those detailing the responses of other countries to the Afghan refugee crisis, articles that only mentioned Afghan refugees in passing, and duplicate articles. This resulted in a final total of 345 articles for analysis. The final corpus consists of articles and editorials from the news, politics, world, and opinion sections of national and local newspapers across Canada. Opinion pieces were included because they are a valuable means through which elites and experts advance their ideas, draw attention to specific issues, and influence policy agendas.

To understand how language and journalistic practices represented Afghan refugees, a combination of coding strategies was employed. The coding process involved at least three cycles. As part of the initial process, I constructed a table with key information about the articles. This table included details such as the headline, topic, date of publication, and the name of the newspaper. In the second cycle, codes were assigned to each article (e.g., government officials, Afghan refugees, advocacy groups, etc.) to capture an overall sense and identify potential categories within the data (Miles et al., 2019). In the third cycle, I focused on uncovering the meanings, assumptions, and ideologies that shaped the portrayal of Afghan refugees in relation to Canada's special immigration measures for Afghans. This involved analyzing the individuals and groups featured in each story and exploring how the articles represented them while conveying messages about the Afghan refugee crisis. The analysis specifically examined the forms of writing used to describe refugees, the patterns and sources of quotations, and the personal storytelling elements employed in news articles to represent the Afghan refugee crisis and Canada's response to the situation.

The following discussion outlines the discursive strategies employed by the media in representing Afghan refugees. My findings indicate that the majority of articles, with 192 published in 2021 and 107 in 2022, were written within the first two years of Canada's special immigration measures for Afghans. Most of this coverage appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, and *Canadian Press* (see Table 1 for a detailed breakdown the top 10 media outlets with the highest number of articles on the issue, Categorized by Bias, Region, and number of Articles). The first theme highlights how media prioritized Afghan interpreters and those worked for the CAF as "allies," creating a hierarchy of deservingness that marginalized other vulnerable groups. The second theme discusses the gendered victimhood that constructed Afghan women as deserving, portraying them as both highly vulnerable under the Taliban and resilient in rebuilding their lives in Canada.

Table 1
Media Outlets by Bias, Region, and Number of Articles

Media Outlet	Political Orientation	Region	Number of Articles
Globe and Mail	Right-Center	National	78
Toronto Star	Center-Left	National	56
Canadian Press	Least Biased	National	36
Ottawa Citizen	Right-Center	Ontario	23
National Post	Right-Center	National	22
Calgary Herald	Right-Center	Alberta	18
Calgary Sun	Right-Center	Alberta	15
The Hamilton Spectator	Left-Center	Ontario	15
Vancouver Sun	Right-Center	British Columbia	13
Waterloo Region Record	Left-Center	Ontario	13

Protect Vulnerable Groups but “Our Allies” First

The first significant finding is the construction of Afghans who worked on the Government of Canada’s projects in Afghanistan, especially those who worked with the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), as more worthy of protection. As discussed previously, Canada’s special immigration programs included pathways not only for interpreters and those with ties to Canada but also for vulnerable groups such as women leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, persecuted religious minorities, and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals (IRCC, 2021). According to the Amnesty International report, these groups, along with ethnic minorities like Hazaras and Uzbeks, religious minorities such as Sikhs and Hindus, and former government officials and military personnel, are at risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, and enforced disappearance under the Taliban regime (Human Rights in Afghanistan, 2023). However, in the news coverage of Afghan refugees following the Taliban’s takeover, only Afghan interpreters and those who worked with the CAF are a central focus and are discussed in relation to Canada’s special immigration programs for Afghans.

The majority of newspaper articles (n=180) on Afghan refugees highlighted Afghan interpreters and those who worked with the CAF as guards and drivers, detailing their accounts of being targeted by the Taliban, their journeys of escaping Afghanistan, and their experiences filing and waiting for the approval of their immigration applications. The news reports consistently referred to Afghans who served the CAF as “allies,” “friends,” and “individuals with enduring ties to Canada,” underscoring their significant contributions and the urgency of their situation. For example, consider the following sequence of news headlines about Afghans who worked with the CAF: “Too many friends still left behind in Afghanistan” (“Too Many Friends”, 2021); “We are failing our brave Afghan allies” (Mackay, 2022); “How Ottawa failed Afghans who risked their lives as our allies” (Blackwell, 2021); “A moral failure as Canada leaves Afghan allies stranded” (“A Moral Failure”, 2021); “Ex-soldier helped get Afghan allies to Canada” (Laucius, 2021); “Canada abandoned its Afghan allies” (Ngo, 2021); “Former Afghan allies’ lives on the line, veterans say” (“Former Afghan Allies”, 2021); “Military sources have said that Canadians and Afghan allies were left behind in chaotic final days of evacuation” (Chase & Fife, 2024).

Canada’s involvement during the 20 years of the US war in Afghanistan was not limited to its military mission as part of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In addition to humanitarian assistance, Canada has provided \$3.8 billion in international assistance to Afghanistan to support reconstruction and development efforts (Dhaliwal, 2022). These initiatives were carried out in collaboration with thousands of local staff who played critical roles in implementing Canada’s mission in Afghanistan. However, in the majority of news stories about Afghan refugees, only those who helped Canada’s military mission and the Canadian embassy are represented as “allies” in need of protection. Overall, 72% of the articles that focused on the evacuation of Afghan individuals associated with Canadian government efforts in Afghanistan primarily discuss Afghans who worked with the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Embassy. Almost a third (32%) of all the articles refer only to interpreters as Canadian allies or people with significant or enduring ties to Canada. Notably, the voices of individuals involved in Canadian-funded initiatives, such as peace and development programs, and other vulnerable groups with no direct ties

to Canada are largely neglected in the coverage of the Afghan refugee crisis, with only 33 news reports featuring interviews and stories from those who worked with Canada's humanitarian and development initiatives in Afghanistan. This selective representation in media coverage points to an emphasis on affiliation-based obligations, portraying Canada's responsibility toward Afghan refugees as stemming from their support to the Canadian military mission rather than its formal commitments under the Refugee Convention.

Gendered Victimhood: "Canada Needs to Welcome Afghan Women"

The discourse of Afghan refugees in relation to Canada's special immigration programs for Afghans is also closely bound up with gendered notions of victimhood and deservingness. Historically, the media representation of Afghan women has sparked some of the most volatile debates around Western intervention to defend women's rights and gender equality in Afghanistan. In the corpus of news stories about Afghan refugees, the portrayal of Afghan women focuses on two themes: their victimhood and vulnerability due to their gender in Afghanistan, and Afghan refugee women finding freedom and empowerment following their resettlement in Canada. For example, consider the following statements in news articles about Afghan refugees: "Women and girls will once again be subjected to a brutal Taliban regime" (Nardi, 2021); "There is no rule of law, no respect for rights; it's a travesty" (Nardi, 2021); "The Taliban continue to impose restrictions on women and girls, including their right to work and access to education" (Carbert, 2021); "The fallout in Afghanistan is already leading to a rise in civilian deaths, particularly among women" (Do, 2021); and "The full story of the woman's bewildering crime is emerging as many Afghans once again struggle to exit the country, this time fearing a brutal Taliban regime" (Blackwell, 2022).

Two frequently reported cases in news stories about Afghan refugees involve former female parliament members and a group of Afghan female judges and prosecutors who are facing significant delays in receiving their Canadian visas while waiting in a third country. In articles such as "Canada Is Turning Its Back on Afghan Women Facing Death and Despair" (Berz, 2024) and "Advocates Plead for Afghan Women's Rights Activist to Be Let into Canada" (Laucius, 2022), a range of newspapers cover the fate of Afghan women under the Taliban regime, especially those who worked as advocates, human rights defenders, and musicians. Others highlight the murder of a former female lawmaker in Afghanistan to underscore the "dangerous climate created by the Taliban's anti-women decrees that have put female advocates like Nabizada in the crosshairs of extremists" ("The Urgent Need," 2023). The plight of Afghan women under the Taliban is described as "tragic beyond belief" (Snyder, 2021), "most at risk" (Karadeglija, 2023; Salem, 2021), and "traumatic and deadly" (Keung, 2022).

A distinguishing feature of news coverage of Afghan refugees, particularly women, is the emphasis on vivid and dramatic details of their experiences in Afghanistan, as well as their fears and concerns. In an article titled "After the Taliban," Katharine Berz and Sharif Sharaf tell the story of an Afghan woman who fled to Pakistan following the Taliban's takeover:

Karima (not her real name), 41, who arrived in Canada from Afghanistan in early September, is not afraid to ask for help but has not yet been able to see a mental-health professional. She raised her family in a war zone and worried constantly about her six children when they were out of their house in Afghanistan. Medication that she received a few years ago in Pakistan for depression and anxiety has now run out. Safe in Canada, Karima has recurring memories of the blood-soaked hand of a small girl killed in an explosion and her brother-in-law's dead body (Berz & Sharaf, 2022).

Another article recounts a Canadian journalist's experience meeting a local female doctor in Afghanistan, stating: "She stuffed naan bread and sweet cakes into a journalist's pocket with the parting words, 'Ask the women in your country to be our voice'" She is begging Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to lead them to safety (Armstrong & Sher, 2021).

The findings of this study show that by constructing Afghan women as highly vulnerable and deserving of protection, the news media also tend to romanticize their lives after resettlement in Canada. In the majority of news reports concerning Afghan refugees' post-migration experiences, women are depicted as pursuing education and employment while successfully integrating into their new society. For example,

in an article, Gordon McIntyre of *Vancouver Sun* tells the story of an Afghan woman who is perusing her education after arriving to Canada with the help of a local advocacy group in Vancouver. The story underscores the resilience of Afghan refugee women, highlighting how they not only rebuild their own lives in exile but also become powerful advocates for the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan (2024). In another article from *Ottawa Citizen*, Christina Spencer writes about the aspirations of three Afghan women who are determined to pursue education and build careers, opportunities that were taken away from them under the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan (2023).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal how media portrayals of Afghan refugees following the Taliban's takeover in 2021 constructed selective and hierarchical notions of deservingness. The analysis identifies two key discursive strategies that shaped these portrayals: emotional and moral connections to those who served Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, and gendered notions of victimhood. While these strategies led to more sympathetic reporting and public support for resettlement efforts, they simultaneously reinforced selective and exclusionary notions of vulnerability and deservingness that were often tied to Canada's involvement in the War on Terror. A central theme in the media representation was the emphasis on Afghans affiliated with the CAF, such as interpreters and support staff. These individuals were consistently referred to as "our allies" and "friends," employing semantic strategies that created a categorical division among vulnerable Afghan groups.

While Canada's special immigration programs included a broad range of at-risk populations (IRCC, 2021), media narratives constructed individuals with ties to Canada as more deserving of protection and resettlement. The sense of compassion and solidarity with this particular group of Afghans was created by what Piotr Cap calls "proximization" of their experiences and ideologies with Canada. Cap (2018) suggests that "proximization is a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant entities, events, and states of affairs (including 'distant' i.e. adversarial ideologies) – a symbolic them – as increasingly and negatively consequential to the speaker and her addressee (us)" (p. 289). In other words, to evoke closeness to an external threat or event, media discourse removes the distance between the audience and the event, making it relevant and immediate. This is achieved through spatial proximization (the construal of external "them" entities physically encroaching upon "us" entities), temporal proximization (the construal of the threat as imminent and requiring an immediate response), and axiological proximization (the framing of the threat as a challenge to the values and identity of "us" entities) (Cap, 2018). In the case of Afghan refugees after the return of the Taliban, the interpreters and the staff in Afghanistan are positioned closer to Canada because their contributions to the Canadian military mission during the War on Terror reflect Canadian values and ideologies. Thus, the targeting and persecution of these individuals by the Taliban symbolize a threat to Canada's legacy and the significance of its efforts in Afghanistan.

What is crucial to note here is that by portraying interpreters and the CAF affiliates as more deserving, media discourse relied on a binary of "self" and "other," positioning those affiliated with Canada's military mission as extensions of the "self" and, therefore, more deserving of protection. Stuart Hall refers to this binary as a "splitting strategy," which functions to divide the acceptable and normative from the unacceptable and deviant, systematically excluding those who fail to conform (1997, p. 258). In the case of media representation of Afghan refugees, the "splitting strategy" led to a hierarchization of deservingness among different groups, determined by their perceived proximity to Canada and Canadian values. This process is evident in media coverage and at times overtly conveyed. For example, a *Toronto Star* article quotes a former CAF combat interpreter urging the Canadian government to "prioritize the displaced CAF combat interpreters' evacuation from Kabul instead of other civilians" (Keung, 2021). Similarly, Wendy Long, founder of Afghan Canadian Interpreters, is quoted in the *National Post*: "We do have a responsibility for those people, more so than anyone else, because of their connection to Canada... they protected our men and women, and we are responsible for protecting them" (Blackwell, 2021).

In addition to this hierarchical framing based on ties to Canada, media portrayals of Afghan women introduced a gendered layer to the constructions of vulnerability and deservingness. As illustrated in the findings section, the media discourse surrounding Afghan women emphasizes their vulnerability and victimhood while simultaneously romanticizing their post-resettlement experiences. The frequent focus on vivid and dramatic details of Afghan women's suffering under the Taliban, coupled with their

desperate cries for help from the West, may evoke feelings of solidarity and compassion, positioning them as a deserving group. However, as Didier Fassin (2012) highlights in his work on humanitarianism, such narratives often reinforce asymmetrical power relations by constructing vulnerable individuals as victims in need of help from those in positions of power (p. 3-4). It is for this reason that when compassion is exercised in the public space it is “always directed from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker, the more fragile, the more vulnerable—those who can generally be constituted as victims of an overwhelming fate” (p. 4).

In the case of the media portrayal of Afghan women, this asymmetry is political rather than psychological. Historically, Afghan women have been framed as deserving of Western protection and rescue from their communities and their so-called “backward” and patriarchal culture (Ayotte & Husain, 2005). The trope of “saving” Afghan women has been a recurring theme in foreign interventions in Afghanistan, including the War on Terror and the two-decade-long international efforts to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment (Razack et al., 2010). In fact, as Sara Farris notes, the invasion of Afghanistan was widely endorsed by the international public as both a mission to liberate Afghan women from the Taliban’s oppressive regime and as an act of defense and retaliation against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks (2017). During that period, Western media representations heavily focused on the image of women under the burqa, using it as a symbol to reinforce the narrative of victimhood and the West’s moral obligation to intervene (Macdonald, 2006). The desire to save Afghan women is rooted in the White Imperial logic that perceives Brown women as vulnerable and threatened by their own people and culture (Razack et al., 2010; Thobani, 2010). Over two decades later, the figure of Afghan women in Canadian media discourse remains vulnerable and in suffering, whose protection is portrayed as the moral responsibility of Canada. In doing so, the media discourse not only portrays Afghan women as silenced and waiting for rescue but also highlights Canada’s generosity and moral superiority while ignoring its 14-year military involvement in the US-led war in Afghanistan, which contributed to the very conditions of marginalization and oppression that Canada claims to be addressing (see Fluri, 2009; Razack et al., 2010; Thobani, 2019).

As outlined in the findings, media depictions of Afghan women extend beyond the simplistic portrayal of vulnerable, racialized Muslim women in need of protection. Afghan women are represented not only as vulnerable and requiring safeguarding but also as highly motivated individuals with aspirations to pursue higher education, contribute to society, and advocate for the rights of women left behind in Afghanistan. A *Canadian Press* article refers to them as an “aspiring community” (Woolf, 2021), while another article from the *Globe and Mail* notes that they are individuals who demonstrate resilience and determination, whether by protesting against the Taliban’s oppressive regime in Afghanistan or by pursuing education and working toward their dreams in Canada (Fung, 2024). This contrasting notion of deservingness creates “complex boundaries of inclusion and exclusion” (Welfens, 2023) that refugees must navigate, where their status as victims can both facilitate access to protection and simultaneously limit their agency and opportunities for self-determination. Additionally, this narrative of Afghan women as highly motivated and aspiring individuals can also lead to the exclusion of those refugees or asylum seekers who are unable or unwilling to meet this idealized standard (see Clark et al., 2024).

It is without doubt that Afghan women have been the primary victims of patriarchal values, local wars, the Taliban’s fundamentalist ideologies, and systemic gender inequality enforced by various regimes throughout the history. However, portrayals that focus exclusively on women’s vulnerability because of their gender oversimplify their experiences and obscure the broader context, including the 20-year foreign intervention under the guise of the War on Terror that have shaped their current realities. This discursive construction of care and compassion also does little to improve the policies and practices concerning Afghan refugee women.

Conclusion

This paper builds on studies of mainstream news representation of refugees and asylum seekers by providing a discourse analysis of how they are portrayed in the media. It sheds light on how media portrayals of Afghans as deserving refugees are shaped by Canada’s role in the US-led war in Afghanistan, where refugee status is framed not strictly through the Refugee Convention, but through Canada’s perceived moral obligation resulting from its involvement in the war. The study’s central argument is that press coverage of Afghan refugees’ shifts seeking asylum from a legal right to a matter of deservingness, where refugees need to demonstrate how they are deserving of resettlement in Canada. In doing so, the

media establish a specific regime of representation, where refugee deservingness is assessed based on individuals' affiliation with Canada and their gendered vulnerability. Within this context, deservingness functions as a "mode of bordering", which is reinstated through and within media discourse (Holzberg et al., 2018).

The study findings reveal that the media coverage of Afghan refugees in Canada is centered around the figure of deserving refugee, which is constructed in debates around individuals' affiliation with Canada's military mission in Afghanistan and their gender. While the media discourse presents the arrival of Afghan refugees to Canada as a positive phenomenon, it reinforces a dehumanizing logic of deservingness that requires the racialized 'other' to conform to a white imperial logic of vulnerability in order to be deemed worthy of protection. In doing so, the media constructs the binary of "self" and the "other" in which the "self" emerges as a savior and a nation with moral responsibility to protect vulnerable refugees. This kind of representation not only shows Afghan refugees as mere subjects in need of protection from the West but also overlooks the many factors that have contributed to the Afghanistan current situation, including the US military intervention, where Canada was involved for over ten years.

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Ordinary Crimes and Justice in the Portuguese Colonial War: Empirical Data for Criminological Reflection

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Abstract: Criminology dedicated to analysing crimes in war contexts has predominantly focused on serious violations under International Law, such as genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. Yet, ordinary crimes committed during wartime, particularly in colonial conflicts, have received comparatively less attention. An ongoing research project on the Colonial Wars fought by Portugal in Angola, Guinea, and Mozambique between 1961 and 1974 offers an opportunity to examine these crimes. The research aims to interpret how these crimes, committed by Portuguese Armed Forces combatants, were handled by the justice system of the time. While some international and war crimes, like the Wiriyamu Massacre, were reported during the 13-year wars, documentary analysis of criminal proceedings in the Portuguese Military Historical Archive reveals thousands of other crimes. These include military and common crimes perpetrated by Portuguese combatants against both military personnel and civilians, which were tried in the Territorial Military Courts of Angola, Guinea, and Mozambique throughout the conflicts. Analysing these cases presents challenges to criminology. Firstly, the nature of the war was not conventional, but a colonial war defined by the Portuguese State as a subversive war. Secondly, the research is framed within a complex socio-political context: the *Estado Novo* dictatorship and a distinctly racialised hierarchical order, set against an international backdrop that promoted the right to self-determination. Within this complex setting, this article presents data on ordinary crimes committed during a colonial/subversive war and reports on how they were tried and punished, hoping to foster reflection on largely overlooked criminological issues.

Introduction

Based on ongoing research on the administration of justice during the Portuguese Colonial Wars (1961–1974), which explores how crimes committed by combatants of the Portuguese Armed Forces were handled by the justice system of the time, this article aims to present empirical data collected as a basis for future reflections on the complexity of wars and the complex demands they pose to researchers.

Studying crime in wartime poses significant challenges to criminology. Most criminological analyses of war-related crime have focused on conventional interstate wars and on serious violations of international law, such as genocide or war crimes. This established focus, while fundamental, has left vital areas of wartime criminality underexplored. This research addresses a gap in that literature by focusing instead on two less-studied dimensions. The first concerns the nature of the offences: namely, ordinary crimes — military and common offences committed by combatants against other soldiers and civilians — which have received far less attention than major war crimes. The second concerns the complex setting of the Portuguese Colonial War itself, officially defined by the regime as a “subversive war” and embedded in a racially stratified colonial order under authoritarian rule. This unique socio-political environment - a dictatorship fighting a colonial conflict - is central to understanding the administration of military justice during this period.

Drawing on empirical data from criminal proceedings against members of the Portuguese Armed Forces, the study examines how such cases were prosecuted and punished, situating them within the conflict's socio-political and military context. The aim is to encourage reflection on forms of wartime criminality that remain underexplored in criminology.

To this end, we will begin by presenting a brief description of the research we are carrying out as part of the Crime and Administration of Justice in the Portuguese Colonial War (1961-1974) project: exploratory analysis of criminal proceedings brought against Armed Forces combatants (InJUSTiceWar)¹. Given that the research is still ongoing, and we are in the process of analysing and interpreting the data, this article aims to share some of the issues encountered in examining criminal cases committed by Portuguese combatants during the colonial wars, in the hope that these findings may stimulate further criminological discussion.

The InJUSTiceWar Project: A Brief Overview

Portugal fought a war in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, between 1961 and 1974, against forces organised by liberation movements demanding autonomy for their territories under the principle of self-determination of peoples, enshrined in Article 1 of the United Nations Charter (1945). A conflict that Portugal at the time refused to classify as a war, because it didn't represent a conflict between two sovereign states, thus calling it '[...] terrorist acts, which had to be reacted to with conventional military force, combined with subversive war strategies' (Cunha, 2021, p. 106). Around 800,000 Portuguese soldiers were mobilised in this conflict (70% from mainland Portugal and the islands; 30% from local African recruitment)(Sousa, 2021, p. 19) (Borges, 2024, p. 381). The crimes and excessive violence that these men may have carried out during the two years of service they spent in the forces deployed in African territories refer to a multidisciplinary problem that has been explored in several relationships between war, crime, and the administration of justice.

Although war is understood as a political act of organised violence ‘to safeguard the legitimate or illegitimate interests of States’ (Moreira, 2004, p. 108), it is a conflict regulated by an extensive body of laws, customs, treaties and conventions established to regulate war conduct. As such, if the violence exercised by the combatant can be considered legitimate, when referring to correct war conduct, *jus in bello*, excessive violence that he may commit against civilians, other combatants and prisoners refers to the problem of the deviant soldier (Mullins, 2016; Alvarez, 2016). Research exploring the criminogenic nature of war as well as its prolonged effects on post-conflict societies (Sparks & Loader, 2012) has emphasised that violence by combatants is an expression of military masculinities, training, practices, discourses and a military institutional culture that transforms the civilian into a combatant loyal to the State and his combat unit, obedient to superior orders, created to participate in violence without having

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to think too much about it (Alvarez, 2016, pp. 101-107; Wadham, 2016). According to these approaches, this recourse to violence is not deviant at all but is a constituent ingredient of the normalisation of the abnormal behaviours during times of conflict on the one hand and the endemic recourse to violence in the military per se on the other (Walklate & McGarry, 2015, p. 449). But if in the context of war legitimate violence, carried out by soldiers in combat, is expected, the literature that analyses it indicates that '[...] this *raison d'être* for violence also has a criminogenic impulse [...]' (Wadham, 2016, p. 273). Social disorder, the disruption of social control models, and obstacles to monitoring and detecting criminal activities, as well as investigating criminal acts and prosecuting alleged offenders, make the context of war an opportunity structure for crime.

Research on the administration of justice regarding crimes committed at war focus on subjects as varied as transitional justice and the criminal justice procedure (Teitel, 2014; McEvoy, 2007); the administration of justice in the International criminal tribunals (Glennon, 2005) and in the obstacles to criminalisation of war through the International Criminal Court (Lea, 2015); the presence of veterans in the criminal justice system (Lucas et al., 2022), among others. Although they focus on issues related to war crimes and crimes against humanity, they are vital to this project's framework. This is mainly because they have shown that multifactorial analyses, which articulate social, cultural, legal and political dimensions relating to the contexts in which the crimes were committed and subsequently judged, reveal how the administration of justice procedures and discourses are structured in a field of forces and tensions that surpasses the legal dimension. (Maier-Katkin et al., 2009; Hagan & Raymond-Richmond, 2009; Teitel, 2014).

Colonial or independence wars raise specific questions. On the one hand, because most of them are conflicts between States and movements not recognised as States; on the other, because they take place in a colonial context marked by asymmetrical and racialised relations that are not limited to the period of the war and whose legal framework has specific contours. Research on crimes committed in these contexts such as the actions by the French in Algeria (Thénault, 2001a; Horne, 2006; Branche, 2016; Branche, 2002) or the British in Kenya (Anderson, 2005) and Palestine (Hughes, 2009) reveal how colonial powers used the emergency situation arising from the wars to justify the violent measures they employed against populations; how the colonies at war were governed as zones of exception, beyond the reach of the prevailing morals and law, and how the judicial system was instrumentalised for repressive purposes.

There has been a growing and diversified interest in Portugal about the colonial wars, and there are already some works focusing on the crimes committed during that conflict: examining massacres committed by the forces involved (Dhada, 2016; Cabrita, 2008; Cardina & Martins, 2018); exploring military crimes and crimes against the State, such as desertion and other acts of disobedience (Cardina, 2020), and analysing the memory of those crimes in post-colonial Portugal (Rodrigues, 2018; 2021). To this date, the InJUSTiceWar project, which we are currently developing, is the only investigation on common crimes perpetrated by members of the Portuguese Armed Forces (PAF) based on the criminal proceedings that took place within the framework of the Territorial Military Court in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. This singular focus on ordinary criminality, which affects the daily lives of both military personnel and civilians, offers an unprecedented opportunity to analyse the disciplinary mechanisms of the *Estado Novo* and its colonial legal framework during active conflict. For this reason, we believe that this project raises specific questions, which we will outline below.

This is an exploratory project that will provide, for the first time, a mapping of the crimes allegedly committed by PAF members deployed to wars in Africa and an interpretation of the administration of justice regarding them. We believe that this project will provide data on crimes that allow us to reflect on a war with particular contours, fought in a dictatorship and colonial context, which translates into specificities, especially on how they are interpreted by the administration of justice. Furthermore, since these criminal events occur in a context of unconventional war (a subversive war), this work is expected to contribute to proposing benchmarks that will make it possible to compare the administration of justice in this particular case with those implemented in conventional war cases. Finally, in methodological terms, this research draws attention to the need to proceed with caution when using statistical methods to analyse cases that refer to historical narratives that require a contextualised analysis, avoiding simplifications that could distort the complexity of the phenomena studied.

Project Objectives

inJUSTiceWar project seeks to investigate how criminal offences allegedly committed by PAF combatants were interpreted by the Territorial Military Courts of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea during the colonial wars (1961-1974). Its general objective is to identify the structuring factors of the administration of justice discourses regarding decisions taken during criminal proceedings brought against combatants recruited for the wars in Africa. In specific terms, this research will enable characterising the criminal facts, offenders, victims, and witnesses in criminal proceedings; identifying the decisions taken by the administration of justice throughout the proceedings; and testing the importance of legal and extra-legal factors guiding the decisions taken by the administration of justice throughout the proceedings.

One of the biggest challenges of this research concerns the context in which the crimes were committed and tried: a complex socio-political context that combines the *Estado Novo* dictatorship, the extreme situation of war in three different territories to defend the sovereignty of colonial Portugal, and a racialised hierarchical order, in an international context that advocated the right to self-determination of peoples and therefore favoured the independence of territories under colonial rule. It focuses empirically on criminal proceedings considered as discourses that constitute a structured space of power and force relations between the different subjects and institutions that participate in it and inscribe representations supported by the socio-political and legal order. These proceedings show the State exercising its control over society through the functioning of its institutions, which in practice use the power to punish, the *ius puniendi*, by applying the law whose political objectives, political-criminal *stricto sensu*, legal ideals and underlying cultural patterns condition justice-related policies and practices. At the same time, proceedings are decided by people who are not just spokespeople for the State's official discourse. The predispositions, perceptions, beliefs, values and theories of prosecutors and judges, particularly regarding the purposes of the sentences and the purposes to be fulfilled by criminal proceedings, affect the way they assess case-related information and how they act throughout the proceedings.

In accordance with this framework, and given that this project is exploratory in nature, the intention is that, based on its results, questions can be formulated for further research to clarify whether the decisions and procedures of the Territorial Military Courts of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, regarding crimes allegedly committed by Portuguese Armed Forces combatants, reveal interpretative schemes, conditioned by legal and extra-legal factors, related to the legal and political framework committed to the interests of the *Estado Novo* and the maintenance of colonial order in that particular war context.

Project Methodology

The complexity inherent in the project's objectives, particularly understanding the influence of the authoritarian, colonial, and racialised context, requires a robust and cautious methodological framework. Before reflecting on some of the results under analysis, it is important to recall that the colonial wars represented fourteen years of conflict that Portugal waged in three territories thousands of kilometres from the European continent (Angola 1961-1974; Guinea 1963-1974; Mozambique 1964-1974), against liberation movements that claimed their autonomy based on the principle of self-determination. Throughout that conflict, Portugal mobilised around 800,000 Portuguese combatants. Around 30% of those men were from local conscription, i.e., men who fought within the Portuguese Armed Forces against the independence of the territories where they were born.

This research analysed only proceedings relating to common crimes allegedly committed by Portuguese Armed Forces combatants during the Colonial Wars in Angola and Guinea, investigated and tried pursuant to the procedural model designed by military law. These crimes were subject to military jurisdiction because those facts, whether not essentially military crimes (e.g. treason, espionage, crimes against people's rights, insubordination, abuse of authority, cowardice, desertion, military violence, crimes against persons and property in times of war...) or military crimes (falsehood, infidelity or other military duties), were classified as common crimes committed by military personnel or persons belonging to the Armed Forces, and the penalties provided for in general criminal law should apply (Article 4, Code of Military Justice).

The Portuguese Military Historical Archive contains 4119 proceedings of combatants who were tried during the colonial wars in the Territorial Courts of Angola, Guinea and Mozambique. At the start of the

project, the aim was to analyse criminal proceedings tried in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea. Cases relating to the Military Courts of Mozambique, however, were excluded. This is because, for reasons yet to be ascertained, only forty-five proceedings arrived at the Portuguese Military Historical Archive after the wars ended. Furthermore, out of those 45 cases, 5 relate to 1966 and the remaining 40 to the years between 1970 and 1974. Since this is an exploratory project developing a descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, these proceedings were excluded because their number and temporal distribution are not representative of the broader set of data analysed, which could compromise the consistency of the inferences and generate biased results. Consequently, the construction of our sample was based on a total of 4074 criminal proceedings concerning common and military crimes tried in the Military Courts of Angola.

A randomised and stratified sampling process was employed in this research. Of the 4074 criminal proceedings, 3,100 cases tried in Angola between 1961 and 1974, and 974 cases tried in Guinea between 1963 and 1974 were identified. From this total, a sample of 783 cases was drawn, with each case corresponding to one defendant: 430 from Angola (54.92%) and 353 from Guinea (45.08%). The sample comprises exclusively common crimes, with no military offences or war crimes, in accordance with the scope of the study. Developed as part of an exploratory project, the sample reached a size considered sufficient to allow rigorous analysis and the identification of patterns in crimes and penalties across the two contexts.

Case data were collected using a previously developed analysis grid, which covered a wide range of variables and made it possible to capture varied information about the course of the proceedings, the offenders and victims, the types of crimes and the respective sentences. That grid provided data on the four stages of the military criminal proceedings, namely the evidence, the summary of guilt, the prosecution and defence, and the trial. In going through those various stages, data were collected to check whether the procedural rules enshrined in Portuguese legislation in force at the time of the colonial wars were complied with. Socio-demographic data were also collected, such as the place of birth of the offender and the victim, their level of education, age and, in the case of the victims, gender (since all the offenders were male). Data were also collected on the types of crime indicated both at the indictment stage and in the judgment; the place where the crime was committed; and data on sentences, including the type of sanctions applied, acquittals, amnesties and other relevant elements.

As the research is still ongoing, in this article, we will only reflect on some of the data that allow us to map the crimes and the corresponding sentences, and to check whether the proceedings were conducted in accordance with the legislation in force at the time.

Reflections Emerging From the Data

Data were collected on the four stages of the military criminal proceedings, i.e., the evidence, the summary of guilt, the prosecution and defence, and the trial. As for the type of crimes prosecuted, it should be noted that the crimes in the indictment may not correspond to the crimes identified in the decision. This is because, during the investigation and the decisions made during the proceedings, the crimes that have been tried can be reclassified and even replaced by other types of offences, depending on the evidence presented and the legal interpretations. A significant variety of crimes were identified in the prosecution phase, from minor ones such as slander and swindling, to particularly serious ones such as murder and aggravated bodily injury. Out of the 783 cases, the crime of involuntary bodily injury stands out with 324 records, representing 41.4% of the total sample, followed by involuntary homicide, with 198 cases (25.3%). Other crimes, such as theft, with 42 occurrences (5.4%) and wilful bodily injury, with 38 occurrences (4.9%), and sexual crimes, such as statutory rape (3.45%) and rape (1.66%), also stood out, albeit on a smaller scale. In addition, there was a wide range of other crimes, all with a dispersed and unrepresentative incidence. For that reason, the crimes had to be categorised. Crimes were grouped into nine categories according to the Portuguese Penal Code (1884) in force at the time: offences against the economy, honesty, public order and peace, property, public health, community safety, people's safety, and finally against the State, heritage and public faith. As data analysis is still starting, we are not able to present the figures representing each category. We can, however, advance that in the prosecution stage, crimes against people's safety were the most recorded, followed by crimes against property, with a similar incidence to crimes against honesty. All the other categories represent much smaller figures. We can also point out that, at the end of the military criminal proceedings, i.e., at the trial stage, the final classification

of the crime did not change significantly, and the types of crime maintained the same order of incidence.

Most of the crimes were committed in the main cities of Angola and Guinea, namely Luanda and Bissau, with 18.14% and 9.48% of the cases, respectively. Crimes in other locations are dispersed across 21 different sites, each with smaller percentages, reflecting a broad geographic spread. This spatial distribution is a noteworthy observation that warrants further investigation. Future research could explore whether this pattern is related to the higher concentration of military personnel in certain areas, urban-related social dynamics, or other contextual and operational factors. Such an approach aligns with insights from environmental criminology, which emphasises that the occurrence of crime is often influenced by the interaction between offenders, targets, and their environment (Brantingham, 1982; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1998). While the present study does not examine the causal mechanisms underlying this spatial distribution, acknowledging these variations provides a strong foundation for subsequent analyses that aim to understand how geography, military presence, and local conditions interact to shape patterns of criminal behaviour.

A relevant piece of information refers to the ranks of the combatants subject to criminal proceedings. At the time of the trial, approximately 70% of the defendants were soldiers. The remaining defendants had various higher ranks in the military hierarchy. Although these results seem to reveal a clear predominance of defendants in lower military ranks, it should be noted that the majority of combatants in the Portuguese Armed Forces were soldiers, as in any war. Consequently, no conclusions can be drawn about these figures without analysing the composition of the Portuguese Armed Forces throughout the wars and establishing the relative proportions of each rank within the military structure. This task has not yet been developed in the project.

This project considers data on the defendants' place of birth, particularly relevant to understanding the dynamics that influence judicial decisions. As the research focuses on a colonial context, it was important to understand whether the proceedings and the decisions made were influenced by whether or not the defendants were African. It is important to remember that the Portuguese Armed Forces at the time included African combatants, even though they were Portuguese nationals. So far, the research has revealed a predominance of individuals born in the metropolis among the total number of cases brought to trial. They represent approximately 80% of the total of 783 occurrences, while defendants born in Angola and Guinea account for around 14% of that total. There were a few cases in which the defendants' place of birth could not be identified. However, these data do not allow us to know whether the defendants born in Africa were of African origin. The military records that accompany the files only mention the military personnel's place of birth, and at the time, all military personnel in the Portuguese Armed Forces were Portuguese. In 1961, shortly after the start of the war in Angola, the Portuguese Colonial Empire revoked the Statute of Portuguese Natives and from the Provinces of Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique, which established the differences between the native, the denizen and the Portuguese since 1954. With the repeal of that statute by Decree-Law no. 43893, of 6 September 1961, all individuals born in the metropolis and in the colonies now had the same legal rights. Therefore, the data collected does not allow us to say that the defendants who were born in Africa were of African origin, because settlement colonisation meant that Portuguese settlers established themselves in the former Portuguese colonies, and some of the defendants born in Africa might not be of African origin.

The age of the defendants, although it was collected, is not a significant datum, since the combatants were young men called up for compulsory military service, mostly at the age of 20. The defendants in our sample were, on average, 22.90 years old when they committed the crime ($SD=2.687$).

As for the victims of the crimes, approximately half of the sample were military personnel (57.60%). Among the civilian victims, approximately 14% were female and 83% were male. Among the victims whose place of birth was identified in the proceedings, no significant differences were found between the number of those born in Portugal (former metropolis) and those born in Angola and Guinea (former colonies). Out of a total of 783 cases, 241 victims were born in the former colonies (30.78% of the total sample) and 233 in the former Metropolis (29.76% of the total sample). In many cases, the gender of the victims was not identified in the documents analysed.

A particularly important set of data in this research concerns the analysis of proceedings in terms of the procedural rules enshrined in the law. The aim was to ascertain whether the duty to inform regarding the

right to silence and the right to a defence counsel, provided for in the Portuguese Constitution of 1933 (No. 10 of Article 8) and the Criminal Procedure Code of 1929 (Article 22), had been complied with. We can say that in the proceedings consulted, regardless of the socio-demographic characteristics of the defendants and victims, there is, at least on a formal level, strict compliance with the law and the principles enshrined therein, namely the recognition of basic defence rights, the defendant's right to choose a lawyer, the right to adversarial proceedings and not to make statements about the facts of which he is accused.

The ongoing research also revealed that temporary custody was applied in at least 115 cases (14.69%). As far as sentences are concerned, first instance judgements indicate that more than half of the cases were convicted (451 cases), and only 41 defendants were acquitted. Many crimes were amnestied during the proceedings, while in a few other cases the defendants were relieved of punishment. A few appeals were lodged after that first instance judgement: out of a total of 18 appeals, 17 related to convictions and only 1 to an acquittal. In addition, all sanctions applied in the appeal trial remained the same as those decided at first instance, except for one for dismissal of the proceedings.

The sanctions applied varied widely, including prison sentences, fines, disciplinary sanctions, and a diverse range of ancillary measures. Particularly significant is the fact that from the total of convictions (451 cases), the prison sentence was decided in court in 424 cases.

What this research currently allows us to demonstrate unequivocally is that, during the colonial wars, common crimes committed by Armed Forces combatants did not go unpunished. They were, in fact, tried by the Territorial Military Courts of Angola and Guinea, and approximately half of the crimes in our sample were punished with prison sentences.

Although the initial data analysis shows a predominance of crimes against people's safety and property, the categorisation still needs to be completed to deepen the comparisons between the types of crime. Regarding the geographical distribution and place of birth of the defendants, the analysis suggests some doubts that should be investigated in future research, regarding the influence of colonial relations on the justice system, especially considering that the data do not allow us to conclude whether the defendants born in the colonies were of African or Portuguese (European) origin. In addition, the research raises questions about the impact of the military hierarchy and the composition of the Armed Forces on the distribution of proceedings, especially between soldiers and officers, without yet offering a conclusive analysis of those variables. Finally, although the procedural rules seem to have been formally respected, the complexity of the data and the limited access to some information, such as the origin of the defendants and victims, as well as the connection between their place of birth and the judicial decisions, leave open a series of questions about the legal and extra-legal facts that framed the decisions taken in the trials. Further research will be crucial to better understand how those variables influenced the results of the proceedings and the sentences handed down, and to understand how the decisions and procedures of the Territorial Military Courts reveal interpretative schemes, conditioned by factors related to the legal and political framework committed to the interests of the *Estado Novo* and the maintenance of the colonial order in the particular war context.

Final Remarks

This article analyses the administration of justice during the Portuguese colonial wars, partly illustrating the complexity of research focusing on criminal proceedings developed in war contexts. The fact that these proceedings took place in contexts where the social and legal orders were profoundly affected, regardless of the type of war, is indisputable. Consequently, any research into this matter cannot ignore the material and immaterial conditions at the root of the production and preservation of criminal proceedings in times of war, or the factors that condition access to them during and after conflicts.

The problems identified throughout the research also suggest that it is equally imperative to consider the specificities of each conflict. Understanding the dynamics of justice in times of war requires analysing both national and international ideological, social, legal, and political contexts in which each conflict takes place. Unconventional and colonial war contexts, such as the Portuguese colonial wars that took place under a dictatorship, raise specific questions about power relations, inequalities and racialised social structures, phenomena that cannot be ignored by the sciences that study this issue. These specificities emphasise the need to move beyond purely legalistic analyses and fully incorporate the socio-political

framework of the *Estado Novo* and the colonial order to interpret judicial outcomes. Although preliminary, our findings reveal a stark reality: common crimes committed by Armed Forces combatants were, in fact, tried and often punished with prison sentences, demonstrating a functioning, albeit formally compliant, military justice system.

Although preliminary and exploratory, the results of the research we presented show that, in the case of Portugal, military justice operated in accordance with the legal system in force at the time, and that the procedural rules were, for the most part, formally respected. The descriptive statistical analysis of the data also indicates that legal factors seem to have determined a large part of the justice decisions taken during the proceedings. The proceedings analysed show strict compliance, at least formally, with the law and the principles enshrined therein, namely the recognition of basic defence rights, the defendant's right to choose a lawyer, the right to adversarial proceedings and not to make statements about the facts of which he is accused. In addition, the descriptive statistical analysis has not yet identified any extra-legal factors that may have conditioned justice procedures and decisions, such as the origin of the defendants and victims, the gender of the victims, the military rank of the defendants, or whether the crimes were committed against civilians or military personnel. However, we know that legal proceedings are not just a reflection of the enforcement of the law because they are not immune to the political and social dynamics where they take place (Teitel, 2014; Glennon, 2005; Hagan & Raymond-Richmond, 2009). We also know, according to several authors, that in wars that take place in colonial contexts, power relations and racialised hierarchies influence procedural dynamics and judicial decisions (Branche, 2002; Anderson, 2005; Thénault, 2001; Horne, 2006; Hughes, 2009). We have just started to develop an in-depth reading and content analysis of some of the proceedings, which seem to reveal this trend. The narratives present in some documents, such as the interrogation of the accused, the judge's reasoned explanation of the facts and the applicable law, witness statements and the reasons for the judges' decisions, seem to demonstrate social and racial inequalities and other power relations characteristic of colonial and dictatorial regimes. Qualitative research analysing the content of the extensive documents that make up the proceedings is necessary to understand how those phenomena are projected in the proceedings or how they interweave the military procedural dynamics. We expect that this combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches will allow us to capture both the statistical patterns and the contextual, social, and ideological dynamics that shape crime and justice in the cases under analysis.

In conclusion, considering the multiple specificities that characterise wars - including the difference between conventional and unconventional conflicts, as well as the influence of social, political, and ideological factors that transcend their immediate context - any science dedicated to researching them must necessarily recognise the exceptional nature of the war context. Based on the evidence and preliminary reflections presented in this article, we believe that researching crime and justice in times of war requires a multidisciplinary and intersectional approach, capable of encompassing the complexity of the dynamics that interfere in the configuration of both the facts of the crime and justice responses in those contexts. This includes a robust engagement with historical and sociological context to fully account for how power relations and the maintenance of colonial order may have subtly shaped judicial processes, even where formal compliance with the law was observed.

Within this framework, studying crimes committed in war contexts raises important questions for criminology. While disciplines such as sociology, history, and psychology contribute essential knowledge, criminology's focus on crime provides unique tools to analyse offences, the power structures that sustain them, and the responses of justice systems, while allowing for interdisciplinary perspectives. The empirical data presented in this article from the Portuguese colonial wars may provide a basis for reflecting on how criminological theories can help interpret extreme situations where social, political, and legal orders are profoundly disrupted, while also drawing attention to largely overlooked aspects of wartime crime, particularly ordinary crimes. We suggest that engaging with this material could encourage further questions and reflection within criminology.

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Harnessing Criminology's Potential to Theorize the Link Between War and Crime over the Life Course

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Abstract: As unprecedented numbers of children worldwide are exposed to armed conflict, understanding how the hidden wounds of war unfold over the life course has become an urgent concern. The aim of this work is to chart new directions in the criminological study of war by focusing attention on its enduring implications for its most vulnerable victims: children. Building on recent scholarship that has assessed the relevance and utility of core criminological theories in explaining the perpetration of genocide and crimes of mass atrocity (see, e.g., Karstedt, Nyseth Brehm, & Frizzell, 2021), this work argues for drawing more heavily from the life course paradigm (Elder, 1974; 1995) as well as foundational criminological theories to examine the potentially criminogenic implications of exposure to war-related violence and victimization in childhood. Renewing criminological attention to the link between exposure to war and criminality provides an opportunity to refine existing theories and to further understanding of the link between macrosocial contexts and individual lines of development and may promote further understanding of resilience to contexts of extreme violence.

"No one has been able to explain away the fact that war creates the conditions that beget war."

Dwight Eisenhower,

Remarks at Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 10/19/50

Introduction

At present more than 450 million children worldwide—nearly 1 in 6—are living in or fleeing countries afflicted by war and political violence (UNICEF, n.d.). Nearly 50 million have been displaced by conflict, many of whom are forced to live in refugee camps, where the normal trappings of childhood (e.g., going to school, playing with friends) are suspended and uncertain. These numbers reflect a larger trend toward greater civilian casualties in recent years, prompted by shifts in the way contemporary wars are being fought around the globe (see, e.g., Jamieson, 2003, 2014; McGarry & Walklate, 2019). Whereas civilians made up roughly half of casualties during World War II, that proportion has since grown to as much as 90 percent, including increasing numbers of women and children (United Nations, 2022). For those who survive war and other forms of mass violence, including genocide, there is little doubt that the experience will leave an indelible imprint on their lives. However, the question of how such exposure will shape trajectories of development—including pathways of crime and violence—over the life course marks one of the most understudied topics in criminology.

Criminology's waning interest in the war-crime nexus after WWII was part of a sweeping shift in the discipline, which included the rise of critical criminology and attendant redirection of the discipline's gaze to the role of the state as aggressor (Ermann & Lundman, 2002; Rothe & Friedrichs, 2006). Shifting attention to the harms of the government was understandable given the context of the 20th century, a period in which more people died violently as a result of state-sponsored violence and genocide than from all other crimes combined (Brannigan & Hardwick, 2003; Maier-Katkin et al., 2009), prompting Ruggerio (2015, p. 28) to describe it as "'unnamable' for its endless chain of destructive moments." Against the backdrop of government perpetrated atrocity, including torture, massacres and genocidal violence, focusing attention on war's potentially criminogenic implications for its most unwitting victims may be construed (understandably) as problematic, but there are important reasons for the discipline to renew its interest in the war-crime nexus.

First, as the number of children exposed to conflict around the world reaches unprecedented levels, the question of how the "invisible traces" of war (Walklate & McGarry, 2015) will manifest over the life course is of pressing concern. The link between contexts of urban violence and violent criminality in urban ghettos has been a focal point of the discipline for more than a century (see, Sampson and Wilson, 1995), giving rise to prominent theories of social disorganization, collective efficacy, and cultural deviance, among others, yet the discipline remains curiously averse to broadening its purview to contexts of war and state sponsored violence around the globe.

Second, renewing criminological attention to the link between exposure to war and criminality provides an opportunity to refine existing theories and to further understanding of the link between macrosocial contexts and individual lines of development. Sampson (2015) has argued that a major limitation of life course criminology has been its failure to incorporate social change or to link explicitly social change to individual pathways of development, including crime. The omission is notable given that life course research has proliferated since the 1980s, alongside numerous conflicts, genocides and periods of sustained intrastate violence around the globe. Yet rarely have these topics converged.

Finally, and most critically, examining how exposure to war and mass violence may catalyze risks for violent and criminal adaptations in the aftermath will further understanding of resilience. A burgeoning scholarship has shown that exposure to even the most egregious forms of war related violence is not deterministic of adverse outcomes (Apfel and Simon, 1996; Betancourt, 2015; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993). Moreover, scholars note that war and other social crises can paradoxically intensify bonding within families and local communities, concentrating solidarity even as wider social trust erodes (Lieberman, 2006; Fiedler, 2023). Identifying the conditions under which war may lead to what Elder and Clipp (1989) distinguish as "pathogenic" or "developmental" legacies is of critical importance to identifying key interventions in the life course that may mitigate war's deleterious effects.

The aim of this work is to chart new directions in the criminological study of war by focusing attention on its enduring implications for its most vulnerable victims: children. Building on recent scholarship that has assessed the relevance and utility of core criminological theories in explaining the perpetration of genocide and crimes of mass atrocity (see, e.g., Karstedt, Nyseth Brehm, & Frizzell, 2021), this work argues for drawing more heavily on Elder's (1974; 1994; 1998; 1995) life course paradigm, as well as

foundational criminological theories to examine the criminogenic implications of exposure to war-related violence and victimization in childhood. In doing so, it heeds Sampson's (2015, p. 285) call for life-course criminology "to rediscover its roots and step up to the challenge of linking individual and macro-level change" as well as the clarion call for criminologists to engage more seriously with the subject of war (Jamieson, 1998, 2003, 2014).

Following a brief discussion of how war is conceptualized for the purposes of this writing, I begin by evaluating research and theorizing on the criminogenic consequences of war for youth from the early decades of the 20th century to the present context. Next, I turn to the life course paradigm developed by Elder as a foundational theoretical framework for examining war's enduring implications across the life span. Subsequently, I will make the case for the applicability of core criminological theories, specifically control, strain, social learning, to the study of delinquency, crime and violence among war-exposed youth. I conclude by discussing future directions for building theoretically grounded knowledge on war's enduring effects and the pressing need to merge the study of individual lives with macrosocial change.

War as a Discrete Life Event and Developmental Context

The question of how to define war and other forms of state-sponsored violence, including genocide and crimes against humanity, has filled tomes and is beyond the scope of the present inquiry, but for excellent discussions see, e.g., McGarry and Walklate (2015; 2019), Rafter (2016), and Karstedt, Nyseth Brehm, and Frizzell (2021). Rather, of primary concern here is the conceptualization of war as both a discrete event in the life course as well as a macrosocial context in which patterns of human development and behavior unfold. With respect to the former, war can be construed most simply as an exogenous shock (Rosenfeld, 2018)—a violent and drastic restructuring of social order that marks a critical turning point in the life course for those who experience war, whether as militants or civilians, adults or children. With respect to the latter, war also constitutes an enduring sociocultural milieu, which continues to shape both objective opportunities and subjective worldviews, including notions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, good and evil, and one's sense of identity, among others, long past the end of conflict (see, e.g., DiPietro, 2019; Droždek, 2020; Elder & Clipp, 1989; Enloe, 1999; 2023). Notably, for those living in contexts of protracted crises (e.g., Myanmar, Israel-Palestine), conflict is less a rupture but a continuity: the macrosocial backdrop of childhood, youth, and adulthood alike. Violence becomes normalized within everyday social life, shaping family and community bonds and inscribing the logics of war into socialization, identity formation, and the intergenerational transmission of culture and trauma.

At its most basic level, war is also an extraordinarily violent activity. Whereas significant distinctions have been made between the "old" Clausewitzian (Clausewitz, ([1832] 2003) conceptualization of war and "new" wars (see, e.g., McGarry and Walklate, 2019 for a thoughtful discussion), the intricacies of these distinctions are less salient here. Before theorizing on war's potentially criminogenic implications, however, some fundamental implications of the transition from "old" to "new" wars should be noted. First, is that "the violence of war is now disproportionately targeted towards civilians" (McGarry & Walklate, 2019, p. 9). This shift coincides with the dramatic rise in intrastate violence since WWII. Wars within countries are now more common than wars between, and the targeted mass killing, sexual victimization, and torture of civilians at the hands their own governments has become increasingly prevalent (Karstedt, Nyseth Brehm, & Frizzell, 2021). Whether such acts are defined legally as genocide is a fraught issue, but is perhaps of less consequence to children coming of age in such contexts than the decimating forces of mass violence itself.

Second, direct exposure to violence (e.g., bombing campaigns, chemical attacks, and gunfire), is but one of the detriments experienced by children in war. The degree of exposure to violence varies widely across geographic region; in 2023, an estimated 14 percent of people in the world were within 5 km of violent conflict, though in some regions, it is far greater (ACLED & WorldPop, 2024). For example, an estimated 81 percent of Palestine's population is exposed to conflict, underscoring how some children grow up under conditions of near-constant threat, while others may live at the periphery of active hostilities (Raleigh & Kishi, 2025). Even where violence is geographically concentrated, its reverberations extend far beyond battle zones, shaping children's lives through displacement, poverty, famine and the systemic dismantling of safe and stable social environments. By the end of 2024, nearly 50 million children were displaced globally due to conflict and violence, with trends indicating further displacement due to intensifying conflicts in Haiti, Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Palestine, and Sudan

(UNICEF, n.d.). Children make up approximately 30 percent of the global population, but account for as much as 40 percent of refugees and nearly 50 percent of internally displaced people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025). These dynamics intersect with staggering levels of deprivation: in conflict-affected countries, on average, more than a third of the population lives in poverty, compared to just over 10 percent in non-conflict settings (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). Widespread famine is also increasingly linked to modern warfare—both as cause and consequence of political conflict. Combatants’ deliberate weaponization of food production is compounded by food scarcity and dwindling availability of humanitarian aid, driving malnutrition, and heightening the risk for enduring cognitive and social impairment among youth (see, e.g., Oberg, Hodges and Masten, 2022; Raine, 2002).

Taken together, these sobering realities underscore the need for renewed criminological attention to how war’s structural and developmental disruptions generate or reshape patterns of harm among its most unwitting victims. The next section turns to theorizing this war–crime nexus.

Theorizing the War-Crime Nexus

The First and Second World Wars coincided with radical shifts in criminological thought, including the waning emphasis on theories of biological determinism in favor of explanations that granted primacy to social factors (see McGarry and Walklate, 2019; Rafter, 2016). Reflecting on this shift, the earliest studies linking war to rising rates of crime and delinquency typically centered on exogenous mechanisms, including family disruption, premature entrée into the workforce, and the cultural shift in normative value systems attendant to periods of violent social disorganization (Bonger, 1936; Bromberg, 1943; Gault, 1918; Glueck, 1942; Mannheim, 1941; Rosenbaum, 1939). Decades before control theorists would articulate the mechanisms by which an individual’s tenuous bonds to family and conventional institutions gave way to indulgence in one’s natural impulse to deviate (see, e.g., Hirschi, 1969; Nye, 1958; Toby, 1957), scholars attributed spikes in juvenile delinquency during wartime to the “dislocation of home and school life” (Bathurst, 1944, p. 292) and “the withdrawal from child-life of adult personal influence, and in the curtailment of those social and educational agencies that hitherto have occupied so large a part of the child’s life” (Leeson, 1917, p. 22).

Also prominent in early scholarship was the focus on cultural shifts wrought by war. French criminologist Francois Roux (1913) was among the earliest to identify the moral turpitude of war as a potentially criminogenic force that would endure in its aftermath. Writing of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, Roux warned of the state of “moral vertigo” that would be ushered in by “the breaking-up of homes and the perpetual vision of death” specific to periods of war (cited in Abbott, 1918, p. 40). War, he argued, is “a school of courage and sacrifice” not “a school that teaches respect for the person or the property of others” (cited in Abbott, 1918, p. 40). Von Hentig (1947) suggested similarly that people may acquire an “atrocious habit” in times of war, while Bonger (1936) referred to the “spirit of violence” that takes root in contexts of mass violence.

It is notable that the lion’s share of early scholarship on the war-crime nexus focused on the “home front” in times of war, emphasizing the impact of social disorganization, demoralization, family dissolution, and child neglect, among other social harms, on rates of domestic—and typically young male—criminality (Gault, 1918; Bonger, 1936). As McGarry and Walklate (2019, p. 38) observe “such a focus on domestic matters of crime and social disorder, occurring as a result of war and thereafter, successfully obscured a wider assortment of critical issues from criminological scrutiny, including...the cultural salience of militarized masculinities and hyper-sexuality; and increase levels of gendered, racialized and ethicized violence directed toward vulnerable social groups during times of war and thereafter.” The discipline’s potential to expand and refine theorizing on the role of war in shaping pathways of delinquency and criminality among youth specifically, and to broaden its purview beyond the home front was availed by the sustained warfare and mounting intrastate violence that characterized the latter half of the twentieth century. However, in the aftermath of WWII, criminological interest in the relationship between war and criminality slipped into disciplinary torpor (see Jamieson, 1998, 2003, 2014), even as wars raged on and the shifting nature of contemporary warfare engulfed more and more civilians.

While criminology largely neglected broader questions pertaining to war’s criminogenic implications in the postwar decades, insights from adjacent disciplines—particularly psychology, medicine, and social work—have filled the gap, producing a growing body of evidence on how childhood and adolescent

exposure to war violence and attendant harms may be linked to criminogenic outcomes (French & Nikolic-Novakovic, 2011; Leavitt and Fox, 1993). Collectively this work suggests that war-related trauma disrupts normative growth and coping processes, leading to aggression, emotional dysregulation, and antisocial behavior, which is often mediated by post-traumatic stress (Keresteš, 2006; Leavitt & Fox, 1993; Qouta et al., 2008). For some youth, violence may become a coping mechanism. Weierstall, Elbert, and Crombach (2013), for example, argue that repeated exposure to violence can normalize aggression, with traumatic stress producing a paradoxical “appetitive aggression” in which individuals come to regulate psychological distress by perpetrating violence.

The link between war and delinquency is also evident at the macro level. Itskovich, Khoury, and Hasisi (2024), for example, found that among Arab youth in East Jerusalem, exposure to political conflict was linked to juvenile delinquency, with attitudes toward political violence serving as a significant predictor. Similarly, Dubow et al. (2019) demonstrated that exposure to ethnic-political violence among Israeli and Palestinian youth predicted serious violent behavior and antisocial outcomes toward both in-group and out-group members, underscoring the long-term impact of political conflict on youth behavior and highlighting the importance of considering both immediate and cumulative exposure to violence. While research underscores the importance of protective factors such as supportive parenting in mitigating risks (Qouta et al., 2008), the evidence suggests that exposure to war violence operates as both a psychological stressor and a structural condition that cultivates criminogenic potential.

Farrall and Gray (2024) highlight that understanding crime requires attention not only to individual behavior but also to the broader political, social, and policy contexts in which it occurs (see also, Laub & Sampson, 2003). Their insights are directly relevant to the war-crime nexus, emphasizing that macro-level conditions—such as political violence, disrupted institutions, and structural insecurity—interact with life-course trajectories to shape patterns of criminal behavior in conflict-affected societies. War embeds risk at multiple levels—disrupting developmental stability, fostering coping through aggression, and embedding structural conditions that normalize violence—underscoring the need for criminology to integrate micro- and macro-level perspectives on how war shapes pathways into crime.

Elder's Life Course Paradigm and War's Enduring Imprint Upon the Life Course

Although not intended for the study of crime, or the link between war and crime, specifically, Elder's (1974; 1994; 1995) life course paradigm and its interrelated principles—*historical time and place, timing in the life course, interdependent lives, and human agency*—have proven foundational to theorizing on criminal careers across the life span, including Sampson and Laub's (1993; Laub and Sampson, 2003) theory of age graded informal social control, and holds particular relevance to the study of war's enduring legacy upon the life course. Elder's paradigm, broadly, “views human lives in their changing worlds” (1995, p. 102), and stresses “the social forces that shape the life course and its developmental consequences” (p. 104). Central to this perspective is the concept of the *chronosystem*: an ecological concept that “captures all of these interacting elements over time—the developing person, the nature of the environment, and their proximal processes of interaction” (p. 123). Also fundamental to Elder's paradigm are the concepts of turning points or changes in the life course, which are brought about by key transitions (e.g., marrying, entering the workforce, migrating), and ultimately shape the trajectory of one's life.

To address the question of how war might be expressed in the life patterns of the individual necessitates careful attention first to the essential embeddedness of human lives within multiple interconnected spheres of influence. Analogous to a set of Russian dolls, individuals are nested within multiple levels, ranging from the micro-system, which encapsulates individuals' relationships with their immediate environment (e.g., family, peers), to the macro-system, which includes the broader patterns of culture, custom, and change that interact with more proximate structures to frame one's social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the macro-level, few events bring about as radical a shift in structure, culture and social organization as war. From a structural standpoint, individuals exposed to war and other forms of mass atrocity experience major social disruption, including widespread displacement, damage to infrastructure, economic instability, and the erosion of community institutions. From contexts of war emerge marginalized groups, including widows, orphans and refugees, whose diminished social status will continue to shape opportunities and life chances long past the end of conflict. Critically, war shapes hegemonic masculinities and femininities (Goldstein, 2003), and holds the potential to upend or concretize patriarchy in ways that can lead to further violence, particularly against women (Muftic &

Bouffard, 2008). To attend fully to the question of how war imprints upon the life course thus necessitates consideration of the multiple ways in which it fundamentally reconfigures the social fabric of society.

Elder's second principle, timing in lives, asserts that the relative impact of various life events (e.g., losing a parent) and social changes (e.g., economic recession, war) depends on one's location at the intersection of social, psychological, and biological development, with younger children believed to be most vulnerable to stressful life events (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993). Elder's (1974) study of children during the Great Depression, for example, showed that young boys between the ages of 1 and 8 faced the greatest risk for developmental impairment because the economic crisis occurred at a time when they were "most dependent on their families under stress" (p. 115). Timing in the life course is of particular import to the study of the war-crime nexus for at least two reasons. First, the detriments of war may be especially profound for children, who lack the same reservoir of emotional coping mechanisms as adults or even adolescents (Goldstein, Wampler & Wise, 1997; Heptinstall, Sethna, & Taylor, 2004). The link between exposure to violence and victimization and subsequent aggression has been borne out in empirical research, which demonstrates both its acute and enduring effects upon youth (Kirk & Hardy, 2014; Macmillan, 2001; Wilkinson & Carr, 2008). Second, among the deleterious consequences of war for children is the attenuation of childhood and attendant acceleration of traditional age-graded expectations. In times of war, adultlike expectations and experiences (e.g., providing financially for the family, caring for children) may be extended downward to those of younger ages, effectively denying them the protected, non-responsible experience of childhood (Elder, 1995). Scholarship suggests that precocious entrée into adult roles is harmful for adolescent development (Newcomb, 1996) and may serve as a turning point in the life course, which catalyzes deviant behavior (see e.g., Carbone-Lopez & Miller, 2012). A particularly egregious example is the forcible conscription of children to serve as combatants. Although seldom the focus of criminological scholarship, DiPietro and Baker's (2023) recent case study of Omar, a former "child soldier"¹ conscripted during the Bosnian war and genocide (1992-1995) at the age of 11, demonstrates how Omar's forced entrée into the military served as a key turning point in his life, limiting his identity resources, shaping his adoption of hypermasculine norms, and ultimately setting in motion a pattern of cumulative disadvantage and violent criminality that extended well into adulthood.

The cornerstone of Elder's model is the principle of linked lives, which emphasizes how "historical events and individual experience are connected through the family and the 'linked' fates of its members" (Elder, 1998, p. 3). This principle is especially salient for understanding how the structural disruptions attendant to war—including the withdrawal of young men from civilian life, the entry of women into the workforce, prolonged separations, and in many cases the permanent loss of family members—fundamentally alter intergenerational relationships. War frequently redistributes caregiving responsibilities, accelerates role reversals in which children take on adult duties, and destabilizes parental authority, thereby undermining the consistency of family routines and the transmission of norms. These shifts reverberate across the family system, reshaping the nature and effectiveness of socialization, children's views of self and others, and the mechanisms of life course regulation or social control (Elder, 1995, p. 118). Congruent with early theorizing on war's deleterious effects upon families, contemporary research underscores how war related trauma and family disruption impact children, even grandchildren (Betancourt, 2015; Leiner, 2009; Miller & Miller, 1991). The children of war veterans, for instance, face elevated risks of post-traumatic stress, emotional and behavioral problems, and other psychological manifestations of parental trauma (Betancourt 2015; Leiner 2009). These findings affirm Elder's claim that "the misfortune and the opportunity of adult children, as well as their personal problems, become intergenerational" (Elder, 1994, p. 6). In this sense, the family is not only a site where the consequences of war are first registered, but also the conduit through which those consequences are transmitted across time, shaping developmental pathways long after the cessation of armed conflict.

Finally, whereas times of abrupt social change or crisis may fundamentally alter the life course, the personal implications of such changes are "contingent on what people bring to the change process as well as on the nature and severity of the change itself" (Elder, 1994, p. 6). By emphasizing the role of human agency, Elder's paradigm avoids deterministic assumptions regarding the way in which even the most calamitous historical events impact human development. Critically, as Betancourt (2015, p. 199) observes, "despite some of the worst horrors imaginable, there are indeed many who manage to show normative health and interpersonal functioning despite substantial exposure to violence." The question of how

¹ It should be noted that the term "child soldier" is contested, as it narrowly presents youth as passive victims (see, e.g., Drumble, 2012 for a thoughtful discussion).

divergent life pathways stem from shared contexts of mass violence therefore necessitates consideration of human choice, subjectivity and action within the broader structure of opportunity and constraints of one's particular place in time and geographic space.

At its core, the life-course paradigm endeavors to integrate macrosocial change with the study of individual lives (Ryder, 1965). Although war marks one of the most drastic forms of social change, its potentially criminogenic effects upon the life course have been given limited empirical attention within criminology. The omission is surprising in light of the relevance of the discipline's core theories to the study of the war-crime nexus. In the following section, I turn to three of these perspectives—social control, strain, and social learning/subcultural theory—to articulate how the discipline might engage more fully with the potentially criminogenic implications of war.

Criminological Theory and the War-Crime Nexus

Social Control Theory

From the earliest conceptualizations, control theories wrestled with the question of how and why individuals resist their natural impulse to deviate. Speaking mainly to delinquency, scholars writing in the 1950s argued that social control was rooted in one's attachments to conventional institutions (Toby, 1957). Family was the single most important locus of control for youth and that affectional identification with parents and other non-criminal adults provided a critical buffer between youth and the lure of proscribed activities (Nye, 1958). Building on this early work, Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory became a preeminent theory in criminology, and foundational to Sampson and Laub's (1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003) theory of age-graded informal social control, which extended the perspective to account for stability and change in criminal careers through adulthood.

Social control perspectives may hold particular promise for understanding war's potentially criminogenic impact over the life course. In times of war, nearly everything that anchors the individual to the collective is disrupted. Family systems are fragmented by death, displacement, and military conscription. Community institutions, including schools and religious organizations, are unable to function as agents of socialization, and networks of informal social control are ruptured by forced migration, and in the case of intrastate conflicts, by religious and ethnic divisions that may linger long past the end of conflict. For children coming of age in contexts of war or forced to flee conflict zones to refugee camps, this fragmentation occurs at a time when attachments to family and school are most critical for socialization, rendering as Elder (1974, p. 30) observed "both interaction and social bonds problematic."

Weakened attachments to family and community institutions consequent to war may set in motion a pattern of cumulative disadvantage among youth, including diminished commitment to and involvement in prosocial activities, such as school. Also salient to contexts of war is the detrimental impact of sustained violence on belief. Some of the earliest writings on war's deleterious consequences suggest that it erodes conventional moral and legal norms (Bromberg, 1943). Propaganda, dehumanization, and the normalization of violence may weaken individuals' belief in nonviolence and/or the justice system and breed legal cynicism. This may be especially likely in contexts of state-sponsored violence (e.g., genocide and crimes against humanity), for which the wheels of justice have been historically slow and ineffective, and perpetrators of atrocity may enjoy relative impunity (see, e.g., Rafter, 2016). War also disrupts fundamental institutions. For children in contexts of protracted crisis, including those living in refugee camps, sometimes for the duration of childhood and adolescence, falling behind in education may set in motion patterns of accumulative disadvantage, effectively knifing off opportunities for prosocial development (Barber, 1999; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1999). It flows from the logic of social control theory then, that war-exposed youth would be at elevated risk for delinquency and criminality even in the aftermath of war, as the damage to social bonds and weakened belief systems may persist into adulthood.

Critically, however, research on the implications of war for social cohesion is equivocal, with some work finding that social bonds may actually be strengthened rather than diminished in the aftermath of war (see, e.g., Bauer et al., 2016). Barber's (1999) study of Palestinian youth during the Intifada illustrates this duality: while exposure was linked to depression and antisocial behavior, involvement in resistance was also positively related to religiosity and family values. These findings underscore Erikson's (1994, p. 231) insight that "trauma can create community," forging a sense of identity and solidarity through



shared suffering. In this light, war may not simply dissolve bonds—it may also redirect and reshape them, sometimes in ways that buffer against its most criminogenic effects (see also, Karstedt, 2012).

While the immediate impacts of war often include the disintegration of social bonds, the long-term effects can be more complex, as under certain conditions, war can act as a catalyst for strengthening family and community cohesion. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing interventions that not only address the immediate needs of war-affected populations but also support the rebuilding of social structures that promote resilience and social control.

Anomie and Strain Theory

At the root of contemporary strain perspectives is Durkheim's (1893 [1997], 1897 [2005]) concept of *anomie*, which captures the state of normlessness and social instability that arises in periods of social ferment. Durkheim argued that the collective breakdown in shared norms and values consequent to rapid social change would engender alienation from the collective conscience, and a sense of meaninglessness, futility and despair.² These insights were foundational to Merton's (1938) theory of social structure and anomie (1938), which attributed crime to the disjunction between cultural goals (e.g., wealth, status), and legitimate means to attain them, and subsequently to Agnew's (1992, 2012) general strain theory, which shifts attention from blocked goals to the presence of "negative stimuli" and the inability to escape aversive conditions, and the negative emotional states that result.

The application of anomie-strain theory to the war-crime nexus should be *prima facie* straightforward. At the macro-level, war brings about anomic conditions, causes damage to infrastructure, economic instability and the marginalization of certain groups (e.g., widows, veterans, orphans) that could conceivably lead to blocked economic goals and subsequent crime, particularly so-called utilitarian crimes (e.g., theft, corruption). At the individual level war introduces intense and chronic "negative stimuli" (Agnew, 1992, 2012)—direct violence, forced displacement, poverty, and the loss of loved ones—while simultaneously removing "positive stimuli" such as safe housing, schools, and community supports. Congruent with Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources (COR) perspective, these dynamics represent cascading resource losses—of material assets, social supports, and future opportunities. These strains are not fleeting. Research shows that traumatic war experiences can produce mental health effects and behavioral adaptations that persist long after the cessation of hostilities (Betancourt, Khan, & Brennan, 2020; Droždek, 2020; Kibris, Altuntaş & Eren, 2024). Conflict-related sexual violence can amplify these effects, producing long-term disruptions in social cohesion and individual life trajectories, especially among child survivors who, faced with stigma, may struggle to achieve basic social and developmental goals. GST complements this perspective by specifying the emotional pathways through which such losses translate into crime. Anger, frustration, and despair are key mechanisms linking strain to criminal behavior, with crime serving as a form of "corrective action" when legitimate escape or restitution seems impossible. War-related strains—high in magnitude, perceived injustice, and personal relevance—are precisely the types most likely to elicit these intense negative emotions.

Recent empirical work underscores this connection. Using survey data from two large Ukrainian cities, Timmer et al. (2023) show that both direct and vicarious war exposure predict projected interpersonal violence among civilians. These findings provide rare population-level evidence that war-related stressors and routine hardships can ignite the very emotional dynamics—anger, frustration, perceived injustice—that GST identifies as precursors to violence. Historical and qualitative studies likewise reveal the enduring power of war-related strain. Miller and Miller's (1991) interviews with the grandchildren of Armenian genocide survivors document how trauma and perceived injustice were transmitted across generations, motivating acts of political violence nearly seventy years later.

The war environment therefore can generate a multi-layered strain process—macro-level anomie, community-wide resource depletion, and individual-level emotional trauma—that together generate

² It is noteworthy that Durkheim, who was writing during La Belle Époque, an historical period bookended by the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the beginning of WWI in 1914, characterized by relative peace, prosperity and optimism in Europe, embraced a functionalist view of war. Viewing war as an aberration that would be dispelled as society shifted from primitive "mechanical" solidarity to the more advanced "organic" form, he posited that war would strengthen, rather than diminish the social and moral fabric of society (see, McGarry and Walklate, 2019 for a thoughtful discussion).

criminogenic pressures extending well beyond the period of open conflict.

Social Learning and Subcultural Theory

Social learning and subcultural perspectives, rooted in Sutherland's (1947) theory of differential association, posit that individuals acquire techniques for committing crime, as well as definitions, rationalizations, and motivations favorable to law violation, through processes of interaction. Central to these perspectives is the idea that behavior is shaped primarily by the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, captured succinctly in W.I. Thomas' oft-cited theorem, that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Social learning theories therefore emphasize human subjectivities, recognizing that the objective conditions people experience may be less consequential for criminal behavior than the interpretations and meanings they construct from them.

Subcultural theories build on these insights by focusing on the attitudes, norms, and values that support crime and violence within specific social contexts. A voluminous body of criminological scholarship has explored the ways that attitudes governing the use and necessity of violence take root in socially isolated, distressed urban environments (Anderson, 1999; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). Sampson and Wilson (1995) introduced the concept of "cognitive landscapes," or norms regarding standards and expectations of conduct, to bridge ecologically structured tolerances for crime to criminal behavior (see also Sampson & Bean, 2006). Whether or not individuals embrace and act upon violent ideologies depends on a constellation of social and psychological risk factors, but cognitive landscapes are a critical lens through which individuals see and relate to the world.

Whereas subcultural theories have stemmed primarily from disadvantaged urban contexts, emphasizing the structural conditions (e.g., poverty, isolation) that give rise to violent adaptations, there are critical parallels to be drawn between inner-city cultures of violence and "cultures of war" (see, e.g., Garbarino, 1995). In both contexts, violence may be internalized as a means of asserting respect, negotiating social position, and maintaining identity. Gender performances are central to both contexts, as individuals are "held accountable" for enacting socially prescribed gender roles (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In war, men and boys may experience intense pressures to embody mythologized military identities, and failures to meet these ideals can produce profound psychological strain, social sanctions, and further exposure to violence (Baaz & Stern, 2009:505). As Goldstein (2003, p. 264) notes, "cultural norms force men to endure trauma and master fear, in order to claim the status of 'manhood'....cultures develop concepts of masculinity that motivate men to fight." Hypermasculine ideals thus operate as a key mechanism through which violence is normalized and valorized.

Critically, social learning and subcultural perspectives provide a framework for examining how exposure to war related violence may impact behavior by shaping systems of meaning, normative values and cognitive scripts pertaining to the use and acceptability of violence (Qouta et al., 2008) during children's most formative developmental period. Hypermasculine ideologies that equate power with violence may be filtered through discourses to shape the world views of children coming of age in contexts of atrocity. Articulating a "culture of war" is a formidable task, and one that is beyond the present scope, but as a baseline can be considered—much like cultures of violence—a complex mosaic of attitudes, identities, institutions, and beliefs that espouse violence as a necessary means to an end. That children bear no responsibility for war or mass violence does not insulate them from its cultural infusion or its potentially criminogenic implications. The way in which individuals ascribe meaning to their experiences and its implication for identity and behavior across the life span marks one of the most critical directions for the future study of war's imprint upon the life course, and may hold the keys for unraveling intergroup variation in life trajectories stemming from contexts of shared atrocity.

Moving Forward

More than 25 years have passed since Jamieson (1998) entreated the discipline to engage more critically with the topic of war, yet criminologists have been historically slow to heed the call. The aim of this work is to chart new directions in the study of war's enduring implications by providing an overview of the life course paradigm as well as core criminological theories and concepts that hold particular relevance for examining how exposure to war and other forms of mass violence early in life may produce enduring behavioral effects over the life course. Elder's life course paradigm and some of the discipline's most



well-trodden criminological perspectives provide a baseline for theorizing war's potentially criminogenic impacts, but deeper engagement with the subject would benefit from expanding our repertoire to consider novel analytic approaches, including those rooted in phenomenology, which grants primacy to human subjectivities and reveals linkages between individual lives and macro-social contexts (see, e.g., Barnum and Jennings, 2021; Farrall and Gray, 2024; Manning and Raphael, 2012).

As Betancourt (2015, p. 199) reminds us, the effects of war are not deterministic." This paradox highlights the importance of examining not just harm, but also resilience and post-traumatic growth. Future research should prioritize children as a central population of interest, investigating how exposure to violence, displacement, and other war-related adversities intersect with developmental stages, gendered expectations, and social supports to shape behavioral trajectories. Longitudinal and life history approaches could illuminate pathways linking early exposure to war-related strain with both criminality and resilience. Gendered analyses are particularly critical, given evidence that militarized masculinity and socially imposed gender performances influence identity, coping, and vulnerability among war affected youth (see, e.g. DiPietro, 2025). We must also attend to what Jamieson (1998) describes as the *cultural inscription of war*—the ways that war's legacies are etched into collective memory and social life long after formal hostilities have ceased. One manifestation is the persistence and continuing appeal of militarized masculinities in peacetime, which sustain gendered hierarchies of power and valorize aggression, discipline, and domination as markers of manhood. These cultural residues shape children's developmental contexts by normalizing militarized gender ideals within families, schools, and communities, reinforcing patterns of inequality and channeling young men in particular toward specific identities and behaviors.

Taken together, these insights suggest that the study of war within criminology should attend simultaneously to its destructive and generative dimensions. Studies of the war-crime nexus offer a critical opportunity not only to trace the unintended deleterious consequences among its most vulnerable victims, but also to understand patterns of resilience, adaptation, and growth in its aftermath. A rich historical literature documenting the implications of war for human development and behavior (including crime) remains a largely untapped resource within criminology, as do relevant insights from psychology, sociology, and social work. Integrating insights from other disciplines will strengthen these efforts. Psychological and social work research on post-traumatic growth, parenting, and intergenerational resilience—(see, e.g., Irakoze and Sinalo, 2022)—offers concrete examples of how families and communities can support adaptive development and buffer the criminogenic effects of war-related strain. Linking criminological theory with such practical interventions can highlight mechanisms for mitigating risk, fostering resilience, and informing evidence-based policy and humanitarian programming in current war-affected regions.

As Assmann and Clift (2016, p. 165) note, "One of the distinctive features of historical traumas is their belated reappearance long after the decisive events occurred." The consequences of conflict are rarely confined to the immediate period of violence; instead, they reverberate across social structures, cultural norms, and individual life courses. Ultimately, we must adopt a long view of war's imprint upon the life course—one that considers its enduring structural, cultural, and psychosocial effects over time and across generations.

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The Megaphone in Genocidal Times: On the Sonic Silencing and Illegalization of (Amplified) Political Dissent and Resistance

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Abstract: This article examines the use of noise ordinance by-laws to illegalize and issue costly fines against demonstrators who have used megaphones to amplify their dissent and resistance to the continued bombardment, occupation, and apartheid in Palestine during protests in Ottawa – Canada’s capital city. It also explores the possibilities and limits of extra-academic engagement through an analysis of a campaign and zine calling for the abolition of noise ordinance by-laws involving the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project – an action research group – in support of these efforts. In interrogating the process involved in and narratives produced through the campaign and zine project, this paper highlights the amplified words subject to by-law fines, the impact these sanctions had on megaphone users and within the activist community, as well as what targeted demonstrators would like to see happen both in Ottawa in response to the attempted sonic silencing of political dissent and in Palestine where genocidal violence continues. In so doing, the paper highlights the value of abolitionist criminological interventions that entail collective struggle and advocacy with the oppressed and antagonism against rather than complicity with the carceral state.

Introduction

In the wake of the 7 October 2023 attacks led by Hamas on targets situated on Palestinian lands claimed by the Israeli state that resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 people (UNHR, 2024), Israel has waged its latest military campaign in Gaza. By 7 October 2024, more than 42,000 Palestinians had been killed and nearly all 2.1 million people living in Gaza had been displaced from their homes (ibid). Entire households, neighbourhoods and even universities have been wiped off the map or left in rubble by bombs, most of which have been supplied by the United States (Gritten, 2024). The International Court of Justice (2024, p. 6) has stated that Palestinians face “a real and imminent risk of irreparable prejudice to the plausible rights” enshrined under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, while the International Criminal Court (2024) has issued warrants of arrest for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Israeli Minister of Defence Yoav Gallant “for crimes against humanity and war crimes”. Prior to this, the unfolding genocidal violence occurring in Palestine – which is just the latest volley in an ethnic cleansing campaign Palestinians have endured since the Nakba and founding of Israel in 1948 (El-Kurd, 2025) – prompted and continues to prompt massive demonstrations across the world calling for the liberation of Palestine. In turn, many of these protests have been subject to criminalization and other forms of illegalization.

Ottawa – the capital of Canada – which is located on unceded and unsundered Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory, is one such place where Palestinian solidarity protesters have been subject to state repression. This pacification of political dissent by law enforcement officers in support of genocidal land theft in Palestine by the Israeli state is not accidental, but rather a structural feature of and necessity for the Canadian state – situated on stolen Indigenous lands. To not do so would put into question the legitimacy of Canada, along with its institutions, laws, policies, and practices that have sustained and further entrenched the Canadian settler-colonial nation building project before and after the country’s Confederation in 1867 (see Chartrand & Savarese, 2023). The same is true for those living in other settler colonial states that remain steadfast supporters of Israel even amid the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians, including children, in Gaza that have been indiscriminately murdered by the so-called Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the name of self-defence.

This article examines the use of noise ordinance by-laws to illegalize and issue costly fines against demonstrators who use megaphones and other means to amplify their dissent and resistance to the continued bombardment, occupation, and apartheid in Palestine during protests in Ottawa. It also explores the possibilities and limits of extra-academic engagement through an analysis of a campaign and zine calling for the abolition of noise ordinance by-laws involving the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project – an action research group. In interrogating the process involved in and narratives produced through the campaign and zine project, this paper highlights the amplified words subject to by-law fines, the impact these sanctions had on megaphone users and within the activist community, as well as what targeted demonstrators would like to see happen both in Ottawa in response to the attempted sonic silencing of political dissent and in Palestine where genocidal violence continues. In so doing, we highlight the need for abolitionist criminological interventions that entail collective struggle and advocacy with the oppressed and antagonism against rather than complicity with the carceral state.

Sound Amplification and Megaphones: A Short History

Before examining the struggle over sound amplification generally and the use of megaphones specifically in the context of Palestine solidarity protests in Ottawa, we trace the latter’s social, cultural and political uses, both historically and in contemporary times. We do so by locating the megaphone within the history of sound techniques primarily through the writings of François Baskevitch (2009a, 2009b),¹ a French historian of science and an acoustician, as well as Canadian historian Bret Edwards (2011).

The megaphone is first and foremost linked to sound, voice, and its transmission, but has also evolved with time to other uses. Indeed, through the amplification of the sound level of speaking voices, megaphones today allow for the dissemination of sounds and communication of discourse across an extended space, reaching distant individuals. Based on its historiography, it appears this instrument originated from numerous scientific developments in the field of acoustics. Basketvich (2009b, p. 7) explains that the

¹ All quotes attributed to Baskevitch (2009a, 2009b) are our translations from the original texts in French to English.



invention of the ancestor of the megaphone, namely “speaking trumpets”, derived from specific needs of the time – appearing in 1670, it was primarily designed to enable communication at sea. Other devices were also developed, such as “acoustic horns, tubes or pipes that propagate sound” on the one hand and “architectural techniques allowing discreet conversations” (Baskevitch, 2009a, p. 6) on the other.

By the 19th century and the Victorian era, the original, non-electronic megaphone played a “prominent role in the patriarchal power structure and leisure culture of the Victorian era” since it was then “an exclusive and gendered communication device that imparted knowledge and stature to its users” (Edwards, 2011, p. 9). Specifically, while the Victorian cultural context was marked by veneration of industrialization, progress, and the development of the market economy, men used the megaphone in the late 19th and early 20th centuries “to entertain, instruct and profit from primarily middle- and upper-class audiences interested in experiencing activities thought to be appropriate for status [e.g. sporting events] and, in the process, perpetuate their own position of privilege” (Edwards, 2011, p. 10).

Minority groups also occasionally made use of the megaphone in this patriarchal context, such as suffragettes that organized and took to the streets of New York City in the early 1900’s, distributing “Votes for Women” badges from a taxi from which they proclaimed slogans in favour of women’s suffrage via a non-electronic megaphone. However, it is only after World War II that the megaphone – now a transistorized, inexpensive and highly mobile electro-acoustic device, “largely effective in addressing large crowds, numbering hundreds or even thousands of people” (Edwards, 2011, p. 16) – “became synonymous with opportunity and liberation” (Edwards, 2011, p. 9), namely among African Americans and women during the civil rights era. Put differently, through “the escalation of post-war political and social tensions and design improvements” (Edwards, 2011, p. 8), the megaphone allowed the voices of people pushed to the margins “to be amplified and, no less importantly, recognized and respected” (Edwards, 2011, p. 9).

Yet, in keeping with its historical uses, when in the hands of men and institutions like police forces who were also armed with the tool, the megaphone also remained a political symbol of security, capitalism, masculinity, and conservatism. According to Edwards (2011), the use of the megaphone thus took on a polarized significance throughout the 20th century, between maintaining and contesting social order, whereas its use in the Victorian era consistently preserved the *status quo*.

At the turn of the 21st century, sound amplification devices continue to be used to advance liberation, including in the context of abolitionist protests outside prison walls challenging “the exclusionary spatial ordering” of the institution that attempts to naturalize a carceral order by working to restrict what imprisoned people can hear and from whom (Russell and Carlton, 2020, p. 308). Increasingly, however, sound amplification devices are also deployed in the context of protests by reactionary groups (see Young and Popovski, 2024), including white nationalist interventions that “assert ownership over space” (Gillespie, 2025, p. 149) and displace “racialized others” (ibid, p. 150) that are said to not belong to the nation.

Like other reactionary forces, sound amplification is also increasingly used as acoustic repression by police and military forces towards the contemporary dangerous classes, whether they be entire populations or specific groups of people pushed to the margins held in sites of confinement. Juliette Volcler, a French independent researcher, traces such uses in her 2011 book *Le son comme arme : Les usages policiers et militaires du son*. According to her genealogy of sound repression, the sound domain increasingly emerged as a military strategic tool during armed conflicts, as well as in the security management of public spaces in the early 2000s. For instance, in September 2005, Israeli army planes deliberately broke the sound barrier at low altitude in the skies of Gaza to emit sensory controls on the Palestinian population. During a four-day nocturnal period following these abusive interventions, twenty-nine supersonic detonations were recorded. These caused “windows [to] break by the thousands, walls [to] crack”, while leaving “victims of these bangs [to] suffer, among other things, from anxiety attacks, muscle spasms, difficulty breathing” (Volcler, 2011, p. 150).²

Regarding public spaces, Volcler revisits the usefulness of sound for state authorities, allowing them to harass, immobilize or disperse crowds – mainly comprised of young people. As an illustration, she mentions France, which uses disencirclement grenades, but also incapacitating multi-sensory grenades, popularized among law enforcement for allegedly being non-lethal interventions. These, however, have

2 Our translation from the original text in French to English.

resulted in permanent sensory losses and the loss of limbs among some protesters (Célérier, 2012, p. 9). Such uses of sound in demonstrations as weapons “are part of a behaviorist conception of maintaining order: it has the advantage of modifying behavior without killing” (Célérier, 2012, p. 10).³

If sound is a weapon, that is “a way of amplifying and extending the jurisdiction of the state” (Parker, 2015, p. 15), and its instruments used to propagate it can render people docile and break resistance, Volcler (2011) asserts that it is by mastering the use of these same tools that it becomes possible to appropriate them to build resistance and counterattacks. It is observed that it is through “the multiple modes of emission of the human voice” – with “each sender using different stratagems to distinguish themselves from others” in the form of “screams, words and formulas uttered with intensity to dominate the ambient noise, onomatopoeias, whispers, chatter, formulas expressed in a spoken-sung mode” (Leclair, 2020, p. 279)⁴ and the like – that megaphones took up more space within contemporary demonstrations.

The megaphone, when used by the police in demonstrations, expresses the power dynamics of that institution, but when it is wielded by protesters, it embodies the imagery of resistance through an appropriation of this instrument that historically did not initially bestow state power, but reinforced the status quo nonetheless. Thus, the use of megaphones by activists represents an underlying wave heralding a countermovement for the so-called other, not only bringing together people fighting for common cause, but also a unifying voice for the comrades present. Indeed, Laurent Beauguitte (2019, p. 13),⁵ a geographer who observed assemblies at Place des Fêtes during the summer and fall of 2016 in Sorbier (France), asserts that “the role of sound amplification devices cannot be underestimated: speaking through a megaphone or microphone can be intimidating. Using such a device when the number of people is very limited may seem superfluous. However, in the Parisian public space, not using such devices renders the demonstration inaudible”. He thus identifies two inherent characteristics of the current electric megaphone: those of group cohesion and communication both within and outside the crowd. Similar observations are also made by Étienne Pingaud (2014, p. 225),⁶ a sociologist who by examining the temporalities of struggle in a local mobilization for Palestine in France recounts:

...the conflict with the local power quickly intensified. The town hall decided to organize a nighttime demonstration parade through the city streets, scheduled for the following Friday evening (January 16th). The main organizer of *Free Palestine*, who does not want to leave the initiative to an authority deemed compromised, therefore, once again enacts the principle of diversion, by participating in the procession, but on their terms. The association’s activists take care of practical organization details, particularly the preparation of visible banners: “Support for popular resistance”, “Right to return”, “Boycott”, “Israel get out, Palestine is not yours”. To quickly spread the word to residents, she decides to resort to an unusual “homemade” method: a militant, who is involved in many activities of the local parish, rides his bike the day before through the city’s alleys shouting the meeting time and the planned slogans using a megaphone.

Seen in this light, the transgressive communicative nature stemming from the megaphone serves not only to warn, but also to amplify dissent (Traïni, 2008).

In keeping with Edwards’ (2011) arguments, the voices amplified by megaphones do not all seem to possess the same weight or (il)legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the state. According to our observations made during protest events in Ottawa, some voices are immediately heard, yet do not face repression from police and by-law officers, while others denouncing genocide in Palestine are subject to what we call sonic silencing for using megaphones and other noise amplification technologies, notably through fines. Through such instances, we can observe how attempts by protesters to take over space via “acoustic territorialisation” (LaBelle, 2010), that sonically disrupts a status quo in which colonialism – whether in Canada or in Israel – is taken for granted, are met with carceral state repression aimed at reasserting the dominant “sonic order” (Atkinson, 2007) in which colonial spatial hierarchies of settler being and belonging are maintained.

3 Our translation from the original text in French to English.

4 All quotes attributed to Leclair (2020) are our translations from the original text in French to English.

5 Our translation from the original text in French to English.

6 Our translation from the original text in French to English.

Sonic Silencing

As detailed in the section above, while sound is a weapon and an expression of dominant power relations (Vocler, 2011), it is also an instrument of resistance, counter-power and an expression of struggle within movements to disrupt the status quo (Russell and Carlton, 2020). In this context, we have seen protests involving the deployment of sound, namely in the form of discourse broadcast using noise amplification devices like megaphones that criticize and demands alternatives to occupation, apartheid, and genocide in Palestine. At present, we can also observe what Thomas Mathiesen (2004, p. 9) calls “silent silencing”, which fosters “acquiescence... through a process which is quiet rather than noisy, hidden rather than open, unnoticed rather than noticeable, unseen rather than seen, non-physical rather than physical” such as labelling critics of the state of Israel as antisemitic so as to dissuade others from speaking out about atrocities in Palestine. However, for the purposes of this paper, which documents the deployment of fines by policing authorities in Ottawa to silence and attempt what Mathiesen (2015) has called ‘defining-in’ and ‘defining-out’ who and what can be heard in given struggles, below we document “ways of silencing” Palestinian solidarity activists who use megaphones and others means of sound amplification that are “loud and noisy” (Mathiesen, 2004, p. vi), namely costly fines. As we show, this approach to illegalization is meant to sonically silence dissent – that is to disperse, disappear and delete it from public space.

Megaphone Use and By-Law Fines

As the capital of Canada, Ottawa is frequently the site of demonstrations spanning the political spectrum, from the annual “National March for Life” protest calling for the recriminalization of abortion (McDonald, 2011) and the yearly “Canadian Police and Peace Officers’ Memorial” ceremony commemorating law enforcement officer deaths where demands for more punitive laws are frequently uttered (Ferguson, 2023) to Indigenous sovereignty rallies (Barker, 2015), migrant justice demonstrations (Rivas-Sánchez, 2024), and other social justice events that converge in and around Parliament Hill where the country’s House of Commons and Senate are located. The area and its many protests are currently policed by the Parliamentary Protective Services, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Ottawa Police Service (Ferguson, 2023).

Events of the kind outlined above are also subject to the current iteration of City of Ottawa’s (2017) “Noise” by-law, which aims “to reduce the noise level, so as to preserve, protect and promote health, safety, welfare, and peace for the inhabitants of the City” – a measure described as being “in the public interest”. The by-law includes provisions on “Sound reproduction or amplification devices”, which explicitly prohibits the operation of such devices on highways or public spaces except under specified exemptions, such as possessing a permit for a special event (City of Ottawa, 2017).

In the experience of the second author – who has served as a police liaison at previous small protests (e.g. the 1 March 2021 “Disability Day of Mourning” rally organized by the Disability Justice Network of Ontario – see Calugay-Casuga, 2021) and large demonstrations (e.g. the 25 July 2021 “Status for All March Into Ottawa” rally organized by the Migrant Rights Network – see Ramlakhan, 2021) near and on Parliament Hill that included speakers sharing their insights and demands using megaphones and public address systems – Ottawa’s noise by-law had rarely, if ever, been used in the context of protest policing until recently. For instance, even during the protracted “Freedom Convoy” occupation of early 2022, when transport truck horns blared incessantly across Parliament Hill and the surrounding Centretown neighborhood, the City of Ottawa initially refrained from enforcing this by-law. It was only after Ottawa resident Zexi Lee, alongside her lawyer Paul Champ, filed a multi-million-dollar lawsuit and obtained a court injunction against convoy organizers that any decisive action was taken, and fines started to be issued (CBC News, 2022).

When juxtaposed against the actions taken during weekly Palestinian solidarity protests that began in October 2023, it is evident that a stark contrast in noise by-law enforcement has emerged. As these demonstrations, echoing global solidarity, grew and continued through November and December 2023 amidst Israel’s relentless assault on Gaza, by-law officers and Ottawa Police Service members began issuing fines. The fines, which local activists deemed to be a “clear attempt to suppress pro-Palestinian organizing and support” (Glass, 2023), began with penalties for megaphone use at Palestine solidarity demonstrations and subsequently extended to participants of other social justice causes such as Trans rights rallies, labour strikes, and climate protests (Horizon Ottawa, 2024a).

While the fines themselves could be understood as a form of silent silencing in so far as they are mere pieces of paper delivered in an “unbounded” fashion as those “confronted by them” are unsure when they will be applied (Mathiesen, 2004, p. 11), the ways in which a number of them were meted-out highlights the degree to which this repression was enacted in a loud manner causing significant emotional distress. For instance, Hakima Mokarty – an Ottawa resident fined for using a megaphone at a Palestine solidarity protest – shared a personal account that underscores the anguish associated with such enforcement: “The officer came at about 5:30 pm [to give me a ticket for using a megaphone]. My 12-year-old daughter saw him and came to tell me that a police officer was at our doorstep. She was scared and asked me ‘are they going to take you to jail?’” (Horizon Ottawa, 2024). As has long been documented in the context of imprisonment (e.g. Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2003), this example highlights the degree to which state repression not only impacts the intended target of criminalization and other forms of illegalization, but also extends to their loved ones and communities.

Sarah Abdul-Karim, a member of Palestinian Youth Movement Ottawa, described the noise by-law and its enforcement as “a threat to our rights as Canadians and a threat to Ottawa’s longstanding tradition of social movements and protest” (Glass, 2023). Illustrating that where there are attempts by authorities to silence those challenging dominant relations there is steadfast resistance, Ammar Afaneh of the Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians emphasized, “We need our voices to be heard”. He added, “I was deeply disappointed to see this happening”, but affirmed that there were no plans to cease the weekly demonstrations despite the looming threat of fines (Williams, 2023).

As the Palestine solidarity events continued demanding an immediate and permanent ceasefire, a Canadian arms embargo preventing the delivery of weapons to the Israeli military, the cessation of Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine, and the release of all political prisoners, the fines continued. By the end of March 2024, 48 fines averaging roughly \$480 each and totalling approximately \$23,000 had been levied against activists (Horizon Ottawa, 2024a). It is important to again underscore that, historically, such demonstrations had not been penalized for employing sound amplification devices, further underscoring the selective enforcement of this by-law. If one ever questioned the allegiances of law enforcement in terms of whose side they are on, these actions provide a definitive answer, which ought not to surprise given that policing and by-law officers are often preoccupied with the activities of people pushed to the margins of society who are targeted for exclusion and punishment (Hermer and Mosher, 2002).

Defending the Right to Dissent

Amid the Palestinian solidarity protests, the weight of the by-law fines was being felt among participants. For instance, during a December 2023 rally, Sarah Abdul-Karim highlighted the disruptive nature of these penalties, stating: “we want our protests to be focused on our people back home, who are suffering and dying, we want it to be focused on our government’s inaction and not so much on these bylaw tickets” (Tunney, 2024). Underscoring the significant loss of time and energy caused by what she described as authoritarian measures that aim to suppress dissent and distract from the primary objective of advocating for Palestinian liberation, it was clear that like “political resistance against... softened fascism, in the form of silent silencing” (Mathiesen, 2004, p. 13) was needed, so too was the need for organized pushback against sonic silencing of the kind observed in Ottawa.

In response to the illegalization of amplified speeches at Palestine solidarity events and other social justice demonstrations in Ottawa, organizers representing over 50 groups convened a press conference and rally on 26 March 2024 in front of the City Hall to launch the “Defend the Right to Dissent” campaign (Horizon Ottawa, 2024a). The initiative articulated two central demands at the time. First, the protesters called for an amendment to by-law 2017-255 to exempt demonstrations and pickets from penalties related to megaphone usage and other sound amplification devices. Second, they urged the immediate rescission of these fines to uphold fundamental constitutional rights, specifically freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

The call to cancel these penalties garnered widespread support from a coalition of advocacy groups, including the Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians, Palestinian Youth Movement Ottawa, Independent Jewish Voices Ottawa, Labour for Palestine, INSAF uOttawa, O4P (Ottawa 4 Palestine), and other allied local organizations. As part of their organizing, the groups enrolled legal experts and allies to contest what they describe as an undemocratic, discriminatory, and politically motivated policy enforced by the



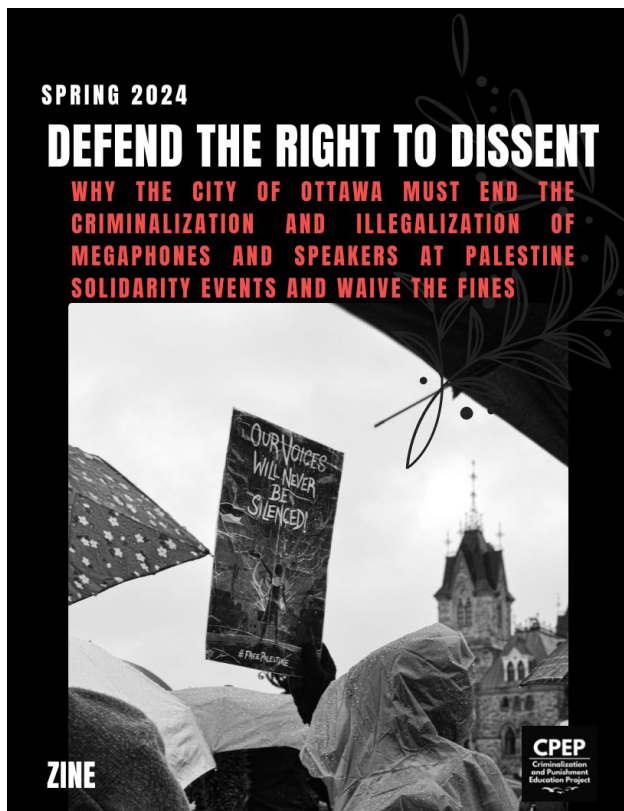
City of Ottawa under Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's administration, who has consistently expressed his support for Israel even amid the on-going atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians, including defending the raising of the Israeli flag at City Hall to mark the settler colonial nation's independence (Raymond, 2024). When the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign was launched, organizers encouraged residents to join their campaign by contacting city councillors and the mayor to protest the unjust fines issued, including through an email zap that called on political representatives to adopt their demands (Horizon Ottawa, 2024b).

Action Research in Support of Resistance to the Illegalization of Palestine Solidarity Protests

In the face of state repression, what is the role of criminology in times of war and genocide? For Vincenzo Ruggiero (2023), there is a need to engage by documenting atrocities and contributing to resistance to end violence on all fronts. For the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP), the answer was to endorse and contribute to the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign. Founded in 2012, CPEP has brought together criminology, sociology, and socio-legal studies students and professors from Carleton University and the University of Ottawa to organize with criminalized people and their loved ones, and other community members to reduce the use and harms of policing and imprisonment, while working towards decarceral futures (Doyle et al., 2021). Much of this organizing has involved research, public awareness initiatives (e.g. documentaries) and events (e.g. vigils), social and news media interventions, and mutual aid initiatives (e.g. the COVID-19 Prisoner Emergency Support Fund with the Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project) and campaigns (e.g. the #NOPE | No Ottawa Prison Expansion).

Part of our involvement in the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign has been to research the history and uses of the megaphone and sound amplification, including in the context of social movements and state repression, along with the origins and subsequent shifts and continuities in noise ordinances. We do this to highlight how the present fight around the sonic silencing of Palestine solidarity protests in Ottawa matters for those fighting against domination and for a better world as it is part of a longer struggle over power in which sound is a weapon. This work also entails contributing to the liberation of Palestinians and our own in terms of defending our free speech and assembly rights through the creation of "Defend the Right to Dissent" zines. The first instalment, released in April 2024 (CPEP, 2024), provides an overview of the initial struggle, testimonials from Palestine solidarity rally participants who have been fined, key campaign demands and information about participating organizations (see below). The zine, developed in concert with key campaign organizers, was put together to drive traffic to the email zap and help generate turnout for the rally that took place in May 2024.

While a modest contribution to the campaign, the inaugural zine is an example of a critical criminological intervention that challenges what Ruggiero (2012, p. 159) calls "mainstream criminology", which encompasses research and public interventions undertaken as part of "a conflict against the powerless, for the perpetuation of the status quo and the exacerbation of social injustice". It is also an example of what Victoria Canning and colleagues (2023, pp. 8-9) describe as "activist criminology" that involves working "with counter-hegemonic groups of all shapes and sizes" to enable "communities to build the bonds of solidarity and safety that facilitate their survival during increasingly perilous times". Although the noise ordinance by-law remains in place, the campaign did nonetheless pause the issuing of fines for several months. However, following the one-year anniversary of the atrocities on 7 October 2023 by Hamas and those that have been perpetrated by the state of Israel since, the temporary depenalization of noise by-laws ceased and the fines resumed coupled with criminalization of dissent in the form of arrests, charges and detention, including in the context of jail support rallies to free Palestine solidarity protestors (Greco, 2024). In the process, the relationship between the military industrial and prison industrial complexes (Davis & Mendieta, 2005) have again been brought into clear view, highlighting the need to eradicate both to achieve liberation for all.

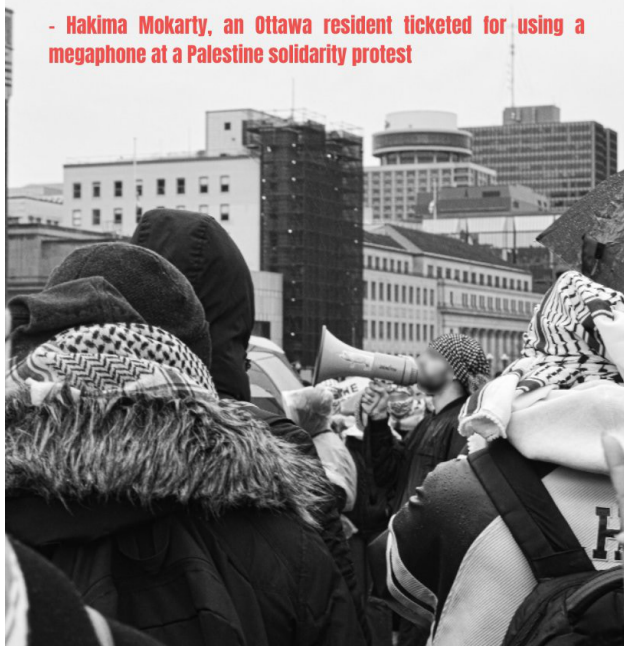


After decades of occupation and apartheid in Palestine, and the transformation of Gaza into an open-air prison, Israel launched its latest military campaign in October 2024. The genocidal violence unleashed by Israel, which has killed tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians under the pretense of eradicating Hamas, prompted massive demonstrations around the world calling for a ceasefire, an end to arms supplies to Israel, the release of all hostages and political prisoners held during this long-running conflict, and the liberation of Palestine.

Many of these demonstrations have been subject to criminalization and other forms of illegalization, such as municipal bylaw fines. For instance, the noise bylaw 2017-255 has been abused to suppress free speech in Ottawa, resulting in 48 fines related to social justice protests, costing over \$23,000, to Ottawa community members who are supporting Palestine solidarity rallies, Trans Health Defense rallies, striking workers, and climate protests. In Ottawa, Canada's capital which is located on unceded and unreturned Algonquin Anishinaabe territory, many unions and community organizations are urging an end to the use of municipal noise bylaws to illegally arrest and impose expensive fines on protesters who use megaphones and loudspeakers to amplify their dissent, resistance, and demands.

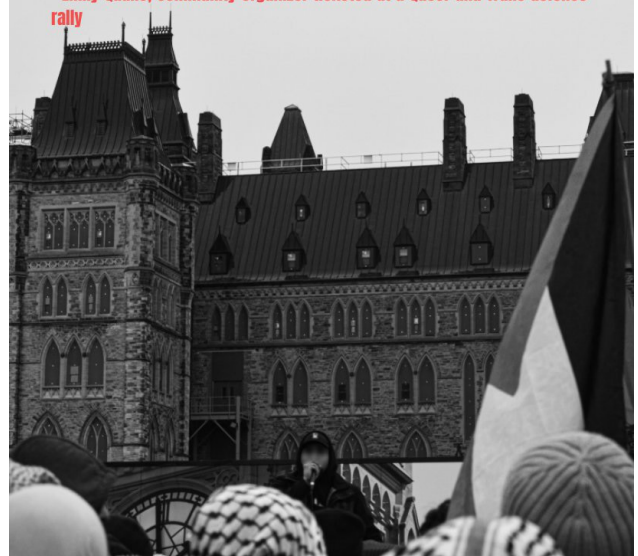
"The officer came at about 5:30 pm [to give me a ticket for using a megaphone]. My 12-year-old daughter saw him and came to tell me that a police officer was at our doorstep. She was scared and asked me 'are they going to take you to jail?'"

- Hakima Mokarty, an Ottawa resident ticketed for using a megaphone at a Palestine solidarity protest



"Throughout 2023, we have defended schools and school boards, indoor and outdoor events, and countered multiple hateful rallies, without one ticket being issued. It was only after dozens of tickets were issued to Pro-Palestinian organizers that trans rights supporters received fines for using a megaphone. These unjust enforcements and escalations of hostility follow a frightening global trend of police crackdown on justice and labour movements. It is essential that by-law and police do not penalize us for using megaphones to help us safely exercise our Charter right to protest."

- Emily Quaille, community organizer ticketed at a Queer and Trans defence rally





Conclusion: On the Need for Academic Engagement and Resistance in Genocidal Times

So, to conclude, what ought to be the role of scholars in criminology and adjacent disciplines right now? Shall we practice criminologies of liberation or oppression? Shall we practice criminologies that work with or against the oppressed? Shall we practice criminologies committed to organizing and building the people power necessary to win the better world that is possible or commit ourselves to insular criminologies from the imagined safe perches of our offices and seminar room lecterns?

While the answers to the questions above may appear to be obvious, the number of criminologists who have allowed themselves to be “silently silenced” (Mathiesen, 2004) amid the on-going genocide in Palestine and/or whose work informs state repression, requires those of us engaged in social justice struggles through research and organizing to state that which ought to be taken for granted. If what has and continues to transpire at our university – where the liberal façade has often shown itself to be intolerant to dissent on the question of Palestine and where the idea of the university as a refuge (Hogeveen & Woolford, 2006) is being shattered as proponents of the status quo inside and outside ‘ivory tower’ gates attempt to silence those denouncing occupation, apartheid and genocide – we critical criminologists and scholars have no choice but to engage in collective struggle and advocacy with the oppressed and antagonism against rather than complicity with the carceral state. Our ideas and our ability to share them are again under attack.

One on-going site of struggle has been the classroom where some professors at the University of Ottawa have faced backlash from students who are ardent supporters of the state of Israel for discussing the genocidal violence Palestinians have faced for decades from imperialist and colonial forces. For instance, professors have faced complaints and have been denounced in national newspaper columns (e.g. Gerson & Waller, 2023) for including course material critical of the state of Israel, such as screening a Human Rights Watch (2022) video describing Gaza as an “open-air prison”.

Another on-going site of struggle has been university campuses, where encampments in support of Palestinians emerged across the world during the spring of 2024, including in Canada (see Liddle, 2024). In response to the organization of an encampment on the lawn of Tabaret Hall demanding that the University of Ottawa disclose its investments in the military-industrial complex and divest from war profiteering tied to the on-going genocide in Palestine, the administration threatened “serious consequences” for those involved in staging this peaceful action before it even began (uOttawa, 2024a). As the encampment persisted and grew from its 1 May 2024 launch to its conclusion on 9 July 2024, the struggle was defined by solidarity among hundreds of students, professors, and allies who shared space, knowledge, and food for several weeks and a university administration who refused to meet the demands of the organizers. The latter even appointed a Senior Advisor on Antisemitism on 25 June 2025 (uOttawa, 2024b) who posted vitriolic social media posts conflating encampment support with antisemitism prior to and after his appointment, all while the university administration claimed it was negotiating with organizers in good faith. As the Senior Advisor on Antisemitism continued his bombastic social media interventions, which even included calling his fellow colleague and professor in our department – a racialized woman with expertise on racism and Islamophobia – a “liar” for her comments critical of Israeli apartheid, occupation, and genocide endured by Palestinians, the university alongside other powerful entities in Ottawa withdrew from Capital Pride (2024) – who issued a “Statement in Solidarity with Palestine” – without explanation other than to comment in news coverage that the statement did not align with the academic institution’s “mandate and values” (Eltherington, 2024). Weeks later, the Senior Advisor ultimately resigned when he faced backlash for having called a September 2024 Israeli attack that injured thousands of Lebanese civilians, which involved the explosion of pagers said to belong to members of Hezbollah (Reuters, 2024), “brilliant” (CBC News, 2024). While the university’s administration has not commented on whether reprisals against encampment organizers and participants are indeed forthcoming, it established protocols in anticipation of classroom and campus disruptions as the fall semester began in September 2024, while its investments in death making continue. It also hired more private security who were readily present across campus during the fall 2024 semester.

The whole episode has contributed to a significant chill on campus around the on-going genocide in Palestine. However, colleagues who are members of Faculty for Palestine Ottawa (F4P Ottawa), including the second author, have resisted this chill. One such effort involved introducing a motion at the 30 April 2025 annual general meeting of the Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa (APUO) to divest its strike fund “from institutions, corporations and other entities enabling human rights violations, war crimes, and any other breaches of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, “unequivocally” support and defend “the academic freedom of its members to teach and pursue inquiry about Palestine that is free from institutional and political censorship”, as well as support “students’, professors’, librarians’ and staff members’ rights to assemble and protest peacefully on campus without disruption, surveillance, reprisal or violence from police, security, or other quarters”, among other measures (APUO, 2025, pp. 2-3). The initiative passed during the online meeting despite a failed effort by motion opponents to have the item removed from the agenda for approximately the first half of the scheduled two-hour meeting (that

was extended by an hour following a strongly supported procedural motion by an F4P Ottawa organizer to add more time to the meeting to allow for more debate among the membership, both for motion proponents and opponents alike), along with subsequent failed attempts by opposing colleagues to push the vote to a future APUO meeting. Also of note is that this motion was introduced, debated, and passed after an unprecedented rescheduling of the annual general meeting that was originally supposed to be bimodal and take place on 17 April 2025 with less than 72 hours' notice, which the association's executive committee attributed to "a combination of factors" in a 15 April 2025 email. The whole episode highlights how academics who engage in Palestine solidarity within their faculty associations face attempts to silence and define them out of legitimate forums.

The wider academy also remains a site of struggle, particularly for scholars seeking to expose violence perpetrated by states. A particularly concerning episode involved a colleague who co-authored a paper documenting legal violations committed by Israeli charitable organizations engaged in the expansion of settlements in Palestine. Despite being published in a reputable peer-reviewed academic journal, the article was met with a complaint from some of the organizations examined in the study, alleging that it promoted antisemitic ideas. As a result, the journal's editors launched an investigation to determine whether the paper should be retracted based on these accusations. In addition to meticulously refuting the unfounded claims leveled against their work, one of the co-authors was compelled to invoke his Jewish identity in defense of the paper's legitimacy – an argument that ultimately helped prevent its retraction, despite attempts to discredit its findings on political grounds.

We conclude this piece by raising these examples to highlight that the classroom, the university, the faculty union boardroom, and the academy are not spaces of refuge. Rather, these are spaces – like the streets where Ottawa by-law and police officers are now once again busy issuing fines to Palestine solidarity protesters engaged in amplified dissent – that are all sites of struggle. And it is our responsibility to persist, to organize, and to resist authoritarianism and institutional complicity in genocide at work on and off our campuses. Contributing to community-led initiatives through research and activism, of the kind CPEP has engaged in as part of the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign, as well as supporting student-led organizing such as encampments and divestment campaigns are small ways to do just that.

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The Criminalisation of War Starts Here: Activism Against Arms Industry in South Korea

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Abstract: Critical criminologists highlight how warmaking is driven by political and economic interests, often paradoxically alongside efforts to regulate warfare. As the global arms race accelerates, rising arms trade and military expenditure risk masking the immorality of war and hindering peace efforts. This paper presents a case study of South Korea, an emerging non-Western actor in the global arms market, examining how arms fairs are increasingly promoted as operational spaces where war is depicted as a benign industry that can be normalised and integrated into economic and political agendas. The findings indicate that arms fairs play a crucial role in the arms trade by allowing states and weapon producers to lawfully portray military spending as a public good, while remaining silent on the humanitarian costs of war. Furthermore, based on the focus group interview with Korean peace campaigners, the paper suggests that the growing prominence of arms fairs has led peace activists to action, despite criminalisation, to disrupt these events with the aim of dismantling the political economy supporting arms producers and architects of war, and promoting non-violence and pacification. It concludes that scholarly focus should persist in highlighting the criminogenic aspects of arms fairs as an integral part of warmaking.

'War is only a cowardly escape from the problems of peace'

- Thomas Mann

Introduction

The ongoing global arms race continues to intensify amid persistent conflicts, including genocide and warfare in the Middle East. The Ukraine–Russia war remains unresolved, while the United States is warning of a potential conflict between China and Taiwan, often citing this as justification for expanding its military footprint in East Asia. On the other hand, numerous states are exiting key humanitarian disarmament treaties; notably, countries bordering Russia—Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland—have already left or are in the process of withdrawing from the Mine Ban Treaty. At the 2025 Summit, NATO member nations committed to increasing their military expenditure by 5% of their gross domestic product, under significant pressure from US President Donald Trump, with South Korea and Japan also being urged to follow this target. This situation is likely to exacerbate the global arms race, as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that 2024 has already reached the highest level of global military spending since the end of the Cold War (Tian et al., 2024).

The acceleration of global violence presents compounded challenges to those who have long advocated for peace and undertaken collective efforts to oppose war and the militarisation of the planet. While war remains a sovereign act, its socio-political foundations have undergone a profound transformation due to the evolution of international law, which enforces stricter regulations and holds states accountable through sanctions, scrutiny, and humanitarian interventions (Glanville, 2013). This development signifies a shift towards prioritising ethical considerations and civilian protection over traditional, state-centric justifications for conflict (Bellamy, 2015). For example, critical criminologists have consistently questioned the legitimacy of warfare rooted in the ‘just war’ tradition, which primarily relies on two criteria (Hathaway & Shapiro, 2017; Lazar, 2017; Walzer, 2006 [1977]): *Jus ad bellum*, asserting that only legitimate authorities—principally nation-states—may wage war as a last resort and with just intent, and *Jus in bello*, which defines acceptable conduct during war based on principles of proportionality and humanitarian considerations.

The ‘just war’ tradition is so vast that a comprehensive critique would warrant another paper. For the remit of this paper, it is sufficient to underscore Ruggiero’s (2023, 269) analysis of how these principles often falter in practice, becoming ‘blank behavioural rules’ and ‘hollow normative principles’ employed to justify warfare. He argues that rather than serving as genuine preventative norms, the concept of ‘just war’ is retrospectively legitimised by victors, while atrocities committed by the defeated are condemned as crimes against global peace—leaving similar actions by the victors unexamined and unaccounted for (Baars, 2013; Zolo, 2020). Recognising that ‘there are no just wars’ in practice (Fiala, 2008) and understanding war as a socially constructed phenomenon rooted in power relations rather than moral imperatives (Ruggiero, 2005), criminologists are well-positioned to shed light on how deviant acts of ‘warmaking’ (Tilly, 1985)—from weapon testing and production to military spending, training, and warfare—occur.

Building on this perspective, the paper examines how states exert their power to rationalise warmaking as a benign enterprise within their political economy, particularly through four key mechanisms: legalisation, marketisation, representation, and punishment. Particular emphasis is placed on arms fairs as sites that showcase new weapons and promote the use of force as a means to achieve peace and security, functioning within the broader context of arms production and trade. This observation of arms fairs is motivated by Ruggiero’s concept of ‘war as carnival’ (2005), as well as by a preliminary investigation into the literature, which reveals that their broader implications for militarism remain insufficiently explored. Furthermore, considering that existing research predominantly focuses on Western contexts, the paper aims to elucidate the expanding roles of emerging non-Western actors in both fuelling and mitigating global conflict and violence.

In this regard, South Korea is chosen for a case study, which is an emerging non-Western actor in the global arms trade and conflict, motivated by two main reasons. First, South Korea is a symbolic space where militarism, colonialism, the Cold War, and development intersect (Doucette, 2024; Moon, 2005); emerging from the Korean War and decades of military dictatorship, it has grown into one of the world’s largest economies with substantial military expenditure, expanding its arms trade with countries engaged in conflict and violence such as Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Bahrain, and Thailand. However, South Korea’s arms trade has so far faced limited scrutiny compared to Western countries. Secondly, South Korea has a rich history of peace activism that resists militarisation, with peace activists

deliberately challenging societal militarisation and disrupting arms industries—an area that warrants further scholarly attention. Their activism highlights gaps in the existing legal frameworks that regulate, justify, and promote the arms trade, revealing contradictions between these frameworks and pacifist approaches to peace. Moreover, the fact that this activism is often met with criminalisation warrants critical criminologists' investigation, with a focus on how dissent against state-facilitated businesses such as warmaking is targeted and silenced.

The paper is structured as follows: First, it examines theoretical discussions regarding the evolution of legal regulations governing warfare, highlighting their shortcomings in protecting life and promoting peace. It also explores how the legitimisation of warfare is often driven by political and economic interests, thereby rendering warfare a form of ordinary business. The paper then contextualises the political and social conditions that have enabled South Korea to emerge as a global arms producer. Subsequently, a case study of peace activism in South Korea is presented, focusing on efforts to disrupt arms fairs—particularly the incident involving the prosecution of peace activists. This analysis illustrates the power dynamics of resistance and criminalisation within the broader context of warmaking. The conclusion examines how criminological studies should support these efforts to reclaim justice for peace without resorting to war.

The Political Economy of Warfare: Locking Society into Violence

Understanding the diverse causes and dynamics of the global arms trade has been explored through different theoretical perspectives, each offering valuable insights into why states engage in and perpetuate arms proliferation. As many summarise (Glaser, 2000; Kydd, 2000; Willardson & Johnson, 2022), realist perspectives see it as a rational response to the anarchic nature of the international system, where states compete for power and security through the accumulation of weapons, often driven by concerns over potential threats and mutual distrust. In contrast, liberal theories emphasise the role of international institutions, treaties, and economic interdependence in potentially mitigating arms proliferation, arguing that cooperation and diplomacy can reduce incentives for excessive armament. Constructivist approaches highlight the influence of shared norms, identities, and perceptions, suggesting that the arms race is shaped by socially constructed ideas about security, threat, and sovereignty, which evolve over time. While these perspectives are pertinent for examining various aspects of arms trade dynamics, this paper primarily follows Marxist theories, which interpret the arms race as an extension of global capitalism—fuelled by the economic interests of a military-industrial complex seeking profits and maintaining dominance, often at the expense of social welfare and sustainable development (Coulomb & Bellais, 2008; Egan, 2022).

The Marxist framing of the arms trade as a capital-driven enterprise is complemented by insights from the political economy of warfare, which examines how economic interests and political power are intricately interconnected in sustaining and perpetuating conflict. It argues that warfare is not driven solely by security concerns or ideological motives but is fundamentally rooted in economic structures and vested interests (Elveren, 2019). For example, the military-industrial complex, resource extraction industries, and arms manufacturers often benefit financially from ongoing conflicts, creating strong incentives to sustain hostilities. Mills' (1956) observation on the power of elites remains pertinent, as political elites, working in collaboration with other powerful groups, may see warfare as an opportunity to consolidate influence, control valuable resources, or maintain economic dominance. This observation can be translated into criminological language as 'the crimes of the powerful' (Rothe & Kauzlarich, 2016), which refer to illegal or unethical acts committed by individuals or entities with significant social, political, or economic influence—such as states and corporations—that serve their interests often at the expense of broader social welfare and justice. These perspectives reveal that the causes, duration, and character of warfare are heavily shaped by the intertwined interests of politics and economics, framing warfare as a nexus of political enterprise and economic activity (Sbicca, 2012). The arms race further intensifies this dynamic by increasing dependence on military industries, fostering a cycle in which societies become growingly reliant on defence expenditure.

As Coe and Vaynman (2019, 342) describe armament 'is a costly measure states use to wage their disputes' instead of relying on peaceful negotiations and diplomacy. However, because military spending has growingly transformed into profiteering businesses, the military-industrial complex is 'created, protected, privileged, and subsidized by the state...without demonstrable public benefits, and without any built-in safeguards for the public interest' (Adams, 1968, 656). With profits derived from arms sales and governmental subsidies, arms producers lobby lawmakers to secure lucrative contracts while

defying accountability to the public and to those in areas such as battlefields and training ranges where their weapons are used and tested. Fichtelberg (2006, 686) critically observes that ‘the ethical codes of most defense contractors do not acknowledge any unique ethical responsibilities incumbent upon these firms arising from the special nature of the goods that they produce. Rather, they invariably discuss their responsibilities towards shareholders and to the firms, subcontractors, and governments which they do business’. In the absence of effective democratic oversight mechanisms, arms production and sales are often hidden behind the guise of military secrets, while governments and corporations assert the arms industry is well ‘controlled’ under international law.

As warmaking becomes one of the most state-facilitated enterprises in modern societies, the production and possession of increasingly destructive weapons have come to serve as key indicators of a state’s material power (Farrell, 2005). Nowadays, alongside conventional weapons, new and emerging military technologies are developed and deployed in ‘degenerate wars’ (Shaw, 2008), where their use often blurs the lines between combatants and civilians, exacerbating violence and complicating ethical and legal standards surrounding warfare. The presence of these weapons amplifies the relentless arms race, leading to the development of increasingly destructive systems such as weapons of mass destruction, AI, and aerospace technology, while undermining efforts for ‘peace without weapons’ (Lichterhan & Cabasso, 2002; Wallace, 2016). Media often frames warmaking as inevitable that requires ‘heroic sacrifice’ (Christoyannopoulos, 2023), a narrative exploited by elites who depict military actions as delivering justice against perceived enemies (Klein, 2011). For example, acts of killing are portrayed as ‘rightful punishment,’ as seen in the US-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Yemen (Degenhardt, 2010; Dunford & Neu, 2019). These stories promote the image of war as restoring order and enforcing norms, often dismissing or justifying atrocities such as the No Gun Ri Massacre and herbicide warfare in Indochina, which are rarely acknowledged publicly and framed as ‘collateral damage’ (Morris-Suzuki, 2009; Oatsvall, 2013).

By contrast, the extensive costs of warmaking are often concealed and even employed to facilitate militarised adaptations that escalate socio-ecological risks. These adaptations are frequently portrayed as technological innovations within the defence sector, purportedly aimed at enhancing climate and environmental security, thereby masking their true implications. For example, new weapons and systems are showcased as contributing to net-zero targets and environmental protection, such as lead-free bullets, ESG investments in arms manufacturers, and hydrogen-powered jet fighters (Post & Le Billon, 2024). At the same time, the military and conservative think-tanks justify the necessity of increased military expenditure in the face of intensifying risks of war that arising from ‘resource scarcity’. This framing of ‘low-carbon green warfare’, however, dangerously conceals the reality that much of military activities, from fossil fuel consumption to environmental warfare, are significant causal factors in climate breakdown and the destruction of ecosystems (often referred to as ‘ecocide’) (Depledge, 2023; Hwang, 2022).

In this context, the arms industry is being legally promoted and protected by states, even as, paradoxically, global legal frameworks for regulating arms trade and transfers continue to develop. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), adopted in 1998, which now forms the cornerstone of international criminal justice, and in principle, signatories of the Rome Statute may face criminal sanctions if their military actions fail to comply with international law—particularly the Rome Statute, international human rights law, and international humanitarian law. Even so, as Baars (2013) and Hamilton (2020) find, corporations implicated in armed conflicts have avoided criminal sanctions while ‘legally compliant’ arms exports are politically rationalised as essential for national security and economically championed as vital drivers of employment and economic growth (Cockburn, 2021). Weapons thus emerge as highly valued commodities, with profit motives fuelling war preparations that often overshadow social and ecological concerns. Consequently, substantial public expenditure and private investment increasingly target the development, proliferation, and enhancement of military capacities—an entrenched trend not only in the United States, the world’s leading military spender, but also across Europe (Newlove-Eriksson & Eriksson, 2023) and Asia (Bitzinger, 2015).

In parallel, it appears that the regulation of the arms trade—despite addressing ‘illicit’ arms trafficking as a key aspect of the global security agenda—has largely developed alongside, rather than as a direct result of, the creation of legal sanctions against specific acts of warfare. The Arms Trade Treaty, signed in 2013, exemplifies this, as it prohibits arms transfers to parties that may commit genocide, crimes against humanity, or terrorism, while its mandate acknowledges ‘the legitimate political, security, economic and

commercial interests of States in the international trade in conventional arms'. While the treaty requires states to implement due processes and safeguards for 'ethical' weapon sales, it effectively normalises arms production itself (Cooper, 2022), neglecting the arbitrary distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' weapon use in practice. Although the Rome Statute prohibits certain acts as 'war crimes', the act of killing itself is not criminalised. In this socio-legal context, 'soldiers do not have to excuse themselves for anything, unless they refuse to kill' because 'war is the supreme expression of conventionality' (Ruggiero, 2005, 248). The same applies to arms producers and traders, whose activities are similarly embedded within this logic.

The legal protection of the arms industry extends beyond direct measures such as administrative exemptions and financial subsidies to encompass broader mechanisms aimed at suppressing dissent and consolidating its privileged position within national and international frameworks. Historically, pacifists advocating non-violence have been dismissed as naïve heretics (Ryan, 2023), portrayed as enemies' collaborators, and subjected to criminal punishment and state violence, including red tagging. During the world wars, conscientious objectors faced severe penalties, with some sentenced to death (Goodall, 2010). Today, many countries continue this trend, with objectors facing repeated legal sanctions, restrictions on mobility and employment, and social marginalisation—effectively amounting to 'social death'.¹ Punitive measures rooted in the state's monopoly on force target both external enemies and internal dissent, constituting a 'war on dissent'. As many social movement theorists observe, such tactics are employed by both authoritarian and liberal-democratic states to silence dissent by portraying protesters as threats to social stability or national security (Della Porta, 1997; Fernandez, 2008; Selmini & Di Ronco, 2019). These strategies often involve criminalisation, marginalisation, or delegitimisation of non-conforming voices, thereby undermining democratic participation and suppressing critical debate. By framing protesters as threats, states seek to justify repressive measures, silence opposition, and maintain control over dominant narratives, ultimately hindering efforts to challenge unjust power structures and promote social change.

Methodology

This paper is based on a small-scale study guided by the working thesis that arms fairs and their associated legal frameworks function as state apparatuses that reinforce the militarisation of society, while exploring how peace activists navigate and challenge these mechanisms through their campaigns. It employed a multi-method approach comprising focus group interviews with peace activists who have monitored South Korea's arms trade, alongside an analysis of legal documents and court rulings related to protests at arms fairs. As the precise size of the arms trade is not disclosed to the public for 'security reasons', media reports and government statistics were collected to illustrate South Korea's growth in the global arms market. The study also examines statements submitted by activists to the judiciary. It investigates the motivations behind their resistance at these events, the responses of judicial authorities such as police and prosecutors, their perspectives on peace, and the challenges they anticipate facing in the future. The interviews were conducted in Korean, and to ensure transparency, the English translations were reviewed and verified by the activists themselves. Where possible, data were triangulated and cross-examined to enhance their credibility.

The focused group interview was conducted with members of a peace NGO called *World Without War*. Founded in 2003, *World Without War* is a collective of peace activists that emerged as an advocacy campaign for conscientious objection to military service in South Korea. It is an affiliate of *War Resisters' International*, which promotes solidarity among grassroots anti-war and pacifist organisations, grounded in its founding declaration condemning war as a crime against humanity. Since the mid-2000s, this peace group has actively expanded its mission to oppose arms suppliers and to scrutinise their activities publicly, arguing that 'increased arms trades or an obsession with more destructive weapons' lead to the normalisation of militaristic responses to conflict and social issues.² The interview, conducted on 29 August 2024 with five of the eight peace campaigners who were prosecuted for their direct action at the arms fair DX Korea 2022, focused on discussing the following issues: (1) the reasons why peace activists resist the arms trade, (2) how they navigate the justice system in the face of prosecution for their actions, and (3) the grounds on which peace activists defend their peace actions against the rationalisation of warfare. The participants in the conversation have various experiences in peace activism, ranging from conscientious objection to military service to feminist peace action, disarmament, and human rights

1 See the UN Human Rights Council's report (A/HRC/56/30).

2 More information in Korean about the group can be accessed at http://www.withoutwar.org/?page_id=10658



advocacy. To protect their privacy, further details about the participants cannot be disclosed to prevent the identification of individual interviewees.

From a Country in War to a Country Complicit in Wars: The ‘K-Defence’ Industry in a Militarising World

Before presenting a case study of peace activism aimed at disrupting arms fairs, this section illustrates how South Korea has evolved and established its emerging position in the global arms trade, positioning itself as a ‘freedom fighter’ against communism and, more recently, terrorism, while simultaneously developing its arms industry as an economic enterprise. The Korean government has purportedly securitised the division of the Korean Peninsula, claiming that it is ‘the only region in the world’ that remains divided. While this framing is somewhat misleading—considering countries such as Ireland, Cyprus, and others (Smetana & Ludvík, 2019)—its core message is clear and compelling: against the backdrop of the Korean War, the country must remain continually prepared for war should the 1953 Armistice Agreement be broken. The overarching message is that war could occur at any moment; therefore, South Korea’s survival depends on maintaining strong military capabilities to counterbalance North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear warheads (Hwang & Hwang, 2024).

Soon after the Korean War, South Korea strengthened its military alliance with the United States over the decades, extending its security and defence policies to position itself as a ‘freedom fighter’ against global communism beyond East Asia. Under Park Chung-hee’s military dictatorship, South Korea sent over 300,000 soldiers to participate in the US-led Many Flags campaign against the Viet Cong, despite domestic anti-war opposition (Kwon, 2020). Kim (2009) notes that both South Korea and North Korea missed opportunities for reconciliation after the Korean War due to US and Soviet intervention, while repressive regimes in both states committed violence to maintain societal control. The South Korean government has historically demonised civilians as North Korean spies, justifying violent repression in incidents such as the Jeju April 3rd Incident, the Bu-Ma Democratic Protests, and the Gwangju Uprising. Following democratisation, Roh Moo-hyun’s administration established transitional justice commissions to investigate past human rights abuses and foster reconciliation, primarily focusing on atrocities committed during military regimes. However, these efforts were limited to addressing domestic wrongdoings before 1987, neglecting ongoing state violence linked to militarism after democratisation, including forced displacement related to the expansion of US and Korean military bases and South Korea’s war crimes in Vietnam during the 1970s (Han, 2005).

Under a civilian-led government, South Korean military personnel—now in new uniforms but maintaining their existing influence—are positioned to collaborate with arms producers to capitalise on opportunities arising from domestic and global military tensions. This partnership enables them to justify ever-increasing military expenditure and to develop, produce, and export more weapons worldwide. Against the backdrop of the fragile security situation on the Korean Peninsula, a significant portion of South Korea’s economic resources has been allocated to military capabilities, making the country one of the top 10 military budget spenders and the ninth-largest arms exporter globally (Tian et al., 2024). The country’s commercial approach to maintaining military strength became more apparent following the establishment of the Defence Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) in 2006, which functions as a governmental control tower overseeing weapon testing, procurement of munitions, arms sales, and research and development in the defence sector.

South Korea’s rapid growth in the global arms market is demonstrated by its increasing sales figures. Projected to reach 20 billion dollars in 2024, the country’s arms exports have nearly tripled from 7.3 billion dollars in 2021. As of 2024, it is known that South Korea has signed arms sales agreements with twelve countries, including Indonesia, Poland, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Norway, Romania, and the Philippines. In 2025, the newly elected Korean president Lee Jae-Myong pledged to expand the country’s arms industry—known as ‘K-Defense’—with the goal of becoming one of the top four arms exporters worldwide. South Korea’s arms exports include a range of products—from conventional munitions and policing equipment such as tear gas, water cannons, and grenades, to advanced heavy weapons like the K2 Black Panther tank, K9 Thunder self-propelled howitzer, T-50 Golden Eagle jet fighter, and Hyunmoo ballistic missile systems. Furthermore, leading Korean defence firms—such as Hanwha, Korea Aerospace Industries, Korean Air, and LIG Nex1—have partnered with international companies to develop cutting-edge aerospace weapons and technologies, including unmanned fighters, drones, and

ballistic missiles. In March 2025, Hanwha Aerospace has signed a contract with the Romanian government to establish a factory for the production of K9 self-propelled artillery, expected to be operational by 2027. This marks the first time a Korean arms manufacturer has engaged in local production within a foreign country.

At the same time, the Korean government has been proactive in the proliferation of ‘ethical’ arms trades. By signing the Arms Trade Treaty in 2016 and also as a member of the Wassenaar Arrangement, the country has positioned itself distinctively as a responsible and legitimate state in the global theatre of arms control, in sharp contrast to its northern counterpart, often referred to as a ‘rogue state’, which exhibits irregular and illegal behaviours in weapons testing and production that threatens global peace and security. Under the pretext of deterring North Korea, South Korea has expanded its military bases and installations, routinely hosting large-scale military exercises—such as ‘Ulchi-Freedom Shield’—involving U.S. Forces Korea and other partner countries, where new munitions and military technologies are regularly tested (Kim, 2023).

War Begins Here! Activists Challenging the Normalisation of War as a Benign Industry

Against this backdrop, this section presents a case study illustrating how arms fairs have become central to the arms trade and are exploited as functional sites that rationalise weapon production and proliferation while promoting war as ‘entertainment’. It demonstrates how arms fairs are legally protected (legalisation), how war experiences are (un)represented (representation), how weapons are showcased as market commodities (marketisation), and how dissenting voices are criminalised (punishment). Additionally, as previously mentioned, the case study explores why and how peace activists organise actions to disrupt arms fairs and expose the state’s capacity to suppress dissent through criminal prosecution.

War Begins From Here: Arms Fairs as Playgrounds for War Merchants

Many countries have a long history of hosting arms fairs, where the word ‘fair’—commonly associated with festivals—belies their purpose of showcasing weapons and military systems capable of effectively destroying potential enemies. Notable international arms fairs include DSEI in the UK, IDEF in Turkey, MSPO in Poland, and IDEX in the UAE. These events serve as major platforms for displaying military technology, facilitating the global arms trade, and fostering networks within the defence industry, with both international and domestic manufacturers exhibiting their latest products, innovations, and experiments.

In South Korea, various arms fairs are held with governmental support and subsidies. They include KADEX (defence), ADEX (land forces equipment), Aerospace & Defense Exhibition (aerospace technologies), KPEX (policing), and MADEX (maritime defence) under the Defense Acquisition Act that promotes arms trade, with the former two promoted as the largest arms fairs in Asia. In these arenas of weaponry, optimistic terms such as prosperity, defence, security, and public safety are widely employed. Governments, arms producers, dealers, and academic and think-tank professionals are brought together, allowing new trends in warfare and military technologies to be observed and examined. It is reported that tens of thousands of visitors, including overseas delegates from governments and militaries as well as arms manufacturers, attend these events.

In those arms fairs, visitors are invited to engage more closely with warfare by playing war games, meeting military experts and scientists, and participating in entertainment events. The situation regarding the deployment and use of Korean weapons in war and atrocities is shrouded in a veil, while the government denies arms exports to war zones and mass media advertise economic gains through arms deals. However, some evidence has been found by NGOs indicating that Korean weapons have been used in battlefields and human rights violations although these instances have largely remained out of the public eye. While South Korea has resisted transparency, particularly in 2024 by not disclosing its arms trade information in the UN Register of Conventional Arms, media reports and government briefings have celebrated ‘successful arms exports’ globally. As a result, Korean-made weapons have been sold and potentially deployed in various contexts, including streets, battlefields, and sites of war crimes and genocide, revealing the arbitrary and problematic nature of the so-called ‘ethical’ arms trade. Despite a ruling from the International Court of Justice on Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine, many Korean corporations, underlying the government’s silence and implicit consent, have continued partnerships with the Israeli military and government.

Notable companies involved include Korea Aerospace Industries, Hanwha Systems, Hyundai Rotem, HD Hyundai Heavy Industries, and Poongsan, which produces cluster munitions (World Without War, 2023).³

This is why peace campaigners regard arms fairs not only as integral components of the arms trade but also as symbolic sites of resistance against militarisation and war preparations. On the necessity of disrupting the arms industry through the peace movement, Interviewee C emphasised that

‘weapons made in Korea are used in other countries, far removed from our daily life, resulting in fewer opportunities for critical reflection on weapons beyond perceiving them as merely sophisticated and expensive toys’.

Building on this perception, one interviewee described their actions at arms fairs as aimed at ‘breaking the silence’, stating that these actions ‘directly compel socially harmful activities like arms sales’ and that ‘secondary effects can be generated by drawing public attention to these actions’ (Interviewee C). Adding to this point, Interviewee A stressed:

‘At first, I was pondering how important it is to conduct resistance actions against arms expos in the context of monitoring the arms trade. After all, a fair is an event, and opposing the fair itself won’t stop arms trades... Now I see that events like arms fairs publicises the arms trade to the public, so I believe that demonstrating our actions directed at these events holds significant meaning’.

Positioned in public spaces outside battlefields, they make weapons highly visible and accessible to visitors. Recently, arms fairs have increasingly been designed as ‘family-friendly’ theme parks, offering children and parents the chance to ‘play’ war games, explore new military vehicles and drones, learn about environmentally friendly and advanced technologies, and take pictures acting as soldiers (saluting, posing with guns, etc.). Paradoxically, while these activities create a sense of ‘remoteness’ from war and violence for ordinary visitors—who are often not the buyers—they tend to omit critical discussions about how these weapons are ultimately deployed, against whom, and for what purposes, thus systematically remaining silent on their real-world human costs and consequences. Peace activism and protests at these events, with a larger goal to transform a war-dependent economy, aim to expose the unseen consequences of weapons and counter the war economy. Consequently, they have launched various campaigns, including resistance actions against arms fairs, solidarity events such as public talks, research initiatives, and special day actions like the Global Days of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS). These ‘breaking the silence’ efforts are particularly important in highlighting peace voices within society, especially amidst media narratives that tend to neutralise the destructive nature of weapons with words and metaphors (Flusberg et al., 2018). In this regard, Interviewee E underscores the unfairness experienced by both victims of war and visitors to arms fairs:

‘Well-crafted narratives surrounding employment and economic profits from the arms trade are fundamentally unjust because such accounts undermine the lives of people and ecosystems in the areas where bombardments occur’.

Their views are supported by an examination of the design and outcomes of arms fairs, whose success is primarily measured by market value, more specifically surplus. In these expos, no programmes are arranged for victims and survivors of war to testify to the consequences of deadly weapons before arms traders, while young children are invited to touch and test different firearms. Exhibitors at the fairs are subsidised by the government, and host organisations, led by high-ranking veterans, receive approximately USD 225,000 in government funding per event. Spending large amounts of public money, the 2022 DX KOREA, held amid the Russia–Ukraine War, hosted 60,000 visitors and delegates from 40 countries, and generated profits of USD 7.5 million, which were solely enjoyed by the host organisations rather than the public. This number was only reported later by the Korean newspaper Hankookilbo on 19 May 2024, amid disputes among the host organisations of DX Korea over the sharing of profits. The increasing profits from arms fairs can be understood within the wider context of Korea’s arms sector, which became the fifth largest manufacturing industry in 2021 for the first time in its history (Park &

³ See Footnote 46 in the latest UN Special Rapporteur’s report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/59/23) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session59/advance-version/a-hrc-59-23-aev.pdf>

Won, 2025).

Criminalising Protest? Interference with Business vs. Freedom of Expression

If legalisation, representation, and marketisation are mechanisms that the state employs to directly rationalise arms trade, criminalisation is the mechanism that is used to create a landscape favourable to arms trade. The criminalisation of peace actions at arms fairs exemplifies this point. During the 2022 DX KOREA, eight anti-war activists carried out the ‘tank action’ by consensus, with two climbing onto a tank and performing Irish folk songs with a violin and guitar, symbolising resistance and peace amidst militarised spaces. Interviewee D described ‘the tank action’ as an artistic protest aimed to deliver an anti-war message by disrupting the event and drawing attention to the horrors of militarisation. This action was inspired by Disrupt Land Forces, an Australian peace group, whose member in his 70s read a poem from atop an armoured vehicle during the 2021 Land Forces exposition in Australia.⁴



(c) World Without War

Interviewees recalled that the direct action at the arms expo aimed to increase ‘the visibility of our action to spread our anti-war message more widely (Interviewee B)’ and to ‘do something I could do well, which in this case was playing a violin (Interviewee E)’ because:

‘Arms fairs gloriously boast how effective the displayed weapons are and...they create a surreal place where the truth—that these weapons are killing people and destroying habitats—is forgotten. I wanted to resist this space artistically’ because ‘arts, at times, helps us see the unseen, feel the unfelt’ (Retrieved from defendant’s statement).

In this regard, they evaluated the action as successful, but they did not foresee the prosecution that followed. Arrested after five minutes of action, the eight activists were eventually indicted for the crime of ‘interference with business’. In South Korea, this law has been widely used to restrict and punish labour strikes and other forms of direct action, effectively oppressing the freedom of association and collective activities and create the ‘chilling effect’ (Porteux & Kim, 2023; Watts, 2019). For the activists, the prosecution came as a surprise because they believed their action ‘was designed to minimise the risks of even a police investigation’ (Interviewee D).

The legal dispute between the prosecutor and the defendants centred on two key criteria: the justifiability of the motive behind the action and the nature and extent of damage incurred. As for the former, the

⁴ A video footage is available at <https://fb.watch/uqCbQytZH0/>.

defendants emphasised their cause as well as procedural injustices that arms fairs. One of the defendants

'It is not our first time to enter these arms fairs, and we have taken various approaches to raise our oppositional voices. We have appealed to the arms fairs organising committees to contemplate on who are targeted by weapons sold in these spaces, to where this endless arms race is bringing us, and precarious situations faced by those who suffer from the arms trade... We never heard back, so we decided to step closer to them to have our voices heard more clearly' (Retrieved from defendant's statement).

The prosecutor sought a total of 17 million Korean Won in fines, but after conflicting decisions in the first and second rulings—where the first trial resulted in an acquittal and the second in a conviction—the Supreme Court sided with the defendants and discharged them from criminal charges. The final decision from the Court was based on the reasoning that (1) the 'tank action' lasted only 11 minutes at one of the 1,350 booths, (2) it was unlikely to have exerted enough force to disrupt operations, and (3) excessive restrictions on protests could infringe upon the right to freedom of expression, which requires appropriate protection. This court ruling is significant not only because it represents a precursor case that dismissed the excessive criminalisation of dissent by the judiciary but also because it opened new opportunities for future actions aimed at stopping arms fairs.

Equally, however, the same ruling presents some dilemmas, as reflected by the interviewees. Reflecting on the final judgment, Interviewee D said, 'We were found not guilty not because our action was justifiable, but because it was not physically harmful'. This suggests that if their actions at the arms fair had caused physical damage or significant disruption, they could have faced criminal sanctions. In this context, the lawsuit reveals critical issues regarding justice in South Korea, particularly that legal protection for peace activism remains dependent on the absence of harm. Since the Supreme Court did not examine the criminogenic nature of arms fairs and arms trades—which was central to the campaigners' motive for their actions—it remains unclear whether future tank actions or other collective peace activities at arms fairs will be similarly protected. In other words, the lack of legal protections for peaceful activism—despite the legal, political, and economic support for arms fairs as part of the arms trade—continues to be a risk factor that may silence and limit peace and disarmament efforts.

Nevertheless, the interviewees pledged to continue their activism and efforts towards the pacification of societies. Interviewee D observed that 'arms fairs and the government's policies that generate demand for the arms trade are, in themselves, sites of societal education' by discouraging critical questions such as 'how many casualties have been and will be caused by these weapons' and 'how ordinary people might disrupt a society organised around the profit of the arms trade'. Interviewee D interpreted arms fairs as a means to 'domesticate the oppressed'—using Freire's (1972) terminology—and, in response, regarded their activism as a form of peace education. Recently, these peace activists have launched a bigger campaign group called *Stop Arms Fair South Korea*, together with other human rights and grassroots peace campaigners. The expansion of the group, with a more diverse membership, would also support additional activities such as monitoring South Korea's arms trade, signing petitions to ratify humanitarian disarmament treaties, and advocating for bans on supplying weapons to governments that are perceived to violate international law and norms.

Furthermore, it should be highlighted that these actions are grounded in the principle of non-violence, which Interviewee A underscore:

'I hear people will fight with knives if lacking guns, and with fists if lacking knives, as if war is inevitable. However, I believe that because we have been educated differently in societies, war will not occur in our contemporary world if no guns exist. So, I think it is important to envision that the abolition of weapons will lead to the abolition of wars'.

This reflects a broader belief, shared by many scholars and pacifist critics (Galtung, 1996; McGarry & Walklate, 2019; Lummis, 2023), that modern society is already capable of resolving conflicts peacefully rather than through war. Although the focused group interview did not thoroughly address this point, it can be suggested that criminalisation should be reoriented towards facilitating the pacification of society, thereby opening new possibilities for the role of criminal justice—and criminologists—in de-escalating war and violence. Moreover, as Kauzlarich (2007) notes, rather than entrenching the binary of

‘ally’ and ‘enemy’ within war logics in pursuit of peace, it may be more productive to explore historically grounded restorative approaches to addressing wars and associated injustices. Such efforts should focus on deconstructing the political economy, whose expansion is driven by the proliferation, normalisation, and perpetuation of warfare, while simultaneously empowering social movements and forces that disrupt this vicious cycle of violence (Kaldor, 2008; Amster, 2019).

Discussion and Conclusion

Following the previous analysis of arms fairs where warmaking is normalised and also resisted, this section further explores how a criminological perspective on war can advance scholarly critiques and activism against the arms industry. From a pacifist viewpoint, as articulated by Ruggiero and others, war is the ultimate crime, yet it remains a legitimate enterprise prioritised over peaceful, non-violent alternatives. At this point, a criminological discourse on war intersects with critical perspectives from peacemaking and peacebuilding criminology, critical military studies, peace studies, the sociology of war, green criminology, and peace activism. This multidisciplinary dialogue would create opportunities for democratic challenges to the legitimisation and normalisation of the war industry. While not an exhaustive list, several measures—discussed during the interview—are proposed to reframe war as a criminal conduct: decriminalising and challenging harmful narratives and social stigmas that portray peace activists as ‘betrayers’, ‘spies’, or ‘traitors’; ending arms production and decommissioning arms industries within the framework of a ‘just’ transition; and confiscating profits gained by arms manufacturers, treating them as criminal proceeds to be redirected towards societal pacification—beyond conventional ‘peacebuilding’ efforts limited to war-affected areas—and promoting divestment from the arms industry.

South Korea provides a compelling illustration of this point. Once a country devastated by the Korean war on the verge of the Cold War, it has re-born as one of the major arms traders in the world, both competing with and collaborating alongside Western countries in weapon production and development. Its military expenditure is projected to continue increasing in the near future, as the ‘K-defense’ industry is heavily subsidised by the government as a next-generation sector, supported by ‘cheap’ production costs. Political oppression, including militant and criminal responses to peace activism—often justified by national security concerns in the context of the ‘special’ division situation—plays a crucial role in creating a ‘business-friendly’ environment in the defence sector while deepening economic dependence on war. Although South Korea claims its political legitimacy over North Korea based on liberal values and democratic procedures, it paradoxically contravenes these principles through its arms trade, which is framed as legally compliant and necessary to deter evil forces in the world. This approach serves to obscure the kleptocratic nature of the arms industry. Despite obstacles, peace activists have paved pathways to disrupt arms trades, thereby connecting themselves to a wider global peace and disarmament movement. Following Carter’s (2005) view, these non-violent direct actions embody participatory democratic principles, emphasising the essential need for transparent and accountable control over warmaking.

This study’s theoretical and practical contributions can be summarized as follows. It enriches sociological and criminological insights into war by highlighting how arms fairs conceal the criminogenic facets of the arms trade—an area that remains underexplored. While trade contracts are negotiated privately, these fairs publicly display weapons and technology, effectively masking the act of killing under rhetoric of peace and security. They function as forums where arms producers, officials, brokers, academics, students, and buyers converge—often hosting ‘family-friendly’ social events in front of weapons to obscure moral and legal concerns about the goods traded. Recognising war as the crime of crimes prompts critical questions about criminalising ‘spoilers of peace’—those who wage and profit from war—rather than ‘spoilers of war’ like peace campaigners. Despite legal challenges, the active efforts of civil society organisations to monitor and challenge the arms industry—through campaigns such as name-and-shame, solidarity actions, and boycotts—are crucial for laying the groundwork to broaden pacifist scholarship and practice. Such activism raises vital questions about how criminology, as an academic discipline, can further support social movements that uphold the right to life and promote global disarmament. Engaging with peacebuilding theories and activist-research methods within critical criminology could bridge the gap between academia and civil society, fostering pathways towards a war-free world (Belknap, 2015).

Furthermore, reframing ‘war’ as a crime—while advocating for a shift from punitive to restorative justice—offers a critique of militarised notions of punishment and highlights the need for justice- and peace-oriented alternatives. Promoting social gatherings such as ‘peace fairs’ instead of arms fairs provides

spaces for dialogue, understanding, and solidarity. Recalling Harvey (2000), these alternative spaces can nurture hope by serving as sites where new social and political possibilities are imagined and realised. They enable collective agency and resistance against oppressive structures, offering opportunities to envision and build emancipatory futures, challenge dominant narratives, and inspire transformative change towards a more just and peaceful society.

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Who is a Victim of What? Societal Reactions to Harms Caused and Experienced by Children in War as Teaching Materials for Critical Victimology

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Abstract: Critical methodologies in criminological education involve the comprehensive deconstruction of the labels of 'victim' and 'offender'. This approach seeks to encourage students to reflect on their biases and assumptions, and on the role of power in constructing social narratives. This article explores how its author attempts to utilise societal reactions to harms committed *to and by* children in wartime to support deep reflection in critical victimological education. It starts by describing how a victimology module, optional in the final year of an inter-departmental undergraduate criminology programme in Ireland, problematises the false dichotomy of 'victim and offender'. It then discusses how the course uses social and institutional reactions to the harms committed and experienced by Grace Akallo and Dominic Ongwen (as child soldiers in Uganda) and Shamima Begum (as a child who travelled to join ISIS in Syria) to illustrate the socially constructed processes by which labels of 'victim' and 'offender' are claimed and allocated. These cases exemplify how we can integrate examples relating to war into criminology syllabi to embed opportunities for reflection and critical, internationalist thinking. Given that relatively few academic criminologists in Europe publish their teaching practices and materials, the article contributes to the pedagogical literature in critical criminology and victimology, as well as to the literature on the criminology of war.

Introduction

As an applied and interdisciplinary social science, criminology represents an opportunity to provide students with a broad social scientific education. Numerous core concepts from disciplines like sociology, philosophy, politics and law, among others, can be illustrated using ‘our’ examples – examples of crime, social harm, violence and injustice – to help our students reflect deeply on their assumptions and biases, and engage critically with the world (Howes, 2017). Despite clear potential for criminological programmes to contribute to public pedagogies (Hamilton, 2013) – what Tidmarsh (2023, 179) terms the ‘transformative potential’ of teaching and learning in criminology – European criminologists in particular seldom publish and share their pedagogical approaches (the chapters in Palmer, 2020, and Young & Strudwick, 2022, being among the notable recent exceptions).

Authorship in the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, the main pedagogical outlet for our discipline, illustrates this gap. The journal publishes four issues per year, with 103 full articles in the twelve issues spanning 2022, 2023 and 2024. Of the 275 authors, only 25 of them listed a European affiliation, with over 90% of the remaining 250 authors listing a North American affiliation. Of the 25 authors listing a European affiliation, eight were on an article by this author in 2022, of whom six were students hired as research assistants to redesign the module to which the current article pertains. If we focus on 2023 and 2024, just four authors from 190 across 72 articles listed a European affiliation. While European academics publish pedagogical work elsewhere (including in the edited collections cited earlier), this type of article is a rare occurrence in most international, peer-reviewed criminology journals. There is scope for academics in European universities and for criminology journals to share descriptions and analyses of teaching and learning – not least, as an act of resistance to universities’ competitive nature and claims to own our teaching materials (Gadd & Weedon, 2017; Brown, 2021).

This article contributes to this special issue on ‘the criminology of war’ by discussing how I seek to use the social and institutional reactions to individual children who *both committed and were victims* of some of the most serious harms in wartime to demonstrate the essential concept of social constructivism. I begin by considering the value of discussing social constructivism in victimological education, given the role of power in helping explain how ‘victim status’ is claimed and allocated. The section then introduces the use of wartime examples, situating the people I discuss in lectures in the context of the module’s aims, structure and teaching approach.

I then explain how I use the social and institutional reactions to children involved in conflicts in Uganda (Grace Akallo and Dominic Ongwen) and Syria (Shamima Begum) in an attempt to uncover the relationship between whether one is blamed for harms they committed, and whether we grant or withhold the status of ‘victim’ in relation to the harms they experienced. Although this approach has not been directly evaluated, the next section outlines why it is important to share teaching materials when their impact has not been assessed empirically, and draws on the aforementioned research to which this module was subjected (Marder et al., 2022). I conclude by inviting critical social educators to consider whether wartime examples would help them foreground and address complexities, while unpacking students’ assumptions and ‘gut reactions’ to politicised issues, in pedagogical settings.

Social Constructivism, Critical Victimology and War

The call for papers for this special issue states that ‘a discipline which adopts categories that criminalise “the other”, uses stereotypes, and describes individuals and groups in terms of insiders and outsiders [...] is intrinsically uncritical’ (De Backer et al., 2023, 6). This article proceeds from related assumptions: 1) these stereotypes are sufficiently socially harmful and prevalent that it is incumbent on social scientists to address and undermine them through undergraduate teaching; 2) criminology, despite its flaws, is a discipline in which academics can intentionally undertake this task (Howes, 2017); 3) we can build critical criminological thinking into a wide range of subdisciplines beyond critical criminology modules (Sweeney, 2022); and, finally, 4) it is important to use examples from beyond our domestic contexts to globalise and Southernise our curricula and, in turn, students’ perspectives (Sohoni & Petrovic, 2010; Stockdale et al., 2022).

Few categories stigmatise more than that of the ‘criminal’. Criminology provides educators with the tools to help students question their biases and assumptions in this regard. We ask students to reflect on the



power imbalances that manifest in the (political) choice of what the law criminalises – and against whom (selective) enforcement occurs. This raises broader social questions. Who does our society revere and hate? Whose actions can be forgiven; whose cannot? How do wealth, politics, supremacist narratives and hegemony inform our attitudes to these issues? What is the relationship between the types of harm done, the identities of the people who cause and experience those harms, and the level of outrage, sympathy and attention (Christie, 1986; Duggan, 2018; Gracia, 2018)?

A central mission in criminological education is to undermine the assumption that wherever one lands on these questions is the only and natural way of thinking. By definition, of course, we can show that this is incorrect, as what is considered a ‘crime’ changes across time and place. I teach a third-year optional module in victimology, and my argument herein is that victimology is another site in which we can demonstrate that much of what we take for granted is socially constructed. I further assert that there is likely value in taking students away from local contexts by using diverse examples from around the world, including from international conflicts, when trying to help them reflect.

Briefly, the victimology module in question has existed since 2019/2020. Although its design and delivery changed in that time (Marder et al., 2022), its structure has remained broadly the same: its first half is a theoretical deconstruction of the ‘victim’ label, while its second half is an empirical-legal assessment of victims’ needs, interests, rights and interactions with criminal justice processes and actors. It typically has around 100 students who study criminology alongside a second major or minor – often, but not exclusively, a cognate discipline like law, psychology or sociology.

Nils Christie’s work on the ideal victim (1986) is a core text in introducing the ways in which the label of victim is socially constructed. Christie showed that our propensity to afford someone the label of victim depends not on the amount of harm they suffered, but on whether the social, political and economic context of the incident and the people involved are likely to generate sympathy from society. ‘Society’s responses to different types of victims’, Christie (1986, 17) reasons, ‘show that victims must have power and visibility to gain legitimacy as victims’. The victim label also provides a degree of power and has a cachet that makes it highly contested. As McGarry and Walklate (2015, 7) contended, our willingness to believe someone is a victim further depends on our understanding of structure and agency: ‘suffering, power relations and choice are central to how we understand who is, and who is not, given the label victim and, as a consequence, who acquires or does not acquire victim status’. Questions including whether a person was (perceived to be) carrying out a respectable project when they were victimised and whether they are partly ‘to blame’ for what happened, mean that the status of ‘victim’ is not allocated equitably or objectively, but aligns with prevailing structural inequalities and reflects unconscious biases among privileged groups. On the island of Ireland, such an argument can also be situated in political history: during and following the Northern Irish conflict, Lynch and Joyce (2018, 183) argue, ‘competing narratives of victimhood emerged and they served to inform intergroup relations’, with assertions of collective victimhood retaining an important function for those who seek either to justify or to transform aspects of the conflict today. While lecturers must account for their local political and class climates when selecting examples to use in teaching, many countries are home to conflict-related historical figures and events that could help them to illustrate how people can hold diametrically opposing views on who is and is not ‘really’ a victim.

Indeed, nowhere is the contested nature of victimhood greater than in wars. In any conflict, one’s views as to which side can rightly claim the label of victim depends on many factors, including one’s identity and politics, one’s exposure to information, when one considers a given conflict to have ‘begun’, and whom one considers the aggressor. This acute polarisation, alongside typically explicit claims of victimhood from parties on either side, means that war represents a useful context in which to consider the allocation of the victim label. For Van Wijk (2013), victims of international crimes are less likely to gain victim status unless the conflict itself has certain attributes. These include that the conflict must be unique, short and not too complex, and its timing must be ‘right’ (i.e., not competing for limited media and public attention with ‘too many’ other conflicts). Accordingly, one’s willingness to recognise a person or a group as a victim/victims depends on more than the volume and nature of the harm they experience: it is socially and politically constructed. At the individual level, this is more complicated for those who have both experienced and committed harm. While the overlap between victimisation and offending has been investigated empirically (Jennings et al., 2010; Berg & Mulford, 2020; Berg & Schreck, 2022), I introduce this phenomenon in victimology primarily to help students reflect on the social construction of the victim

label, although this might also improve understanding of the prevalence and distribution of different types of victimisation.

Following the first four of 24 lectures in which the module is introduced, the ‘ideal victim’ concept is discussed and victimisation is quantified in ‘crime’ and social harm contexts, the module shifts to a four-lecture miniseries entitled, ‘Who is a victim of what?’ In each, we discuss case studies illustrating each person’s victimisation and offending to help students reflect on the construction of victimhood and the basis by which they allocate or withhold victim status. Societal (both social and institutional) reactions to the people we discuss are an integral aspect of each case study. The slides from these lectures have been published open access on Zenodo (Marder, 2024). They can be viewed alongside a reading of this paper and/or freely used or adapted by others.

The first lecture starts with the idea of child soldiers, exploring the harm that they cause and experience, and how societies responded to specific individuals. Next, we discuss how radicalised children have been considered both victims of grooming and terrorists. It is these two topics that this article discusses. Later lectures study the victim-offender overlap in more ‘domestic’ crime settings, including serious or organised youth violence, violence against people who trespass on property and women who kill abusive partners, before moving on to discuss how the concept of ‘victim blaming’ has been applied in different settings. These materials are discussed using Socratic methods, which involve an interactive series of questions and discussions. We consider what it means to be a victim, before I describe and show videos about relevant individuals, seeking a show of hands as to whether the person in question is ‘primarily a victim or an offender’. I then invite students to explain these ‘gut reactions’, to discuss them in pairs and plenary, and to reflect on their reasoning (Corey, 2018; Ho et al., 2023), before moving on to the next example. This approach to delivering materials seeks to begin with the victim-offender binary, as embedded in criminal justice and widely-held cultural beliefs, and demonstrate its limited utility in defining people – even when those people have killed. By the end of the series it is hoped that students will remember to reflect critically when confronted by an assertion that a person who both experienced and caused harm cannot be entitled to victim status. The first of two assessments, worth 50% of the module, attends to this segment of the course. I ask students to submit a 1500-word essay on victims of the powerful whom society ignores, on why it is important to think critically about how we use the label of ‘victim’, or to propose a study that explores how society treats and perceives victims of crime in Ireland.

The Harm Caused and Experienced by Child Soldiers in Uganda

I start the lecture about child soldiers with the maxim – as attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – that ‘there is no crime of which I cannot conceive myself guilty’. This discussion focuses on the premise that any person may be capable of any action – no matter how harmful – under the right circumstances. We then define and quantify child soldier recruitment, citing the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (UNICEF, 2007) and various international non-governmental and governmental organisations which work to advocate against the recruitment and participation of children in conflict.

In 2001, the Rome Statute established the International Criminal Court, outlining offences that it could prosecute and providing details on investigation, prosecution and trial processes, *inter alia*. This defines ‘war crimes’ as including ‘conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities’ within Article 8(2)(b)(xxvi) (International Criminal Court, 2024).

While no students ever dispute that recruiting child soldiers constitutes a very serious crime, the situation becomes more complicated when it comes to the question of whether and how, if at all, children who are recruited as child soldiers should be held criminally accountable for their actions. A quote from a now-dissolved NGO, Child Soldiers International (2019), introduces this debate:

Should children be prosecuted for war crimes? This is a very difficult question to answer in simple terms. International human rights and child protection experts generally recognise that children used for military purposes are first and foremost victims of abuses of their human rights and that states must prioritise the prosecution of those who unlawfully recruit and use them. [We believe] children should never be prosecuted solely for their association with armed forces or groups.



However, when children are accused of committing crimes considered to be the most serious under international law, and where children have reached an age of criminal responsibility, then excluding them from criminal responsibility may deny justice to their victims and may also not be in the child's own best interests.

I introduce two persons – both former child soldiers, but with quite different trajectories – to examine this further. First, we consider Grace Akallo, who was abducted in Uganda as a teenager and used as a child soldier in Sudan, before escaping seven months later. In this period, Akallo both experienced and committed extreme violence.

My students watch a short UNICEF film in which Akallo describes these experiences and the extensive activism she has undertaken since then (UNICEF, 2013). Akallo explains the shifting nature of the duress she was under throughout her captivity: 'When they gave me a gun, at first it was very difficult, but it came with survival for the fittest because you had to shoot that gun to be able to get food. You had to go to fight to the frontline in order to be able to eat'. The video leaves little question that Akallo killed civilians not out of choice, but out of necessity. It thus frames Akallo as *entirely* not culpable; as a child whose kidnappers had a metaphorical gun to her head even when they physically did not, and who effectively pulled 'her' trigger themselves.

Akallo's story is chronicled in a documentary, *Grace, Milly, Lucy... Child Soldiers* (George, 2014), following a book which Akallo previously co-authored (McDonnell & Akallo, 2007). A review of the documentary, noting that it primarily represents a memoir of three girls' post-captivity lives, adds that Akallo's life 'has taken her far away from the site of her childhood horrors to the rarefied halls of the United Nations and liberal colleges in Massachusetts' (George, 2014, 268). The video we watch illustrates this, with photographs of Akallo next to celebrities and officials, holding anti-child soldier and anti-poverty reports. I ask students a simplistic question – 'is Grace a criminal, a victim, or both?' – to begin a discussion about how to reconcile her actions with her experiences, and to consider the implications for the labels we apply. Students are generally reluctant to use labels other than that of 'victim' to describe her, aligning with the status that the video implies her circumstances warrant.

The next example shown is that of Dominic Ongwen. Abducted at the age of nine by the same organisation as Akallo, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Ongwen likewise committed atrocities as a child. Yet, rather than escaping and living a 'redeemed' life, Ongwen suffered a different fate: he remained with the group, committing atrocities and recruiting child soldiers as an adult, before being prosecuted and, in 2021, convicted of these offences at the International Criminal Court.

Does Ongwen's victimisation, like Akallo, afford him a status of 'victim'? If so, to what extent does this complicate his status as a 'war criminal' (Holá & Bouwknegt, 2019; McQueen, 2019)? The slides present quotes to signal the arguments in this regard. Ongwen's defence lawyer (International Criminal Court, 2018, 6-19) maintains during his trial that his victimisation as a child rendered him not culpable for even his later actions:

Children abducted by the [Lord's Resistance Army], the accused inclusive, and used in the war in northern Uganda grew up in one of the most brutal environments never before known to humanity, with little room for moral development that would enable him to later take independent decisions. [...] We shall show that Dominic Ongwen's presumed culpability is a sham. [...] Once a victim, always a victim. One cannot be a victim and, still under the grips of the same system that victimised him, become a perpetrator.

Unlike Akallo, Ongwen did not escape. Instead, he continued committing atrocities well into his adult years. The core issue for his defence team was that children cannot be expected to replicate Akallo's successful flight to avoid prosecution later. As quoted in Bogani (2017), the defence argued:

Allowing [this case] to proceed would be akin to endorsing an approach which imposes an additional requirement not found in customary international law; namely, that once a child soldier turns 15 years old, he or she has the obligation to release him or herself or escape – even where this would put his or her life at stake – or face the possibility of prosecution.

Again, we examine the interactions between his victimisation and offending, and the implications for his status. The International Criminal Court had to resolve a legal question: whether his victimisation meant he was not liable for the acts he committed. But Ongwen's case raises sociological questions about human behaviour, and philosophical and moral questions relating to responsibility. What does it mean to be responsible for our actions? How relevant are our childhood experiences and prior and ongoing victimisation? What are we trying to achieve by holding people legally or morally responsible for their actions? And how might social and legal processes account for the complexities of real life? These are questions that wartime examples raise, but are as relevant to 'street' and corporate harms as they are to conflict-related harms. Previous empirical research by Barton et al. (2010) and Howes (2017) suggests that the complexities and questions of power which these examples raise could help students question assumptions and develop more nuanced thinking. Although for most students the longevity and seriousness of Ongwen's actions overrides his victimisation, juxtaposing his story with that of Akallo appears to enable them to interrogate how offending and victimisation interact, and to discuss thoughtfully the effects on a person's later stigmatisation and legal and moral condition.

Grooming and Radicalisation in Britain and Syria

The following lecture starts with a recap of key questions around responsibility, structure and agency, before moving straight into the story of Shamima Begum. Begum achieved notoriety, at least in the United Kingdom, in 2015 when she travelled from London to Syria with two friends, also young girls in their mid-teens. Seemingly concluding that their experience of online grooming meant they were better labelled as victims than as offenders, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police stated at a parliamentary committee that 'if they return home, there are no terrorism issues here'. This was taken to imply that they would not be treated the same as people who had travelled to Syria to fight (Barrett & Evans, 2015), given their role as fighters' 'brides' (Jaffer, 2015). Although Begum seemingly does not fight herself, her recruitment by, and association with, this armed group from a young age puts her in 'child soldier' territory: the Paris Principles include children recruited for sexual purposes among those who should be socially reintegrated when freed. Yet, as we shall soon see, it still resulted in a stigma whereby, for many, she became irreversibly associated with ISIS and shared responsibility for the atrocities they committed.

Four years later, Begum made the headlines in the UK again when, from a refugee camp in Syria, she appealed to return home via interviews in the Times and, later, on ITV News. This caused extensive political debate as to whether her previous 'grooming' absolved her of responsibility for the atrocities that ISIS committed in the intervening period – especially as she initially stated that she did not regret joining them in the first place (Loyd, 2019; Segalov, 2019). Statements that Begum makes in her ITV News (2019) interview are indicative of the challenges she would later face in winning over a sceptical British public (emphasis added):

*I don't see why [the Home Secretary] would see me as a threat. I'm a nineteen year-old girl with a newborn baby. I don't have any weapons. I don't want to hurt anyone – even if I did have weapons or anything. He has no proof that I'm a threat, **other than I was in ISIS, but that's it.***

Subsequently, far from welcoming her home, recognising her childhood victimisation, and affording her access to the support that such a status would legally entail, the Home Secretary stripped her of British citizenship. As of December 2024, Begum remains in Syria as her case to have her citizenship restored makes its way through the courts, her forthcoming appeal to the European Court of Human Rights the next step (Syal, 2024). With reference to Daly's (2014, 378) remark that 'victim status is not fixed, but socially constructed, mobilized and malleable', a discussion follows about whether or not Begum was a victim of child grooming and, if so, whether this has implications for the sympathy and, indeed, the rights she should be afforded now. By this stage, my students generally express a level of ambivalence and uncertainty commensurate with the complexity of these people's stories, and that indicates the approach has helped undermine the labels of 'victim' and 'offender'.

The Importance of Sharing Teaching Materials and Approaches

There are two main benefits to criminologists sharing our teaching materials. First, outlining approaches in detail and sharing materials creates Open Educational Resources for others to retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute (Wiley & Hilton, 2018). Arguably, making teaching materials open access is as



important as open research: this contributes to information availability, which Stagg and Partridge (2019, 477) contend is ‘a necessary condition for human flourishing’. In other words, equity dictates that those of us with the time and resources to create teaching materials should make them freely available (Trotter & Hodgkinson-Williams, 2020). Victimology (Bostaph et al., 2014) and critical criminology (Sweeney, 2022) are often absent from undergraduate programmes, making it especially important to draw attention to, and share our teaching materials from, these topics.

Second, sharing materials might help academics reflect on the topics raised and ideate new or different approaches. Even if no criminologists use the cases or slides published herein, the article may still encourage readers to consider whether wartime examples can aid their teaching of different concepts. Perhaps not all countries, universities, disciplines and modules suffer from the overuse of domestic examples to illustrate how societies operate: an aspect of what Sohoni and Petrovic (2010, 288) describe as ‘methodological nationalism’ in social sciences. Yet, it is important to supplement calls to decolonise our curricula (Sercombe et al., 2022; Agoznino, 2023) with opportunities to reflect on the types of materials that can help us achieve this (Moosavi, 2010). For Moore (2024), addressing criminology’s ‘colonial problem’ requires us to diversify materials at the programme level and situate knowledge in colonial histories, for which wartime examples are perfect. Sharing materials freely and discussing approaches in journals can support a teaching discourse that helps us avoid reusing the materials with which we were taught, and builds ‘communities of practice’ that ‘engage in a process of collective learning’ on changing criminological education (Wenger, 2015, 1). As a lecturer, I remain grateful to criminologists whose writings include examples which illustrate how to communicate key concepts. Christie’s poetic narratives on the ‘little old ladies’ who are ‘ideal victims’ (Christie, 1986), and on a person urinating in public whose actions seem more or less ‘criminal’ depending on whether or not you know them (Christie, 2004), are integral to how I explain that people’s statuses, identities and relationships determine the labels we give them, as much or more than their actions do.

The arguments made in this article would be strengthened if the underlying hypotheses they contained (e.g., that using wartime examples builds critical thinking) had been empirically verified. As noted, previous studies by Howes (2017) and Barton et al. (2010) investigated the impact of critical criminological instruction on student learning. Barton et al. (2010, 39) found that students ‘value and engage with critical scholarship’, prompting them to ‘question the power of dominant ideologies and oppressive power structures [and] challenge their own prejudices and the prejudices of others’. For Howes (2017, 904), many students made either ‘subtle shifts’ or ‘some inroads’ into ‘deeper levels of nuance’; others ‘were deeply engaged in learning and critical thinking’. It is credible to hypothesise, therefore, that the approaches outlined here could contribute to learning in similar ways.

For the purpose of this article, however, we do not have the data to examine this empirically. A previous study (Marder et al., 2022) piloted restorative practices and design innovation as methods of involving students in this module’s design. With 32% of registered students in LW380 Victimology in 2019/2020 (n=25), a series of restorative circles, followed by a design workshop, identified twenty student-proposed changes to the module, which I committed to implement before teaching it again. For our current purpose, it is notable that students provided suggestions regarding the type (e.g., add more podcasts to the reading lists) and design (e.g., fewer slides, less text) of teaching materials, but had no suggestions regarding the topics selected. This seemingly implies that participating students were not opposed to the materials and, indeed, most recommended maintaining and expanding the dialogic approach and the use of videos in class. I do not have the ethical approval to detail feedback from students in recent years, but it is notable that the written feedback from the past two years does not include any comment on the topics selected or their impact on learning. With these caveats, the article demonstrates how wartime examples can, at least, provide opportunities for students to think critically and reflect deeply on their assumptions.

Conclusion

It is highly likely that the vast majority of students who study victimology will never work in a specialist victim support role. Yet, there is a growing recognition that many professions interact with victims of crime in the course of their work (e.g., Browne-James et al., 2021; Nascimento et al., 2023). It is crucial to equip students to reflect on their biases, reserve judgment, and avoid stereotyping and labelling in circumstances where they might be able to support someone who needs their help.

More than this, it is a core role of universities generally, and of social scientific education in particular, to enhance students' capacity to analyse critically the information – including labels and statuses that the powerful assign the powerless – to which they are exposed. The purpose of drawing attention to Akallo's 'offending' and Ongwen's 'victimisation', for example, is not to lower sympathy for the former and increase it for the latter. Rather, it is to demonstrate that critical analysis extends beyond the level of sympathy one feels as a 'gut reaction', to assessing what informs our recognition or dismissal of another's victimisation. As Drake and Henley (2014, 141) argue:

Differentiating between 'victims' and 'offenders' elides consideration of more meaningful support for victims, worsens opportunities for the reintegration of ex-prisoners and constructs a false dichotomy between citizens who do not fall into mutually-exclusive categories.

Societal reactions to acutely harmful human behaviours in war can be presented, assessed and deconstructed to enable crucial sociological, political, legal and philosophical questions to be raised. The end result, if this succeeds, should be more conscientious citizens who are equipped to think critically about these complexities when confronted with them later: when engaging with media and in social contexts (Howes, 2017), as well as electoral and professional settings (Tidmarsh, 2023). Criminologists who wish to demonstrate the responsibility of states and corporations for the most acute harms can do little better than to use wartime examples in modules that are not necessarily about international, state or corporate crime – as De Backer et al. (2023, 6) contend, the 'critical criminologist can ask who benefits from an armed conflict'. Such cases would permit us to include educational content on the responsibility of arms industries and the (post-)colonial context in which modern conflict occurs, as well as to put the social treatment of our contemporary 'folks devils' into perspective. I invite criminologists globally to spurn parochialism and consider using examples from around the world, including from conflict settings, to illustrate important concepts in our teaching.

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Marginalisation, Hate Speeches and Criminalisation of Syrians Under Temporary Protection in Turkey

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Editors' Foreword – Wilkinson, H. and Degenhardt, T.

We are very grateful to Halil Ibrahim Bahar for submitting this piece amid challenging circumstances, which prevented full development and editing beyond the submission stage. We also thank his daughter, Hacer, for being involved in the editing process and communicating with us on behalf of Halil.

This opinion piece addresses the tensions that arise when legislation such as the Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection [2013, Law No. 6458](#) (UNHCR, 2016), which should protect vulnerable groups, is not adequately resourced or enforced in practice to provide safe routes into full citizenship, for example, by failing to address hate speech, by politicians, the public and via social media, and by preventing legal rights to work.

Through the example of a YouTube video which was widely watched and engaged with through public comments, Bahar draws attention to how the Turkish government appear to use ideologies of hate (Yanay, 2012) to dehumanise, blame, and forcefully exclude refugee peoples through justifications of them being a 'threat' to national security and standards of living.

Indeed, the key themes and examples raised in this piece hold current relevance in many parts of the world, capturing how states and authoritarian, far-right political regimes have long targeted the vulnerabilities of refugee, asylum, and racialised migrant communities as 'dangerous problems to be solved' (Morrison, 2019: 5-41). Beneath the manufactured hate and racialised 'great replacement' conspiracies, are long-established techniques of far-right politics, which aim to divert attention away from critiquing those in positions of power, by displacing the structural socio-economic and political roots of human struggle, often linked to widespread inequalities, and instead blaming 'unwanted others' who are constructed as the 'real threats to the nation' (Fromm, 1941; Bauman, 1989). As Bahar argues, the dehumanisation of people crossing human borders is an increasingly urgent issue to document and resist.

All involved in the editing of this special issue are thinking of Halil and his family, along with all who speak out against war, conflict, and dehumanisation amid the threat of persecution.

Introduction

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, resulted in a staggering loss of life and widespread displacement. By the end of 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023) reported that 7.2 million people remained displaced within Syria, including 6.5 million refugees and asylum seekers. Consequently, a total of 13.8 million Syrians were forcibly displaced across 137 countries (ibid.). This piece outlines the ongoing situation in Syria regarding the treatment of refugee communities.

As of October 31, 2024, Turkey is hosting 2,935,742 Syrians under temporary protection status. These refugees are distributed across fourteen of Turkey's eighty-one provinces, with the highest concentrations in border areas. For example, Gaziantep hosts 412,354 Syrians (16.0% of its population), Hatay has 222,627 (12.6%), Mardin has 46,499 (4.97%), and Sanliurfa has 243,405 (9.91%). Kilis, a smaller province, has an exceptionally high concentration, with 64,116 Syrians (29.24%). Other southern provinces, such as Adana (211,977 or 8.54%), Mersin (188,214 or 8.85%), and Kahramanmaras (83,275 or 6.94%), also have significant populations of Syrian refugees. Larger, more economically significant provinces, such as Ankara (85,586 or 1.45%), Bursa (169,049 or 5.00%), Izmir (115,477 or 2.51%), Kayseri (80,207 or 5.26%), and Konya (119,404 or 4.89%), host a smaller proportion of refugees. Istanbul has the most significant number of Syrians, with 511,645 individuals, accounting for approximately 3.16% of the province's population (MoI, 2024). The demographic impact is particularly pronounced in the smaller southern provinces.

According to the UNHCR (2024), as of November 7, 2024, there are 3,085,056 registered Syrian refugees in Turkey. The discrepancies between the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and UNHCR data likely stem from the Turkish government's use of "temporary protection" for Syrians. Meanwhile, the UNHCR refers to them as "registered refugees." As of December 31, 2023, Turkey's population was 85,372,377 (TUIK, 2024), with 57,774 Syrians living in camps as of May 9, 2024 (Mülteciler Derneği, 2024). The Turkish government has primarily managed the care of these refugees with its resources, supplemented by assistance from the European Union.

In 2014, Turkey introduced the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which established a temporary protection status for Syrians. This law guarantees them the right to remain in Turkey until the Syrian conflict is resolved and provides access to essential services such as healthcare, education, social assistance, and, to some extent, the labor market. However, these rights are not sufficiently supported by policies that protect Syrians from discrimination and hate speech.

This opinion piece highlights how the circulation of online hate speech against Syrians in Turkey, sometimes perpetuated by established political parties, may provide the context for specific incidents of street violence. Drawing on political speeches and widely available social media videos, the piece aims to underscore the vulnerable situation of Syrians who have fled the civil war in their country, only to face ongoing discrimination and exploitation despite the legal protections that international agreements and national legal provisions should offer.

Hate Speech, Marginalization, and Criminalization of Syrians

Hate speech occurs in various social contexts, including political disputes, creative expression, professional sports, and workplace environments. Hate speech is a wilful public statement intended to denigrate a person as representative of a specific group (Paz et al, 2020: 1), typically targeting members of a social minority. Consequently, we can categorize it as sexist, racist, xenophobic, ageist, fatphobic, or homophobic, among other classifications (Di Fátima, 2023, 11). This phenomenon is particularly prevalent against Syrians in Turkey, primarily through new social media.

Anti-Syrian sentiment in Turkey refers to the prevailing social reaction to the influx of Syrians into urban areas due to irregular migration (Yükseker et al., 2022, 9). Anti-Syrian factions assert that Turkey is, as expressed by one of the widely shared X hashtags, "quietly occupied" by Syrian forces.

Social and news media often portray Syrians as either "replacing Turkish workers" or as criminals involved in "drug smuggling, sexual harassment, rape, theft, harassment, violence, and other forms of street and property crime" (Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021, 2249; Yüksek et al., 2022), illustrating their ongoing

criminalization, which follows typical tropes of populist politics and far-right rhetoric.

Primarily raised by the populist Zafer (Victory) Party and its leader, Mr. Ümit Özdağ, displaced Syrians have become a highly contentious political issue on the agenda. Mr. Özdağ argues that Turkey is heading toward a civil war. Aiming to create moral panic by exaggerating the risk posed by Syrian people (Cohen, 2011 [1972]), particularly during the latest presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, the Victory Party prioritized the ‘Syrian issue’ on its political agenda. Mr. Özdağ has garnered significant positive attention from the public, especially from young people who may feel the effects of societal instability most acutely, and his party has consistently scapegoated Syrians to gain consensus.

These populist narratives create tension and expose Syrians to vulnerability, harassment, and mobbing in their workplaces and on the streets. For example, on August 10, 2021, a confrontation between a group of Syrians and locals in Ankara resulted in the tragic death of a young boy. The tension escalated the following day when Turkish people targeted the homes, vehicles, and shops of Syrians living in these neighborhoods. The words of a young man, aged 15-16, who participated in these events and has his face partially covered in a related video are telling:

“If they (authorities) give us half an hour, we will send them (Syrians) away as a nation; the aim is not to kill” (BBC News, 2021).

This indicates possible reasons behind the attack and seems to suggest political and media discourse surrounding ‘the invasion’ or ‘replacement’. This further illustrates how Syrians, who are marginalized through online verbal means, can be violently attacked in Syria, despite the protections that humanitarian laws should provide.

The precarious situation faced by Syrians in Turkey under international protection leads to increased marginalization, discrimination, and exploitation. Often, Syrians are compelled to accept irregular working conditions and exploitative jobs, are hesitant to voice their grievances, and suffer from human rights abuses (Yükseker et al., 2022). For many Syrian men, working has become essential to support their families; however, taking jobs at a young age has been shown to contribute to higher school dropout rates (Yükseker et al. 2022, 8).

Due to restrictions on the right to work, working-age refugees may resort to informal and irregular employment, often earning inadequate wages that are significantly lower than Turkey’s minimum wage, primarily in the textile, services, construction, and education sectors. This situation arises because these “protected” Syrians, despite receiving essential public services like healthcare and education, cannot legally work in Turkey because of their temporary status. To secure legal employment, Syrians must apply for residency permits; however, the bureaucratic hurdles and limitations associated with this process make it exceedingly challenging.

In contrast, and perhaps reflecting how Syrian communities are framed as a ‘threat’ by politicians and media outlets, some locals argue that Syrians are ‘responsible’ for rising unemployment and higher rent prices. Furthermore, some locals claim that Syrians have ‘unfair economic advantages’ because they can open unlicensed businesses and are not subject to the tax requirements imposed on citizens.

Nationalist and exclusionary content has been found to predominate on social media sites (Öztürk and Ayvaz, 2018). For instance, terms like ‘traitor’, ‘potential threat’, and ‘source of the country’s economic problem’ on YouTube portray Syrian refugees in a hostile, discriminatory, and hateful light (Aslan, 2017; Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021: 2249). As a result, it is unsurprising to witness the rise in anti-Syrian sentiments and attitudes. One notable example involves a suspect who explained in court after being called to testify about the death of a 10-year-old boy killed by a shotgun for allegedly making noise in Gaziantep, “I thought the children were Syrian. I didn’t think Turkish children were so ill-behaved” (Refugee Agency, 2024). This tragic testimony captures the prevalence of prejudice against Syrians in Turkey.

Political Parties and Campaigns

Harmful and dehumanizing discourses about migration have increasingly been utilized by political groups that exploit migrants and refugees as scapegoats for deep-rooted societal issues and anxieties,

often for political or monetary gain, particularly during election campaigns. Candidates centered their campaign rhetoric on Syrian refugees, with numerous themes specifically crafted to address Turkish voters' concerns regarding employment and housing.

The targeting of societal anxieties is particularly evident in a TV show where Mr. Özdağ, who does not hesitate to threaten Syrians under temporary protection, argues: "As your stay here gets longer, you feel the nerves of the Turkish people who welcome you here with hospitality get tense too" (Haberiniz, 2023). Connecting with Mr. Özdağ, who repeatedly claims that Turkey is 'being dragged into civil war', he mobilizes nationalist othering by establishing 'outsiders and insiders', asserting that those 'who say "Syrians should stay in Turkey" are traitors!' (Abluka, 2024). Mr. Özdağ declares that he founded the Victory Party to end this civil war and adds, "All refugees will go back when the Victory Party is in power."

Through this anti-migration nationalism, and amid very real socio-economic struggles, the Victory Party has become a beacon of hope for anti-immigrant sentiments, especially among the youth. This use of migration as a political and electoral tool is also coupled with a greater emphasis on criminalizing communities in highly vulnerable positions, labeling them as a 'security concern'. In a recent TV show, Mr. Özdağ (2024) said:

"I have no issue with foreign workers in Turkey. They contribute positively. My concern lies with those foreigners who become a burden to Turkey and depend on the Turkish state. The Zafer Party is opposed to mass migration, particularly against the illegal immigration of unskilled, jobless, and vulnerable individuals. As a result, there is increasing worry that Turkey's streets may become unsafe."

In the securitization process, particularly women and migrant groups, including those who arrived from Afghanistan, are utilized to emphasize the gravity of the issue. On the same TV show, once again, Mr. Özdağ attempted to heighten the sense of insecurity, fear of crime, and victimization among the public by targeting women to increase their feelings of insecurity:

"People who are originally from Afghanistan have begun to compare Turkey to Afghanistan. It is that unsafe. 74% of women do not feel safe. 62% of men also feel unsafe on the streets" (Özdağ, 2024).

Continuing to discuss the sense of insecurity felt by a migrant from Afghanistan, he went on to say:

"In a TV interview in Izmir yesterday, someone mentioned that things were different in 2015. Everything has changed in recent years. These migrations no longer make me feel safe. When I came from Afghanistan in 2015, this was a very safe city. Now it has become like Afghanistan" (ibid.).

Comparing Turkey to Afghanistan makes the contrast even more pronounced, considering that Afghanistan is a country linked to significant insecurity for women.

To justify claims of needing 'take action' regarding migration and citizenship rights, these rhetorics seek to pit one group of migrants against another while employing stereotypical gendered tropes to emphasize, and possibly exploit, sexist discourses of 'protection'. It appears to be urging males to act to protect women, echoing how the 2001 war in Afghanistan was seemingly also launched to 'save women'.

The level of normalization of prejudice against Syrians is such that even the titles of some shared videos are discriminatory. For instance, a YouTube video is titled: "Syrians cannot leave their homes...There is garbage everywhere," referring to the dehumanizing trope of uncleanness attributed to Syrians. In the video below, the YouTuber shares life in Şenyurt Street, known as the "Syrian neighborhood," where Syrians make up the majority in Gaziantep province, which borders Syria. The YouTuber, who has previously visited this neighborhood, compares his current observations with those from his last visit. He emphasizes that there are fewer people on the streets than during his previous visit, and the shops run by Syrians are closed. A Turkish shopkeeper claims that the documents of Syrian shopkeepers have deficiencies, which prevent them from opening their shops due to fear of facing fines from the relevant authorities. Turkish shopkeepers claim that they pay their taxes, while Syrian shopkeepers do not. The video also highlights the removal of Arabic signs from shops owned by Syrians. The large open area where Syrians once set up the market is now empty. The YouTuber points to the garbage on the street and adds:

“Many Syrian neighborhoods we visited have hygiene problems” (Kola, 2024).

The comments made on the video are as crucial as the content of the video itself in revealing how nationalist, racist, anti-migration language and dehumanization may be shaping reactions to vulnerable communities in everyday life. For example, comments left by YouTube viewers include:

“Isn’t it a crime to open a business without a license, not to pay taxes, and to operate without insurance? Who allowed this lawlessness to continue? I wish they would all return to their lands. What will happen tomorrow? They will increase. Why should our children bother with them? Being guests should end. They are not our brothers. We don’t need their taxes. Even their surroundings are filthy. The policy that the state has been following is wrong. Let them go; we don’t want them! They have overstepped their limits. Please don’t give them shops; don’t give them houses; don’t sell them property; let them go. Look and observe where there are Arabs; there is almost no peace or cleanliness. I don’t want Syrians in my country. We have no patience left” (Refugee Agency, 2024).

All these comments demonstrate how many in Turkey seem to buy into these videos and their narrative, which build on typical tropes of the migrant as dirty and as a burden to the country. This reflects the broader circulation of hate speech promoted by political parties for their gain. This set of comments further illustrates how these sentiments may make Syrians more hesitant to work openly in specific neighborhoods.

On December 8, 2024, armed insurgents seized the Syrian city of Damascus, forcing long-standing leader President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country. This action follows 13 years of civil conflict and effectively marks the end of the strict reign of the Assad dictatorship (Bakkour, 2025). In Turkey, Syrian refugees celebrated the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime on Sunday. People gathered in the central square of Kilis, a border city in southern Turkey, waving Syrian and Turkish flags. In Hatay province, near the Syrian border, some individuals expressed a desire to return home after years of living in Turkey (Çelik 2025; Smith 2024).

Turkey has expressed its support for Syria’s autonomy (Çekebilir, 2024). While visiting Damascus in December 2022, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated that the priority in Syria is “to achieve national reconciliation, to ensure economic development, and to create conditions that will enable Syrians who have been separated from their country for years to return to their homeland.” (in Çekebilir, 2024).

Turkey, a significant economy in the region with a robust construction industry, acknowledges its ability to rebuild Syria, which has endured extensive devastation over the past decade regarding its economy, infrastructure, and services. Projects aimed at repairing Syria’s roads, airports, energy, and electrical infrastructure have already been announced by Turkey’s ministries of transportation, energy, and natural resources (ibid.).

Conclusion

Since 2011, there has been a barrage of hate propaganda and disinformation targeting Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. People are discussing a systematic operation that employs artificial intelligence and other technical tools to create numerous fake accounts solely for this purpose. Discriminatory and racist messages have a clear visibility advantage on social media and other online platforms, as they tend to accumulate likes and thus gain value for these platforms. Intensive criticism from politicians like Mr. Özdağ has asserted that Turkey is facing a ‘silent invasion’, fostering fears that irregular migration will disrupt its demographic structure. The claim that ‘demography is disrupted’ seems to imply that the population should consist of a specific ethnic or religious composition. Amid this harmful political rhetoric, some view even a slight increase in the number of Syrians as a threat.

However, Turkey is a country with diverse ethnic, religious, sectarian, and belief origins. It’s essential to recognize that these speeches can potentially lead to severe discrimination and even violent racist incidents with tragic consequences. As a result, Syrians are viewed with suspicion, and they have become targets of hate-based crimes by individuals they do not even know. These discourses and narratives, therefore, must be stopped.

While some opposition political parties specifically highlight the serious problems faced by refugees and criticize the government, they also use language that is far from humane, incorporating discrimination, racism, and hate speech. This issue is compounded by the fact that these parties tend to rely on false data, and the government fails to provide accurate information about Syrians. Additionally, some claim that these criminal incidents against Syrians and the subsequent arrests are politically organized, making it more difficult to portray these violent incidents as “spontaneous events” or “the people’s instant reaction.” This political atmosphere of hate speech, criminalization of Syrians, and contention undermines the foundations of social peace in Turkey, hindering the development of effective immigration policies that could positively influence the country’s domestic and foreign policy.

Even after the fall of the Assad regime, a sustainable political resolution in Syria seems unlikely while hostilities continue. In the absence of a resolution to the conflict in Syria, simply calling for Syrians to ‘go back to their country’ does not seem to address the concerns of those Syrians who are understandably hesitant to return home, considering the complexity and unresolved nature of governance in Syria (Fraser and Wilks 2024). As we have explained, Turkish officials have made statements to assist in rebuilding Syria’s roads, airports, energy, and electrical infrastructure. However, these further developments in the conflict in Syria will not necessarily resolve the issues of international protection for refugee communities in Turkey.

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Liberating the Women of Iran: The Regime Change Industry, Women's Rights and Imperial Wars

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Introduction

During the so-called “12-day war” of June 2025, many Iranians resorted to humor and irony to find some peace of mind in the midst of the bombings. While leaving Tehran because of the Israeli attacks, a friend commented that, at least, she was not out of the country where she would have had to fight against monarchists and their “nonsensical calls for regime change”. In fact, to many in Iran and the diaspora, such talks were a potent reminder of past disastrous attempts at overthrowing and replacing regimes hostile to the US in neighboring countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Like in the case of Afghanistan, the legitimate aspirations to autonomy and self-determination of Iranian women have been used to justify a military attack against a state that repressed them. In his address to the Iranian people of June 13th, Benjamin Netanyahu (the ICC-wanted Prime Minister of Israel) concluded his speech by saying,

“This is your opportunity to stand up and let your voices be heard. Woman Life Freedom. *Zan Zandegi Azadi*¹ [...] Israel's fight is not with you [...] our fight is with our common enemy, a murderous regime that both oppresses you and impoverishes you. Brave people of Iran: your light will defeat the darkness. I am with you, the people of Israel are with you” (Israeli PM, 2025).

Netanyahu defined the bombing of Iranian women, men, children, as an “opportunity” for the same to “stand up” against the regime in the name of “Woman Life Freedom”. Furthermore, photos of Israeli soldiers and women pilots circulated on social media of them inscribing the name of Mahsa Amini, along with references to Kian Pirfalak—a nine-year-old boy shot dead in September 2022 during the Woman Life Freedom uprising—on a munition used during airstrikes on Iran (Truzman, 2025). The script (and the irony of it) did not go unnoticed.

We argue that such calls for regime change follow a pre-determined script which shows strong similarities with other instances of regime change in the past. Indeed, the “military attack cum regime change” pattern is not new, and its genealogy goes back to the colonial *mission civilisatrice*. More specifically, we focus on the role of the idea of “gender disorder” to justify the “regime change script” both discursively and materially in the case of the recent Israel-Iran war—that is, the idea that when racialized men oppress women, these are in need of external salvation through bombing.

We understand regime change as an industry which encompasses political and military forces, the media and civil society. It is as much about propaganda as it is about material relations of power—military might, economic reconstruction, resource exploitation. The regime change industry also needs people to animate it. In particular we examine the role of the monarchists, led by Reza Pahlavi², and the My Stealthy Freedom campaign, led by Masih Alinejad. Following Bacchetta et al. (2002) and Cohen's analysis of state denials of crime (1996), we pay attention to the co-optation of women within this industry and to how “gender disorder” is mobilized to deny aggression.

Gender Disorder and Regime Change

With Cohen, it becomes clear how the memory and the core message of a people's feminist uprising are being mobilized to justify a military attack. Cohen examines the ways in which states articulate their denial of having committed certain actions, usually human rights violations, even when evidence is offered (Cohen, 1996). Literal, interpretative and implicatory denials are discursive forms through which states deny, re-frame, and normalize their actions by saying that they either did not happen or were

1 Woman Life Freedom is the main slogan of the uprising that started in Iran in September 2022, following the killing of young Kurdish-Iranian woman Jina Mahsa Amini. It lasted several months and represented the fiercest challenge to the stability of the Islamic Republic to date. It had a strong feminist and anti-authoritarian tone.

2 Reza Pahlavi is the son of the king Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, removed from power by the 1979 revolution. Although he has not set foot in Iran since 1979 and lacks the backing of a broad popular movement, Reza Pahlavi positions himself as a potential figure to fill the “power vacuum” in the event of a regime change. The phrase “to fill the power vacuum” is one of Pahlavi's recurring rhetorical lines in several interviews. It has also become a point of satire among his opponents on social media. In Persian, *por kardan-e khalā* (“to fill the vacuum”) phonetically resembles *por kardan-e khala* (“to fill the toilet”), which has only added to the mockery. Reza Pahlavi displays solid Zionist beliefs and is particularly appreciated by conservative and right-wing political networks in the West.

something else. There is a striking similarity with how military aggressions and unlawful violations of a state's sovereignty by other sovereign states have been framed as something else, usually as a necessary or "moral" intervention by a "civilized" nation to liberate local populations presented as deprived of political agency from injustice.

Such framing is often accompanied by discourses about gender disorder, pivoted around the representation of distorted masculinities and submissive femininities in need of rescue. Rosenberg (2002) reviews some historical examples. In 1898 US, iconography representing Cuba as a damsel in distress urged the American government to rescue Cuban women from Spanish brutal rulers, and during World War I German women were monstified and represented as violent and murderous mothers. Ideas of "gender disorder" according to which men and women adopt "improper gendered behaviors" is ever-present since American imperial enterprises dating back to the Nineteenth century, such as the military occupation of the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. Since then, in the US and elsewhere, the script about rescuing women and children has consolidated through military enterprises and ad hoc-created moral panics, whether around honor crimes (Abu-Lughod, 2011), identity (Zakaria, 2021) or femonationalist themes related to national values under threat (Farris, 2017).

The 2001 radio delivery on Afghanistan by Laura Bush is part and parcel of this tradition. In it, her mentioning of children not allowed to fly kites, women face-beaten for laughing or maimed for wearing nail polish, served the purpose of asserting that, thanks to US military intervention, women's life had improved. "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women", Bush declared, and concluded by saying that "I hope Americans will join our family in working to ensure that dignity and opportunity will be secured for all the women and children of Afghanistan" (Bush, 2001).

Waging war in the name of liberating a population to bring modernity and democracy in, is never disassociated from the rescuing of women and children from dangerous men. In other words, if regime change is the structure, the instrumentalization of women's rights and liberation is one of the narratives sustaining that very structure. Gender inequality and patriarchal violence are reframed as a circumstantial problem which can be solved through legislative reform after regime change, obscuring the imperial violence that facilitates it. Therefore, we can think of regime change as a structure of imperial expansion, sustained by the claim of eliminating gender disorder.

In the case of Iran, the "geopolitical other" *par excellence* (Pezeshki & Rasooli, 2025), gender disorder is framed in a very specific way, considering the mediatization of women-led uprisings such as Woman Life Freedom, which impedes the utilization of stereotypes representing racialized, often Muslim, women as submissive. In what follows, we turn our attention to the framings adopted by the regime change industry in the case of Iran.

The Industry of Regime Change in Iran

We theorize regime change as a structure that enables imperial warfare. We also theorize it as an industry, which counts on material and immaterial resources: politicians, intellectuals, journalists, policymakers, activists, as well as infrastructures, networks, organizations and funding. An example of how the industry may manifest is the Iran Disinformation campaign (@IranDisinfo). The campaign, known through its social media activism, was funded by the US Department of State and targeted Iranian-American experts critical of Trump's policy towards Iran or deemed to be "too soft" on the Islamic Republic. They were slandered, and disinformation about them was spread. While the Iran Disinformation project has been taken off the government's payroll, other organizations and actors replaced it, like Tavaana, a well-known monarchist platform (Mortazavi & Hussain, 2020).

Monarchists and other forces in the diaspora make no secret of their favoring a regime change and their willingness to "step in" and run the transition away from the Islamic Republic (Pahlavi, 2025a, 2025b, 20205c; Rajavi, 2025). Both the monarchists and the Mujaheddin—the most relevant actors favoring a regime change in Iran—issued plans for the post-regime change transitional phase, which ought to be placed under their leadership, and actively fundraised through them (First 100 Days, 2024; Ten Points Plan, 2006). What is important to emphasize here is that such plans have never been discussed with Iranians in Iran. The Iran regime change industry, in fact, exists out of the empire's geopolitical interests. Actors compete for imperial political benevolence and economic support. They do not need popular

legitimacy.

The industry of regime change in Iran utilizes several narratives. Women's liberation is a central one but along with it, we also have tropes centered on ethnic minorities' rights and liberation from state centralization, and on nationalism, pivoted on the idea of liberating Iran's "potential for greatness from the incompetence of the regime". Plans to territorially divide Iran according to ethnic fault lines are popular in Washington and Tel Aviv, and build on well-established policy traditions (Mamedov, 2025). Equally linked to regime change are plans to "Make Iran Great Again" or MIGA, an expression foremost utilized by monarchists well before Trump rendered it famous in a June 2025 post on his Truth Social, which read: "It's not politically correct to use the term, 'Regime Change,' but if the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn't there be a Regime change??? MIGA!!!" (Trump, 2025; Keshavarzian & Stewart, 2025). Nationalist narratives often utilize civilizational references to disavow Iran's Islamic identity and to elevate its Persian heritage and closeness to Christian and Jewish religious traditions. By doing this, such narratives (which resonate with those mobilized in the framework of the Global War on Terror; see Butler, 2009) follow a racialized logic where Muslim (and Arab, by extension) identity is constructed as "alien and inferior", while identities perceived as white and Western are constructed as fundamentally "free and superior" (Rahbari, 2025; Iranian Americans for Liberty, 2025; Pahlavi, 2025d).

Narratives around women's liberation are central to the regime change industry. They form a competitive discursive field, with many actors from the diaspora fighting for the funding and political credibility made available by different institutions, from national governments to private foundations. Particularly active is the My Stealthy Freedom campaign.³ This is better understood as network with a core—Alinejad—and associated actors like private foundations, civic organizations, sympathetic influencers and policymakers that reinforce and amplify the message. While this network is extensive, for the sake of space, we will focus on Alinejad to examine how legitimate demands for rights are capitalized on in the regime change industry. We will focus on the 2025 Israeli-Iran war, although this narrative has been used by Alinejad since before.

Alinejad is probably the best-known figure associated with women's rights activism in Iran and a celebrated icon for advocates of regime change. In 2014, she launched the My Stealthy Freedom campaign, urging Iranian women to share photos and videos of themselves without compulsory *hijab*. These visuals garnered international attention, allowing Alinejad to present herself as the digital-age leader of the women's civil disobedience movement and to receive significant financial and political support (Alinejad, 2018). However, her work has been sharply criticized especially by Iranian feminists, who have highlighted how the fight against compulsory hijab predates Alinejad's co-optation of it for her own visibility. In this sense, Zanganeh (2018) defined Alinejad's feminism "opportunistic". Many have also questioned the political direction of her activism. Although Alinejad frequently identifies as an independent and humanitarian voice, in 2019 she met with then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a member of Trump administration. Despite Pompeo's support for the rollback of women's rights in the US, including reproductive freedom, he praised Alinejad's work on Iran. In 2022, during an interview with *The New Yorker*, Alinejad controversially claimed for herself the leadership of the Woman Life Freedom uprising (Filkins, 2022), drawing significant criticism from Iranian feminists and activists, who viewed the uprising as a collective struggle that should not be coopted by any single figure. In November 2022, Alinejad (2022) announced that she had met with French President Macron. She urged France to recall its ambassador, suspend nuclear negotiations, proscribe the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, expel Iranian diplomats, organize a meeting with representatives of the Iranian opposition and "prepare the EU for a secular Iran". Many wondered how an independent women's rights activist could speak for the Iranian people, and how her activism could justify demanding broad intervention from Western governments to facilitate regime change in Iran. Her tendency to align with the interests of imperial powers while denouncing domestic repression led critics like Shohadae (2023) to describe Alinejad as a "modern American savior". This attitude also manifested in her support for Israel's assault on Gaza and genocide, framed as justified attacks against Iran-supported "terrorists" (Dabashi, 2024).

Alinejad's social media activity in the aftermath of Israel's 2025 attack on Iran was particularly rich. Between June 13th and the June 24th ceasefire, Alinejad published 46 Tweets (including retweets) on X and 157 posts on Instagram, in addition to a large volume of Instagram stories. Part of this material ridicules

³ See <https://www.mystealthyfreedom.org>

news and reports of Iranian officials being killed by Israeli bombs while ignoring civilian casualties—and when civilian deaths are acknowledged, the blame is immediately shifted onto the Islamic Republic rather than Israel. Alinejad also posted videos of herself urging the leader of the Islamic Republic to resign. In them, she asserts that the Iranian people are not enemies of the Israeli people, and claims that both have become “human shields” for the Islamic Republic. In line with her politics, Alinejad makes large use of the terminology adopted by Israeli and IDF propaganda, such as “human shields”, “precision strikes”, “targeted attacks” and “bombing for freedom”.

The violence of the Iranian state against women is evoked as a justification for the legitimacy and necessity of bombing Iran until the Islamic Republic is replaced with a secular regime. On June 19th, Alinejad posted on X the picture of several women who had been blinded during the Woman Life Freedom uprising. In it, she addressed “all anti-war activists in the West” by accusing them of ignoring the regime’s violence against women and of being “anti-Iranian people” when calling for an end to the war (Alinejad, 2025). A similar argument is fleshed out in a video posted on June 22nd, in which the deaths of Jina Mahsa Amini and female protesters during Woman Life Freedom—and the shooting of Neda Agha-Soltan during the Green Movement protests, back in 2009—are directly linked to the necessity of ending the regime: “we call [...] on the free world to stand with the people of Iran. If you want to end this war, there is only one solution: to end the barbaric regime in Iran” (Alinejad, 2025a).

While Alinejad’s argumentative structure overlaps with Reza Pahlavi’s, she only seldom mentions the phrase “regime change” and is much more careful in claiming for herself the political leadership of a transitional phase post-Islamic Republic. Alinejad’s language centers “the people of Iran” which she constructs as a uniform collective, whose voice she delivers to a Western audience and whose will she embodies. In her discursive structure, support for the people of Iran and the necessity to end injustice, including gender apartheid (Alinejad, 2024), is code for support for external intervention bringing about regime change (Alinejad, 2025b).

Conclusion

Missing from the “regime change script” is the mention of the many women and men who endured great suffering during the Israeli military attack. Although narratives of suffering spread across social media, the proponents of regime change represented Iranians as a crowd cheering Israeli and American bombs, transformed into a humanitarian gift to “free Iran from the mullahs”.

Some progressive and anti-imperialist organizations/groups also denounced that, while regime change narratives widely circulated, their platforms were censored. For instance, the leftist page Sedaye Mahi-ye Siah reported on June 19th that their posts criticizing monarchist celebrations of Israeli attacks and exposing a Zionist group’s anti-Iran hymn, were removed despite gaining traction, suggesting that social media algorithms suppress dissenting narratives in favor of dominant pro-regime change propaganda (Black Fish Voice, 2025).

Others denounced that the many statements that civil society groups and political organizations based in Iran issued during the war, condemning both Israel’s aggression and the structural violence of the Islamic Republic, were willfully ignored. In them, the co-optation of grassroots political and social struggles of Iranians, including Woman Life Freedom, was called out as an ill-attempt at silencing the activists who, from within, seek political change and demand the right to hold their own institutions accountable through sovereign mechanisms of democracy. Regime change, on the contrary, is built on the unaccountability of imperial warfare and of those who theorize and campaign for it.

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize the fertility of thinking with “gender disorder” and monstification to unveil the workings of imperial power and geopolitics. Imperial warfare does nothing to advance liberation from patriarchal violence. On the contrary, while monstifying racialized men and instrumentalizing the legitimate desire for freedom of Iranian women, it offers more of the same medicine: contextual violence that reinforces structural violence through killing, dispossession, the impossibility of life. Carefully selecting which women can speak, it silences those voices that call for a radical rethinking of power. Through the promise of correcting “disorders” and through strategic denials, empires racialize and restrict the number of those who have a right to have rights.

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Forum: Palestine & Gaza





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Forum: Palestine & Gaza - Editorial

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This forum on Palestine and Gaza responds to the call from [De Backer et al. \(2023\)](#) for critical criminologists to address the substantial imbalances of power between the Israeli state and Palestinians, and to actively avoid reproducing these inequalities by clearly analysing ongoing violence within the long continuum of occupation, apartheid and colonialism ([Wilkinson and Degenhardt, 2024](#)).

At the time of writing, the world is witnessing the final stages of Israel's near total destruction – genocide ([United Nations, 1948, Article II](#); UN, 2025; ICJ, 2024a) – of the Palestinian peoples (Green, 2023; Al-Hindi, 2025). Although journalists and media news teams are being denied access to film the mass decimation of life and land in Gaza ([BBC, 2025](#)), satellite images evidence the truth about the widespread scale of destruction ([Garman, Murphy and BBC the Visual Journalism Team, 2025](#)). Whole cities, homes, schools, hospitals, libraries, shops, and places to play have been bombed to rubble, further than the eye can see. The bombing, killing and destruction have not stopped, even at times of ceasefire ([Amnesty International, 2025b](#)).

Since the brutal and widely reported Hamas attacks on 7th October 2023, child deaths have increased by 180% (UNICEF, 2025) and [Amnesty International \(2025a\)](#) reports that 90% of the heavily concentrated population of Gaza's 2 million+ peoples have been forcefully displaced. The blocking of international aid in 2024-25 has led to the [World Health Organisation \(2025\)](#) reporting one in five children are now acutely malnourished, with research by [Medical Aid for Palestinians \(2025\)](#) finding over 40% of mothers in conditions of severe malnutrition and unable to breast feed their babies. In April 2024 the United Nations reported deep concerns about 'scholasticide' (OHCHR, 2025) – a term referring 'to the systemic obliteration of education through the arrest, detention or killing of teachers, students and staff, and the destruction of educational infrastructure' – after more than 80% of schools in Gaza were destroyed ([UN, 2024](#)). Journalists have also been targeted and killed by Israel at the highest rate recorded since the establishment of the Committee to Protect Journalists in 1992 ([Allan et al., 2024](#)).

Many of us are haunted by the images and videos of destruction in Gaza and the West Bank, and inspired by the resilience of Palestinians. Many criminologists who may have been frustrated by the use of the label of 'criminality' in the context of the state, are now resorting to the label of international criminality and invoking the international criminal justice system as a possible resource to intervene – as a tactic to manifest some form of moral response to enact a ceasefire, and to counter-act the censure by powerful western states.

This special issue forum on Palestine and Gaza connects contexts of activism and protest to aggressive attempts by state institutions, law-makers and policing forces to suppress the global swell of solidarity against genocide. All contributions explore new aspects of genocide, expanding the remit of the discipline to address issues of war relating to artificial intelligence (AI), ecocide, attacks to freedom of speech within academia, and the potential uses of international institutions by Global South states, such as the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court to meaningfully intervene in state crimes.

Fiametta Bonfigli provides an overview of the recent mobilizations by states and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to account for the violation of international law and international criminal law by the state of Israel in Palestine. Despite the shortcomings and discrediting of the judicial institutions at international levels, Bonfigli (2025) argues that international justice is still seen as a valuable venue to challenge long term processes of colonization such as those perpetrated by Israel in Palestine (ICJ, 2024a; ICJ 2024b; ICC, 2024). If international justice is currently mostly utilised by states in the Global South, there is an increased mobilization also within the Global North with countries such as Ireland, Spain and Slovenia joining the legal charges brought against Israel.

Lambros Fatsis's piece evidences the need to resist practices of silencing and the complicity of our academic institutions in the normalization and acceptance of the destruction and erasure of some people. The powerful intervention speaks of recent concerns raised within the European Society of Criminology (ESC) annual conference about the need to professionally stand in opposition to war crimes and genocide, forms of supreme crimes. Fatsis (2025) rightly dismantles the ESC's excuse of 'scientificity' used to block motions and dismiss widespread concerns, recognising that any social science cannot shy away from issues that demand a political and moral conscience, especially at times of urgent violations of international criminal law such as the ones carried out by Israel. The issue of genocide in Palestine

should be especially important to criminologists, as a disciplinary study involving critical analysis of the role of power in socially constructing crime. We thank Lambros Fatsis for such a crucial intervention from his experience at the ESC conference in Athens this year. We support the request that the Society takes a stand on the issue ([Criminologists for Palestine, 2025](#)).

Iva Ramuš Cvetkovič researches the use of artificial intelligence (AI) powered tech in the context of the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Cvetkovič (2025) argues that the AI powered technology constitutes evidence of the *means rea* required for the adjudication of the crime of genocide. The design of the technology with the time set in between detonations indicate not the aim of precision, but rather that of mass destruction. The mass production of targeting implicit in the design of the AI technology prove not just the genocidal intent from the Israeli army, but also that responsibility reaches to the very top of the chain of command. Analysing the use of AI powered tech as a genocidal tool is key to arresting its use in other contexts, an important issue if we are to limit the destructivity of future conflicts. Cvetkovič further argues that failing to charge Israel of genocide could weaken the international criminal law apparatus, and threaten the future of humanity.

White's (2025) article further evidences the mass destruction of Palestine as part of Israel's long-term colonisation project and a strategy of war by design. Through analysing the social and legal parameters of ecocide, White argues that Israel's mass destruction, contamination and degradation of Palestinian trees, water, soils, infrastructure and ecosystems contributes directly to the ongoing genocide and continues to be internationally denied and facilitated. As White (2025) argues, occupation, ecocide and genocide must be understood and analysed together as a colonial process. Israel's intent is not only to destroy Palestinian lives in whole or in part, but to make the land unliveable. White concludes that documentation and recognition of mass environmental harm as ecocide is vital to achieving interventions from international courts, as well as contributing evidence to the urgency of demanding an end to war and occupation, and the need for reparations and restoration of Palestinian land rights. This article offers important future directions for green criminology, as well as zemiology and those researching harms of the powerful.

At the time in which these analyses were written, Western states are aggressively targeting groups and individuals involved in protesting the ongoing destruction in Palestine ([Abuqamar, 2025](#); [Curreri and Piché, 2025](#); [Pali and Pallister-Wilkins, 2025](#)). Protesters are demanding that international institutions be active in ceasing their material and discursive support of the Israeli government. This movement is not just limited to some states - it is an issue that is taken up by people across the globe, with different intensity and including calls to boycott corporations complicit in genocidal regimes ([Polya, 2023](#); [Sutrisno, 2024](#); [Varman et al., 2025](#)).

As this forum and the artistic intervention (Ali and Sharma, with ASHTAR Theatre, 2025) powerfully convey, there is an urgency to engage in action and call for an immediate ceasefire and reparations. Our collective solidarities stand with all those harmed by ongoing genocides, wars and state violence.

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If Machines Could Speak: What can the AI-Powered Technologies Used in Gaza Tell us About Israel's Genocidal Intent?

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Keywords: Gaza, artificial intelligence, algorithms, genocide, *dolus specialis*

Abstract: Gaza has been marked as the first AI-powered genocide due to the fact that the mass-scale annihilation of Palestinian people in Gaza is conducted with the help of AI algorithmic tools – namely *Gospel*, *Lavender* and *Where is Daddy?*. It is, therefore, the first time that we must examine the functioning of AI tools in light of a genocide claim. While it has already been established that there exists at least a plausible risk of a genocide being perpetrated in Gaza, most of the attempts to prove genocidal intent focus on the countless examples of dehumanizing rhetoric and other forms of genocidal language deployed by Israeli officials. In this short article, I, therefore, purposefully focus on the other (that is, the technological) aspect of this issue and explore the role of aforementioned AI tools in the context of the asserted perpetration of genocide. I examine whether the design, as well as the reported use of such AI tools in Gaza, can offer additional proof for establishing genocidal intent. This is extremely relevant not only to examine this particular genocide claim in its entirety but to prevent normalization and further uncritical use of these potentially genocidal technologies.

Due to the high involvement of AI tools in the ongoing destruction and annihilation of Gaza, Israel's conduct has been described as “the first AI-powered genocide” (Fazi, 2024). Besides the numerous warnings of scholars and experts that Israel is conducting genocide in Gaza (*Public Statement: Scholars Warn of Potential Genocide in Gaza – TWAILR*, 2024; Segal, 2024; *Gaza: UN Experts Call on International Community to Prevent Genocide against the Palestinian People*, 2024; Albanese, 2024), this claim is currently disputed before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). ICJ already found violations of rights protected by the 1948 Genocide Convention plausible and, on that basis, issued several sets of provisional measures to protect the asserted rights (*Application of the Convention on the Prevention And Punishment of The Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip*, 2024). Jurisdiction of the ICJ over this issue is, however, not precluding the International Criminal Court (ICC) and domestic courts of states from determining individual criminal liability for perpetrators of genocide (Albanese, 2024). Such a broadly recognized risk of genocide, therefore, calls for a detailed examination of all facts relevant to the legal assessment of Israel's war in Gaza, including its use of AI tools and their design.

Even though the use of AI in the context of war is not new, the AI tools must be now examined in the context of genocide allegation, not only for thoroughly examining all relevant factors of such a serious claim but also for preventing the normalization, expansion and further use of potentially genocidal AI tools.

To establish the commission of genocide, two elements must be proven beyond reasonable doubt: the *actus reus* (the commission of one of the acts listed in Article II of the Genocide Convention against a protected group) and the *mens rea* (comprising both *dolus generalis*, the general intent to commit the act, and *dolus specialis*, the specific intent to destroy the group *as such*) (Schabas, 2009).

Given the clear evidential relevance of the use of AI tools for at least three forms of the *actus reus*—namely, (a) killing members of the group, (b) causing them serious bodily or mental harm, and (c) inflicting conditions of life intended to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part—this short paper explores whether specific AI-powered algorithmic tools used in Gaza may constitute evidence of special genocidal intent and, by extension, contribute to establishing *mens rea* within litigation proceedings on genocide.

Infamous Trinity of AI Algorithms Used in Gaza: Gospel, Lavender and Where is Daddy?

Israel's use of AI tools in its war in Gaza is evident. Its advanced weaponry, including AI-powered systems, has been extensively studied (Dolinko & Antebi, 2024; Loewenstein, 2023; Rosenhek et al., 2003) and is frequently promoted by the state itself (IDF, 2023; Jeremy Bob, 2023; Weinstein & Mimran, 2023). While the design and operational details of these tools remain largely classified due to their military nature, various details have been disclosed in the recent Report made by the +972 Magazine and Local Call, which identifies and describes—based on testimonies from IDF soldiers directly involved in their deployment—, three distinct AI tools used for generation of bombing targets: *Gospel*, *Lavender* and *Where is Daddy?* (Abraham, 2024).

Gospel is an AI system used to generate geographical targets potentially linked to Palestinian militant activity (Davies et al., 2023). *Lavender* similarly identifies potential targets but focuses on individuals rather than locations (Abraham, 2024). The system *Where is Daddy?* reportedly tracks the targeted individuals until they enter their family homes, and then alerts the IDF to strike them (ibid.).

The Report provides extensive details on the ongoing use of AI tools in Gaza—some so disturbing that even scholars claiming to write “from Israel's perspective” describe them as “alarming” (Mimran & Daham, 2024). Yet, labelling them as such is insufficient; they must instead be rigorously analyzed in light of the alleged crime of genocide.

AI and the genocidal intent

Dolus specialis, the subjective element that complements the general intent to commit genocidal acts, may not only be established by direct evidence, such as statements in the officials' rhetoric or written documents but may also be ‘inferred from patterns of conduct’, if genocidal intent is the only reasonable conclusion of such patterns (Albanese, 2024).

Therefore, this Article examines the patterns of conduct related to the use of the aforementioned AI tools in light of the information currently available. It focuses on three distinct but interrelated points: (1) the selection of targets, (2) the collateral damage factor and (3) the bombing.

The selection of targets by means of the aforementioned AI tools was, firstly, remarkably large (Abraham, 2024; Davies et al., 2023). The *Lavender*, according to sources, *rated almost everyone* in Gaza (including babies) from 1 to 100, according to the probability that they are enemy combatants – the higher the score, the more likely that person would be killed (Abraham, 2024; Danes je nov dan, 2025). The instructions given to the soldiers were to use AI as to generate more targets than ever before, which resulted in over 37.000 generated targets (Abraham, 2024). As targeting algorithms are known to feed on data collections containing civilian communication patterns, which causes high chances of mistakenly marking civilians as targets (Badalič, 2021), only the decision to dramatically increase target production alone raises concerns about a mass execution plan.

Secondly, when operating AI, unprecedented numbers of ‘collateral damage’ – civilians, permitted to be killed alongside the selected target, were allowed (Ibidem.). As reported, after 7 October 2023, up to 15 or 20 civilians could be killed for one low-ranking militant, and more than 100 civilians for a supposed commander (Ibidem.). As explained by Shir Hever, multiplying the collateral factor (described by soldiers as “in high double-digits if not low triple-digits”) with tens of thousands of selected targets indicates that at times the number of people considered as permitted to kill exceeded the whole population of Gaza, meaning that effectively everyone was eligible to be killed (Danes je nov dan, 2025). Even though there were some short-time restrictions on the collateral damage (allowing ‘merely’ 5 civilians per combatant to be killed on the most ‘merciful’ days), the soldiers reported that such endeavors “made it really difficult for us to attack, because if the whole family was home, we couldn’t bomb it”, and the restrictions were therefore soon lifted (Abraham, 2024). Such an enormous collateral factor as an “element of revenge” (Abraham, 2024), not only demonstrates a blatant violation of the principle of distinction as a part of the broader corpus of international humanitarian law (IHL) but also expands beyond that and points to a specific intent to destroy the group as such. This is extremely important as IHL and genocide were already examined together with a conclusion that Israel is using IHL as camouflage to cover and legitimize its genocidal violence (Albanese, 2024).

Thirdly, there are several other factors in the Report related to the bombing process that are relevant for the examination of genocidal intent. The testimonies show that the IDF used *Where is Daddy?* algorithm to bomb Lavender-targeted people *intentionally* in their private homes, knowingly and willingly eliminating entire families – including women and children:

“We were not interested in killing [Hamas] operatives only when they were in a military building or engaged in a military activity. [...] On the contrary, the IDF bombed them in homes without hesitation, as a first option. It’s much easier to bomb a family’s home. The system is built to look for them in these situations.” (Abraham, 2024).

Furthermore, the army in almost half of the cases preferred to use ‘dumb’ (i.e. unprecise) bombs on a very small but densely populated geographical area, with children constituting almost 50% of the whole population (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2021; Mohammad, 2023). “You don’t want to waste expensive bombs on unimportant people — it’s very expensive for the country and there’s a shortage [of those bombs]”, an IDF soldier explained (Abraham, 2024). Complete bloodlines – all members from all generations of one family tree – were annihilated this way (Al Ahmad, 2023; El Deeb, 2024).

Testimonies collected in the Report clearly demonstrate that decisions regarding the high number of targets, increasing collateral factor to triple-digits, using unprecise ammunition and bombing targeted people in their homes, alongside their families and other displaced¹ persons, were made consciously and communicated explicitly to the IDF soldiers, pointing to a ‘preconceived plan or policy’ of reaching an unprecedented level of killing and destruction. The latter serves as evidence of the ‘systematic’ nature of acts (*Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu*, 1998) or a ‘pattern of acts’ as part of indirect genocidal intent (Albanese, 2024; *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*

¹ It should not be forgotten that at the beginning of its invasion of Gaza, Israel ordered the whole population of northern Gaza (app. 1 million people) to evacuate towards the south in 24 hours, causing mass displacement, chaos and panic (Krauss and Shurafa, 2023).

(*Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*), 2007). The effects of this plan or policy are today visible in the total destruction of Gaza for the whole world to see.

However, in order to prove that the genocidal intent is *the only reasonable conclusion deriving from the described pattern of acts*, other potential conclusions need to be assessed.

One could argue that the described use of AI, while undoubtedly destructive, nevertheless indicates a certain (low) principle of selectivity, which could preclude genocidal intent. Even though the selected targets represented only a percentage of the whole population in Gaza, high collateral factor and the use of unprecise ammunition in almost 50% of all cases (Abraham, 2024) show that the 'selectivity' of targets is merely an illusion. It seems that AI tools are used to conduct (and simultaneously provide a (false) justification for) carpet bombing (Hever and Jay, 2025). Israel has transformed an entire national group and the entirety of its inhabited space into a destroyable target (Albanese, 2024), under the disguise of technological precision.

Another argument that needs to be addressed is the supposed gender selectivity in the targeting process. The soldiers' testimonies highlighted that – while essentially functioning as a kind of a 'stamping machine' for everything that algorithms suggested – they mainly checked only one thing: if the designated target was male (Abraham, 2024). According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in *Krstić*, even focusing the killing on (exclusively) military-aged men suffices for genocidal intent to destroy a group (*Prosecutor vs. Radislav Krstić*, 2004). However, in the case at hand, there was no checking of the targeted men's age, and the extermination policy carried out by *Where is Daddy?* included also their entire families. If the genocidal intent was proven in the case of the killing of military-aged men in Srebrenica, it must be accepted as even more likely to be established in the Gaza case, where the targeting was significantly broader.

Regarding any other similar argument stating that genocidal intent is precluded by the fact that AI tools did not *explicitly* target *everyone* in Gaza, it must be highlighted that proving genocidal intent does not mean 'proving the intent to kill everyone within the protected group' as often falsely argued in the public debates, but that there was an intent to conduct any one of the five listed *actus reus*, including the causing of serious bodily or mental harm and inflicting conditions of life intended to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part. Genocidal intent can, therefore, be established even when the intent was 'only' to cause such destructive living conditions.

Another popular argument against genocidal intent relies on the IHL category of human shields. Israeli officials indeed often use a '*macro-characterization* of Gaza's civilians as a population of human shields', considering it broadly as 'complicit and thus killable' (Albanese, 2024). By such a misuse of the term 'human shield', Israel transformed Gaza into a "world without civilians" (Semerdijan, 2024), justifying their killing 'under a cloak of purported legality, whose all-enveloping pervasiveness admits only of genocidal intent' (Albanese, 2024).

Therefore, as none of the examined alternative conclusions is convincing, it must be concluded that all three selected elements– selection of targets, collateral damage factor and the way the bombing was and is carried out – examined together, point towards the common intent to destroy the people in Gaza in whole or in part by means of killing, injuring and/or inflicting upon them conditions of life to bring about their destruction.

The extreme level of *dehumanization*² of the whole Gaza population as well as the mass-scale destruction – both created by means of the abovementioned AI tools – resulted in describing these tools as a 'factory' (Davies et al., 2023). This notion ominously resembles some of the horrific examples of various extermination machines used in past genocides.

The Perpetrator: AI or Humans?

While the Israeli AI used in Gaza can serve as additional evidence of genocidal intent, it must be highlighted that the AI is a tool in the hands of humans who are designing, controlling and operating it. Therefore, the criminal liability for genocide lays with those making and following the decisions to increase the number

² Dehumanization of a group is foundational to the process of genocide (Albanese, 2024; Green & Ward, 2004).

of selected targets and collateral factor, as well as to carry out bombing in people's homes in the presence of the whole families, even when some of those decisions were based on AI suggestions.

The threshold for genocidal intent varies for top-, mid- and low-level perpetrators. Although a *purpose-based* intent needs to be proven for the former two categories, the *knowledge-based* intent suffices for the latter category of perpetrators (Ambos, 2009).

In the present case, the top- and mid-level perpetrators – persons who are responsible for creating the aforementioned genocidal policy and plan, such as military commanders, display the ulterior form of purposeful genocidal intent by authorizing and ordering deliberate use of algorithmic tools in dehumanizing, indiscriminate way. In particular, by ordering a mass production of targets, instructing the use of unprecise ammunition and for bombing to occur in the homes of individuals and increasing the collateral damage factor to the point when it was inevitable that this would lead to the commission of *actus reus* of genocide.

Conversely, low-level perpetrators (e.g., soldiers), as clear from their testimonies in the Report, display a knowledge-based threshold of genocidal intent by following these instructions despite their clear knowledge that their actions will cause the destruction of the targeted group in whole or in part by at least one of the genocidal acts.

Gaza as AI-Powered Genocide: The Last Horror or the First of Many?

The fact that Israel turned “Gaza as a whole into a military objective” (Albanese, 2024) with the help of the aforementioned AI tools points towards a possible commission of not only genocide but various international crimes. Although some of them are easier to prove, as unlike genocide, they do not require the establishment of *dolus specialis*, AI technologies must be thoroughly examined also in the context of genocide for various important reasons.

Firstly, only a correct legal qualification will trigger a proper response, both in terms of prevention – activated at the first recognized risk of genocide – as well as sanctioning, both enshrined as *erga omnes* obligations in the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. When asked about the reasons for focusing on the crime of genocide, the UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese replied: “Because it *is* genocide. If you go to a doctor because you have cancer and you are diagnosed with fever, you have a big problem — it's the same with the people who are being genocided.” (*‘It Is Important to Call a Genocide a Genocide,’ Consider Suspending Israel's Credential as UN Member State, Experts Tell Palestinian Rights Committee*, 2024), highlighting the importance of correct legal qualification for proper response to the situation.

Secondly, the precise use of legal terminology is essential for maintaining the integrity of the international legal system. Arbitrarily altering legal classifications undermines legal certainty, predictability, and the equal application of the law. Watering down genocidal actions only because they are difficult to prove leads towards relativization and emptying of the term, weakens the international legal framework and contributes to the normalization of genocidal violence.

Lastly, as Israel is known to widely export its military technology, tested on Palestinians (Abdelnour, 2023; Loewenstein, 2023), particularly in the “Gaza laboratory” (Lederman, 2024), the aforementioned AI tools will be likely used in other cases worldwide, perhaps with more sensibility to the public (and expert) opinion and less genocidal rhetoric displayed by the respective authorities. This means increasing the risk of hiding genocidal intent behind technological disguise, as well as enabling genocides to be conducted extremely fast and under a camouflage of technological neutrality and precision, and at the same time which will have catastrophic consequences not only for the people in Gaza or in Palestine, but for populations worldwide. It is, therefore, crucial to assess Israel's AI tools as potential evidence of not only genocidal acts but also genocidal intent in the ongoing and potentially upcoming litigations concerning the crime of genocide in the context of Gaza.

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The Ecocidal Destruction of Palestine

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Keywords: Contrarianism, denial, ecocide, genocide, Israel

Abstract: Ecocide refers to the large-scale destruction, contamination and degradation of the environment. The devastation of Palestine, particularly in Gaza but also the occupied West Bank, includes systematic destruction of Palestinian-owned land and trees, the contamination of water, air and soils, and horrific tolls of human life. This is genocide and ecocide on a massive scale, the Palestinian people and their lands being the main casualties and intentional targets. The perpetrator is the Israeli state, and these harmful actions have been occurring over many decades with varying levels of intensity as part of its longer-term colonisation project. This paper charts out the recent destruction of the environment in Palestine, and the social and legal parameters of ecocide as a crime, one that is largely unrecognised and unacted upon in and because of contemporary international relations. Ecocide is a state crime of the highest order in that it contributes directly to genocide; yet it continues in Palestine with the active support of the United States and its allies, regardless of atrocities, past, present and future. Denialism in relation to ecocide goes hand in hand with denial of genocide, and each reflects the specific sectional interests and hegemonic power of Israel and the United States in the Middle East.

Introduction

This paper charts out systematic environmental destruction in Palestine and the social and legal parameters of ecocide as a crime, one that is largely unrecognised and unacted upon in and because of contemporary international relations. Used as a war strategy, environmental destruction is the reality on the ground. But vested interests and geopolitics shape how it is represented and how in this instance the law is applied.

The baseline definition of ecocide is that it refers to large-scale severely harmful environmental destruction that occurs within a given geographical area. Different interpretations of ecocide are discussed further below. In the context of colonialism, ecocide includes control over and exploitation of natural resources, contamination of local ecosystems, and destruction of infrastructure in order to subjugate the Palestinian people. This is ecocide by design.

Ecocide is inseparable from genocide. Destruction of the environment is part of systematic attempts to destroy and denigrate specific populations and is an integral part of the colonisation process (Crook, 2024; Short, 2016; Crook, Short & South, 2018). The illegal occupation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli state underpins both. As declared by the International Court of Justice in its ruling of 19 July 2024, Israel's occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is unlawful, along with the associated settlement regime, annexation and use of natural resources (United Nations Human Rights, 2024; see also Amnesty International, 2024). The intentional destruction of the specific environments upon which Palestinians rely is part of this broader settler colonisation and genocide.

Ecocide is a form of structural violence that involves destruction of the environment in ways that are utterly devastating for ecosystems, humans, habitats, and animal and plant species (Higgins, 2012; White, 2023). It thus involves the denuding and destruction of territories to an extent that they are unviable for all that resides within them (Whyte & Saunders, 2024). Ecocide is death. But in this instance, it is targeted at very specific locations and specific groups of people. In Palestine it is inseparable from the colonial project of the Israeli state.

Destroying the Environment in Palestine

The devastation of Palestine, particularly in Gaza but also the occupied West Bank, includes systematic destruction of Palestinian-owned land and trees, the contamination of water, air and soils, and horrific tolls of human life. This is genocide and ecocide on a massive scale, the Palestinian people and their lands being the main casualties and intentional targets.

The perpetrator of this violence is the Israeli state and includes Israeli colonialist settlers supported by the Israeli state, whose harmful actions have been put into effect over many decades with varying levels of intensity. Ecocide is a state crime of the highest order given that the scale of the harm directly contributes to genocide; yet it continues in Palestine with the active support of the United States and its allies, regardless of atrocities, past, present and future. Denialism in relation to ecocide goes hand in hand with denial of genocide, and each reflects the specific sectional interests and hegemonic power of Israel and the United States in the Middle East.

Evidence of the ecocidal destruction of Palestine is readily available and apparent (as seen, for example, in global news visions). Destroying basic built environment infrastructure is integral to this. For instance, due to Israeli bombing and military attacks in Gaza, sewage, wastewater and solid waste management systems and facilities have collapsed. Official United Nations reports note that there are nearly 40 million tons of debris in this small strip of land, including unexploded ordnance and human remains. This is contaminating the ecosystem, a situation that is compounded by the more than 140 temporary waste sites and 340,000 tons of waste, untreated wastewater and sewage overflow (Albanese, 2024, pp. 7/32). Furthermore, 'Another set of urgent but less immediately visible environmental challenges include contamination of land, water resources and air by munitions and unexploded ordnance; possible instability of land arising from the prior construction of an extensive system of tunnels; and contamination of soil and water resources arising from the recent destruction and flooding of such tunnels.' (UNEP, 2024: p. 7).

The destruction of water infrastructure is mirrored in the forced closure of Gaza's sole power plant on 11

October 2023 (Shawoo et al., 2024). Energy supply is a major issue in the Palestinian territories generally and is entirely politicised. For instance, Israel consistently denies permits for Palestinian communities to build rooftop solar panels. Yet, conversely, the merged oil and natural gas field situated within the occupied West Bank has been seized by Israel and, moreover, Israel generates wind and solar energy in areas of Palestinian and Syrian lands that are under illegal occupation (Shawoo et al., 2024). This signifies that the ecocide is targeted and that it, too, forms part of the genocide.

This is also reflected in the destroying of entire swaths of arable land in Gaza, as well as the recurrent destruction of Palestinian olive groves in the occupied West Bank. Over a million olive and fruit trees have been uprooted and cut down in occupied Palestine since 1967, once again highlighting how ecocide is part of a longer-term strategy of cultural and physical extermination (Chelala, 2015; Dinc & Turk, 2025). This is on top of previous exclusions from agricultural land and Israeli state restrictions on access to fertile lands and grazing areas. The Israeli state also controls over 85 per cent of West Bank water resources (Whyte & Saunders, 2024). In Gaza, about 40 per cent of the land was previously farmed; today, it will struggle to regain any significant measure of self-sufficiency in food production even if hostilities cease given that only 1.5 per cent of its agriculture land remains accessible and undamaged (UN Human Rights Council, 2025; Monbiot, 2025). The control over and destruction of natural resources is thus another dimension of the ecocide.

Harms affecting the natural environment are also linked to the weapons used by Israel (supplied largely by the United States and its allies). For example, there are high concentrations of white phosphorus in the soils of northern Gaza, even before the current military incursions (Hamada et al., 2011). Contamination linked to munitions is a looming huge problem, especially insofar as the materials of contemporary weapons include matter such as depleted uranium and other forms of toxic material, with major implication for long-term damage to ecological systems and human health (White, 2008).

Food, water and energy insecurity in Gaza and the occupied West Bank are compounded by future risks and harms directly related to Israeli occupation policies (such as restricting efforts that might mitigate climate change) and Israeli war efforts (particularly in regard to carbon emissions). For example, it has been observed that Israel's genocidal aggression in Gaza in the first 120 days surpassed the annual emissions of over 20 individual countries, and that the rebuilding of Gaza will generate emissions higher than the annual emissions of over 135 countries (Whyte & Saunders, 2024; see also Shawoo et al., 2024). The contributions to and effects from climate change are enormous. The intended net result is to make Gaza completely unliveable.

Is This Ecocide?

Ecocide refers to the systematic destruction, contamination and degradation of the environment that causes severe harm where it occurs (Higgins, 2012). In the context of war, such activity has been criminalised in international law. The Rome Statute, for example, sets out in definitive terms the crime of ecocide as a serious crime although no individual or country has so far been prosecuted or convicted of this crime. Recent conceptualisations of ecocide include humans and entities such as rivers, animals and plants as among those considered victimised by ecocide, expanding notions of harm to include the non-human. The concept has also been extended to include environmental destruction in times of peace as well as war (White, 2023).

There is extensive literature and civil society activism focussing on the concept of ecocide. Yet, in the midst of the contemporary arguments and debates over legal and non-legal definitions, more attention needs to be paid to ecocide as a colonial project (more on this later). The fusion of ecocide and genocide in colonisation processes needs to be highlighted so as to enhance political resistance to such processes (Short, 2016; Whyte, 2020). Even within the specific frameworks of ecocide conceptualisations, however, there is opportunity to make stronger links to colonialism and genocide.

The baseline definition of ecocide is that it involves destruction, contamination and/or degradation of the environment to an extent that is measurable, serious, and harmful to that environment, with detrimental effects on its biotic (living plants and animals) and abiotic (rivers, mountains) components (White, 2024). There are at least five different conceptions of 'ecocide' that vary according to purpose and context. The first two concentrate on the seriousness of the harm; the next three focus on the criminalisation of

activities that cause the harm.

- Harm caused to the environment due to natural causes, that is, due to causes other than human agency such as animals over-grazing paddocks to the detriment of other species and ecosystems (Higgins, 2010). This is not what is happening in Palestine.
- Harm perpetrated by humans that is severe to the extent that it is described as ‘criminal’ in everyday parlance, for example, by scientists and journalists to emphasise the gravity of the situation and the depth of the harm (White, 2024). This is relevant to Palestine and is part of the discourses of resistance to Israeli aggression including its prevention of aid to people in Gaza (that includes, for example, resources necessary for water treatment).
- The crime is currently recognised in Article 8(2)(b)(iv) of the Rome Statute which describes the intentional creation of widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment *during war*, the only stipulation in international law that can hold a person responsible for environmental damage. This is contentious in regard to Palestine insofar as specific legal questions may cloud the issues, including whether International Criminal Court recognition of Palestine is needed to prosecute ecocide (Ghasemi & Abtahi, 2024). The definition of ‘war’ in cases of colonialist imposition and illegal occupation is also contentious. Nonetheless, there is a clearly an important role for the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court to play in regards the devastation in occupied Gaza.
- The ‘Stop Ecocide International’ campaign has proposed a definition that operates under conditions of peace as well as war, that refers specifically to ‘unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment caused by those acts’. (Stop Ecocide Foundation, 2021). This is important to considerations of what is happening in Palestine. However, as discussed below, there are also political dimensions to this that warrant critical scrutiny.
- Ecocentric conceptions of ecocide include the valuing of Nature for its own sake and protection of non-human environmental entities such as rivers, plants, animals, and landscapes (Medlock & White, 2022). This is relevant to the present situation in Palestine insofar as the destruction is severely harmful to all aspects of the local environment. An encompassing concept of ecocide is concerned with the totality of environmental destruction – a phenomenon that when it occurs is an inseparable part of genocide. The erasure of ecosystems and people’s means of survival stem from strategic aims and is intentional (Monbiot, 2025).

In its varying interpretations, ecocide descriptively identifies serious harms to the environment, legally denotes an international crime that occurs during war, aspirationally seeks to criminalise serious environmental harms during times of peace, and inclusively wishes to encompass non-human entities such as ecosystems, plants and animals. While legal technicalities hamper and complicate the status of ecocide as a crime, and as a crime specifically occurring in Palestine, there is no doubt that environmental destruction on this scale and targeted in this manner has ecocidal consequences for the Palestinian people. Killing the land is simultaneously killing the people.

However, as reactions to the genocide unfolding in Gaza also illustrates, international law (e.g., humanitarian law, crimes against peace) and United Nations deliberations (e.g., multiple resolutions condemning Israel for its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories) have basically been ignored and rendered useless in the context of hegemonic global power politics. The so called ‘rules bound’ order seems to only apply when protecting the dominant national and economic interests of the United States and its allies including Israel.

In this political context, claims of ‘ecocide’ as a peacetime and/or wartime international crime are basically symbolic and are rarely if ever exercisable in practice (if current ecocide law and existing ICC cases are any indication). The importance of such charges is therefore essentially political and is thus linked to international moral persuasion rather than actual legal proceedings. Nonetheless, even given these limitations, the sensitivities surrounding ecocide as description of what is occurring in the Palestinian territories is manifest in several ways.

Denial and Ecocidal Destruction

Specifically, the ecocidal destruction in the Palestinian territories has been accompanied by concerted global campaigns of dis/misinformation and obfuscation. A range of suppression techniques and denial strategies have been deployed to silence objection and stifle criticism.

The systematic banning and killing of journalists in the Palestinian territories, for instance, is indicative of the intent of the Israeli state to shape knowledge of the ongoing atrocity. For example, in 2024 the offices of Al Jazeera were raided by heavily armed Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank and the bureau was delivered a 45-day closure order (Al Jazeera, 2024a). Overall, journalist casualties from the Israel action, especially in Gaza, have been immense and unprecedented: 'As of September 24, 2024, CPJ's preliminary investigations showed at least 116 journalists and media workers were among the more than 42,000 killed since the war began, making it the deadliest period for journalists since CPJ began gathering data in 1992' (Al Jazeera, 2024b).

Even in the face of these barriers, the world continues to see first-hand the horrors of the Palestinian genocide/ecocide (Amnesty International, 2024; UN Human Rights Council, 2025). There are nonetheless many excuses and denials. Not 'seeing' is surely not one of them and yet, questions remain regarding why and how even those professing progressive politics can still somehow deny what is presented before them. This is evidenced by the active collusion with and dearth of criticisms of Israeli actions by Western academic institutions, and the general silence of professional associations and university intellectuals to the genocide (Ziadah, 2025; Suslovic et al., 2024). Cohen (1993) reminds us that one of the key problems in dealing with and discussing state crime is that it is not only governments and perpetrators who deny its existence, but citizens, too. When it comes to Palestine, this extends to many of us around the world, including criminologists whose supposed forte is analyses of crime and harm. Complicity in genocide/ecocide takes several forms, including the silence of the bystander.

Contrarianism is not the same, however, as naïve denialism and/or political hesitation. It refers to taking a political position based entirely on specific sectional interests rather than facts or truth. Aggressive contrarianism begets political denialism insofar as opinion and response is shaped by intimidation and condemnation by those originally targeted as doing the wrong. Self-interest trumps fact even in the face of dire and devastating evidence. Contrarianism with respect to Israeli state engagement in Palestine is exercised in various ways, but perhaps is most strongly expressed via the warped use of specific social labels:

We have seen these techniques of denial used with a particular level of intensity over the past month by the Israeli state, allied governments, mainstream media actors and public intellectuals promoting the ideology of Zionism, in an attempt to socially neutralize stigmatising definitions of Israeli state violence as criminal. In the current situation, the false charge of antisemitism – which conflates legitimate criticism of the genocidal actions of the state of Israel with historical persecutions of the Jewish people – is one such example, which serves to condemn the condemner. (International Expert Statement on Israeli State Crime, 2024).

The collateral political damage of such contrarianism is manifest not only in the weak response generally to Israeli and US actions, but also among those most vocal in purporting to be against ecocide. For example, while on the one hand there is a robust international movement to make ecocide the fifth crime against peace, intentional forms of ecocide already evident go largely unrecognised and unacted upon by the same advocacy groups, and there are mixed, substantially different political signals depending on the conflict and specific international relations (Stop Ecocide International 2024, 2025; Killeen, 2025). As noted earlier, used as a war strategy, environmental destruction is the actual reality on the ground. But vested interests and geopolitics shape how it is represented even within relevant critical intellectual forums and law reform groups.

For instance, in 2024 Stop Ecocide Netherlands was expelled from the parent international organisation in response to an article written by its director, in which she raised the question of whether the Israeli army's destruction of nature in Gaza could constitute a war crime. The Stop Ecocide International campaign wished to convey an image of 'political neutrality' with a focus on ecocide as a response to the climate crisis. Yet, claims to neutrality were undermined by its public statements regarding acts of 'ecocide' in

the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine (Stop Ecocide International, 2024). This suggests that the expulsion revealed an awareness of the international geopolitical sensitivities that may impact proposed amendments to the Rome Statute, and a strategic focus on political alignment with those perceived as allies (Killeen, 2025).

Similar political silences, omissions and confusions are evident amongst professional and academic societies which adopt a 'Palestinian exception' position that contrasts to their usual condemnations of colonialism, ecocide, apartheid and genocide (Gunaratnam, 2025; Suslovic et al., 2024). For example, disciplines such as Sociology (in the United States) have likewise exhibited ambivalent solidarity with anti-colonial struggles, with Palestine long being the 'exception' in social science politics (Gunaratnam, 2025). The same with Social Work, where the response to the Palestinian genocide has largely been one of denial and suppression of solidarity with Palestine (Suslovic et al., 2024).

These examples, however, are nonetheless geopolitically bounded. For instance, the *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Journal* editorial board called in December 2023 for 'unconditional solidarity with the people of Palestine' as acknowledged in an editorial in *Affilia: Feminist Inquiry into Social Work*. The same *Affilia* editorial also acknowledged its own 'prolonged silence as complicit with acts of genocidal violence, as well as the historical harms perpetrated against the Palestinian people' (Affilia Editorial, 2025). In 2025, the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology endorsed a statement critical of the Israeli genocide; yet efforts to acknowledge genocide and condemn the perpetrator were thwarted at a General Meeting of the European Society of Criminology in September of the same year. Notably, around the same time, the latest report compiled by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel was released, which stated categorically that Israel has committed and is continuing to commit genocide in Gaza (Al-Khoury & Multheron, 2025; UN Human Rights Council, 2025).

As the evidence keeps mounting of the atrocities, so too world opinion continues to shift. On 27 June 2025, Stop Ecocide International ran a story on its website with the heading "Palestine Denounces Gaza Devastation as 'Ecocide'". However, the only reference to the state of Israel was to the 'ongoing destruction of Gaza's environment during Israel's military campaign'. Ecocide somehow just happens. Rather than describing the systematic nature of the ecocidal destruction (by focussing mainly on the scale) and condemning the perpetrator (instead focussing on the discourses used to describe the destruction) the story concludes by emphasising the emergence of a range of perspectives 'to assess whether the scale and nature of this destruction could meet the threshold of ecocide'. Again, no recognition of intent or culpability. The sense of *criminality* is thereby diminished. A curated overview of key sources is provided below the main story, but the story itself presents as a detached and politically skewed picture of the environmental destruction.

These varied interventions reveal the political dynamics that influence how ecocide is perceived and responded to by different organisations. The present commentary began by describing the environmental harms occurring in the territories of Occupied Palestine. It then interpreted these harms through the lens of diverse definitions and conceptualisations of ecocide. Attention then turned to the muting of political critique and response through mechanisms of contrarianism and denialism. The latter includes silences and omissions ostensibly because of (legal) definitional ambiguities and ongoing assessments of thresholds associated with proposed ecocide laws. The fundamental problem with this, however, is that ecocide is a *process*, not simply an event (see also Rosenberg, 2012). To prevent it requires intervention now, not once it is a *fait accompli*. Satisfying a legal definition is meaningless if it sacrifices action to protect people and places in the here and now.

In the face of strong-arm tactics and contrarian manipulations, exposure of war crimes and concerted public protest and demonstrations against these is fundamental to the political process. Israel must be penalised substantively for its actions in Gaza if the ecocide/genocide is to be stopped. This means stopping the supply of arms and munitions to Israel. It means imposing trade restrictions and boycotts on Israeli goods and services. It means protecting free speech, including within schools and universities, such as the right to critique Israeli colonialism and not conflating this with anti-Semitism. Ownership of land, and destruction of the land, are vital parts of these political narratives and interventions. Hence, the importance of raising ecocide as part of the larger campaign against Israeli genocide.

Conclusion

The Israel-United States nexus has ensured continued occupation, destruction and denigration of the Palestinian territories. This has been accomplished by material support for the ecocide/genocide, such as supply of munitions, as well as propaganda initiatives that reinforce denial of the atrocities occurring in plain sight.

Ecocide in Palestine must be stopped. There is urgent need to reinforce awareness of the horrors of what is happening in Gaza, its longer-term consequences for the people, ecosystems, animals and plants of the region, and to view environmental destruction on this scale as an international crime warranting condemnation and intervention. It is an integral part of the genocide. Documentation and recognition of this environmental harm as ecocide is vital to international legal intervention via the ICC and ICJ as well as adding further weight to civil society demands for cessation of the war/occupation, reparations for the damage and acknowledgement of Palestinian land rights.

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“I Never Ever Want to Hear you Lecture us on Human Rights and International Law Again”: International Tribunals in the Palestine-Israel Context

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Abstract: Despite growing critiques of their inability to ensure accountability, international tribunals remain a key arena for legal action in the Palestine-Israel context. This paper reflects on current debates linking Transitional Justice and international prosecution, focusing on recent developments at the ICC and ICJ. It explores the limitations and possibilities of these tribunals by analyzing: 1) how Global North and Global South states have positioned themselves; and 2) the main actors seeking justice for Palestine through these legal avenues.

Introduction

During the traditional Christmas prayer in Bethlehem, Palestinian Pastor Reverend Munther Isaac declared, "I never ever want to hear you lecture us on human rights and international law ever again" (Tape, 2023)¹. I use this sentence as an introduction to the debate I am going to offer in this brief article: Is international law, and specifically international tribunals, a useful mechanism to provide substantial justice in the Palestine-Israel context?²

Two years into Israel's assault on Gaza—with over 60,000 Palestinian casualties, excluding those before October 7th, 2023—various actors have turned to international tribunals to address the crimes committed.

In March 2021, the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation into crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian Territory since June 13, 2014, following a 2021 ruling that its jurisdiction covers Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

On November 21st, 2024, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense chief Yoav Gallant, as well as a Hamas leader, Ibrahim Al-Masri.

Meanwhile, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is examining a case brought by South Africa against Israel on Genocide in Gaza and requested preventive measures on January 26th, 2024. The same Court, on July 19th, 2024, issued a landmark Advisory Opinion on "Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem" (ICJ, 2024a).

While the ICC targets individual accountability, the ICJ addresses state responsibility through advisory opinions and provisional measures. In efforts to hold Israel accountable, international prosecution is vital but not sufficient; a coordinated approach combining individual and state-level legal action is essential. Still, key questions remain: Have international courts produced tangible outcomes? Can prosecution truly deliver justice in this case?

It is key to analyze these legal arenas critically, observing 1) how Global North and Global South States situated themselves in the dispute and 2) which main actors are using these international tribunals as a venue for justice.

This paper examines the role of international prosecution in relation to transitional justice in the Palestine-Israel context. It analyzes how state and non-state actors engage with international law and judicial mechanisms concerning the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Finally, it reflects critically on the limited impact of court decisions, underscoring the need for a Transitional Justice framework aimed at ending settler colonialism, apartheid, and genocide.

Transitional Justice and International Prosecution in Palestine-Israel

International prosecution for atrocity crimes was established through the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, which shaped the structure of later international and domestic accountability mechanisms. Holding perpetrators of Rome Statute crimes accountable is a key principle of Transitional Justice—an interdisciplinary field combining legal and non-legal approaches to addressing past human rights abuses in transitional societies.

There is no clear-cut definition of what Transitional Justice is, between approaches that underline the

1 To our European friends, I never ever want to hear you lecture us on human rights or international law ever again. And I mean that. We are not white, I guess, it does not apply to us according to your own logic."

2 Although it's difficult to empirically assess whether law in general—and international law in particular—is a "useful" tool in the Palestinian case, this brief piece aims to examine recent developments involving international tribunals (such as the ICC and ICJ), as well as the actions of both state and non-state actors engaging with international law. Echoing Erakat (2019): "While the imbrication of law and politics in the case of Palestine is exemplary of a global system, the sovereign exception that produced the question of Palestine demands particular attention to the potential risks, and benefits, of appealing to international law. In order to serve an emancipatory function, the law must be wielded in the sophisticated service of a political movement that can both give meaning to the law and also directly challenge the structure of power that has placed Palestinians outside the law." (p.4)

role of legal responses to past violence (Teitel, 2000) and others that widen the context of transitional justice by including practices, mechanisms, and concerns beyond the juridical, such as truth commissions and reparations (Roht Arriaza & Mariezcurrena, 2006).

The four classic pillars of transitional justice are criminal prosecutions, truth seeking, reparations, and various forms of reform and prevention, sometimes referred to as guarantees of non-repetition (Hayner, 2022, p. 5), while “memory” has been introduced as a 5th pillar in 2020 by UN Rapporteur Salvioli (2020).³

As previously argued (Bonfigli, 2024), various scholars have discussed the limitations of transitional justice, particularly in its narrow and depoliticized scope, which often privileges legal responses that tend to structure specific conceptions of violence and justice (Nagy, 2008). This “one-fits-all” liberal approach is not considered to be able to grasp and work with systemic and ongoing violence, like in the Palestine-Israel context, because “there has not been a formal transition, a shift either from authoritarian to democratic political forms or from conflict to post-conflict setting, transitional justice is presumably inapposite” (Sirleaf, 2024, p. 168).

Since 1948, with Israel’s creation and the forced displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians barred from return, the Israeli occupation’s large-scale abuses are not isolated events but an ongoing process, culminating in the current brutal attack on Gaza.

Khoury (2021) argues that in the case of Palestine-Israel, Transitional Justice faces the challenge of understanding what counts as historical injustice and how to transition in a context where violence has never stopped. There is, in the case of Palestine, a lack of formal transition: the occupation and settler colonialism⁴ are still there. The author argues that transitions rely on two kinds of justice: retributive and restorative, both aiming at political reconciliation. In the case of Palestine-Israel, “reconciliation” has remained vague and confusing, especially given the reluctance of some peace negotiators in Oslo to deal with the historical roots of conflict (Khoury, 2021, p. 155), namely the Nakba (catastrophe) and the refugee issue: “The peace process was not meant to solve the refugee problem, but to dissolve it” (p. 156).

In this sense, the Palestinian refugee issue and the Right of Return in the framework of Transitional Justice should be at the core of transitional justice efforts embracing historical reparations (Peled & Rouhana 2004, Kapshuk, 2019).

This failure to confront settler colonialism is, according to Browne (2021), due to Israeli intransigence, international inertia, and a Western-sponsored peace-building agenda that describes the situation as a “conflict”. Alternatively, some Israeli scholars (Dudai, 2007; Bracka, 2021) have also expressed criticism over the use of international tribunals. Dudai (2007) proposes a transitional justice model that would include “issues to be explored jointly by the two societies, such as refugees, prisoner release and compensation for victims of violence, there could also be internal truth and reconciliation processes within each society” (p. 250). Moreover, on international tribunals use, Jeremie Bracka (2021) questions the use of international prosecution in Israel/Palestine, considering especially the ICC intervention as possible “False Messiah”: “Arguably, the ICC has made no positive imprint on the Middle East peace process, nor has it been capable of reducing ongoing hostilities or preventing human rights abuses.” (p. 285).

Based on the different perspectives and standpoints mentioned, there seems to be quite a skeptical attitude toward the relevance of international law and international tribunals in the Palestine-Israel context. Despite these critiques, international tribunals are still used as an arena for legal action from a variety of different actors. International law is still mobilized in the quest for Justice: “Law has also ignited the Palestinian civic imagination and has led to bold and creative initiatives, including efforts to hold both states and (corporate) non-state actors accountable through legal and other means, and even to construct alternative models for nation building” (Bisharat et al., 2018, p. 1).

Next, I will briefly look at the current role played by the ICC and the ICJ, taking into consideration not only

3 For the purposes of this article, we will focus on the “Justice Pillar,” examining how international courts, and how both state and non-state actors—have engaged with them and with international law in the context of Israel and Palestine.

4 Patrick Wolfe defines settler colonialism as a system rather than a historical event, that perpetuates the erasure and destruction of native people as a precondition for settler colonialism and expropriation of lands and resources (2006). Also see Augustine Park’s “Settler Colonialism, Decolonization and Radicalizing Transitional Justice” (2020).

their limitations, but also their role as legal-political arenas used by different actors.

Mobilizing International Law: Courts and Actors

ICC has long faced a crisis of credibility on charges of systemic racism and bias (Benyera, 2020, Schuerch, 2017, Sirleaf, 2024, Zolo, 2006). However, Palestinians have repeatedly pushed the ICC to invoke its jurisdiction over the crimes of the Israeli occupation (e.g. Al Haq NGO). Erakat (Erakat & Reynolds, 2019) mentions how Palestinians have used the law as a form of resistance, especially in the case of the PLO and its relationship with international law. Erakat explains how, in the 1970s, the PLO turned to international law and the UN, successfully securing favorable UNGA resolutions on the legal status of Palestinians (Resolutions 3236 and 3237, 1974); on Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination (UNGA Resolution 3379 in 1975); and on the inclusion of guerrilla warfare within ambit of legitimate violence (First and Second Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions in 1977) (p. 4).

The PLO's recourse to International Law hasn't been systematic but rather implemented in a strategic and pragmatic way: turning away from international law during the Oslo Peace process and its return to it after its collapse and the unilateral request for statehood recognition at the UN in 2011.

In 2018, Palestine was formally recognized and allowed to become a state party to the Rome Statute (ICC, 2018) and, in March 2021, the ICC finally opened an investigation respecting the Situation in Palestine for crimes committed since 13 June 2014 (Bensouda, 2021). In this context of addressing the ICC, Burgis-Kasthala, Nahed Samour, and Schwöbel-Patel (2023) emphasized how the legal tactics of a case before the ICC as "a real moment of possibility in which injustice can be highlighted, and in which oppressed voices can change legal analysis and action" (p. 3). These authors consider that the arguments based on the lack of Palestinian statehood and the political character of the Palestinian case at the ICC can be a litmus test for the court: "The ICC can demonstrate how it robustly negates political pressures and instead ensconces itself in carefully crafted justifications grounded firmly in the ICC Statute (p. 3).

The "map" of the actors mobilizing international law for accountability and social justice is a complex mosaic between state and non-state actors.

Since October 7th, 2023, several States and Human Rights organizations have filed complaints and referrals to the ICC, alleging that Israel is committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, apartheid, and genocide against the Palestinian people. It is worth noting how most of these complaints and referrals come from the "Global South": South Africa, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Comoros, and Djibouti (South Africa et al., 2024), Mexico and Chile (Mexico & Chile, 2024). Regarding Chile, a record number of 650 lawyers have referred to the ICC ("650 Chilean lawyers drag 'Israel' to ICC court for Gaza genocide", 2024), proving how diaspora communities play a fundamental role in legal action (Bartlett, 2024).⁵⁶

At the ICJ, South Africa's 2024 genocide suit against Israel has drawn interventions⁷⁸ from numerous

5 Chile is home to the largest Palestinian community outside the Arab world, estimated at 500.000 people in 2023. Chilean-Palestinians have sustained deep cultural and political ties to Palestine through active networks, community institutions, and collective mobilizations. Their engagement has also significantly shaped Chile's foreign policy stance on Palestine and Israel. <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/36894/palestinians-chile>

6 As an example, in the group referral to the ICC (South Africa et al., 2024) the State parties are "gravely concerned about the escalation of violence, including against civilians" and request the Prosecutor to "vigorously investigate crimes under the jurisdiction of the court" (p. 3). The categories of crimes listed are: unlawful appropriation and destruction of public and private properties, forcible transfer of Palestinians, unlawful settlements, murder and attacks on civilians, torture, persecution, apartheid (p.4)

7 Under Art. 63 of the ICJ's Statute: "1. Whenever the construction of a convention to which states other than those concerned in the case are parties is in question, the Registrar shall notify all such states forthwith. 2. Every state so notified has the right to intervene in the proceedings; but if it uses this right, the construction given by the judgment will be equally binding upon it." (ICJ, 1945)

8 The latest Declaration of Intervention has been filed by Brazil: "Brazil further recalls that the determination of genocidal intent requires careful assessment of both direct and circumstantial evidence. Patterns of conduct, systematic nature of attacks, and public statements by State officials are all relevant indicators from which *dolus specialis* may be inferred. Taken together, the acts described meet the composite requirements of Article II of the Convention, including the presence of specific intent. Accordingly, all conditions established by the Convention for

Global South states—Bolivia, Libya, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Turkey, Colombia, and others—while Germany has intervened on Israel’s behalf (Fink, 2024). On July 19th, 2024, the ICJ issued a landmark Advisory Opinion on “Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, determining that Palestinian territories constitute one political unit and that Israel’s occupation since 1967, and the subsequent creation of Israeli settlements and exploitation of natural resources, are illegal under international law. The court concluded that:

Israel’s continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal [...] Consequently, Israel has an obligation to bring an end to its presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible” (ICJ, 2024a, p. 73).

The court also included in its decision important obligations for other States:

All States are under an obligation not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. They are also under an obligation not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by Israel’s illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (ICJ, 2024a, p. 74)

A record number of 52 States and 3 international organizations had expressed their intention to participate in the oral proceedings before the Court on February 9th (ICJ, 2024b). While the Global North/Global South divide is evident in the ICJ case *South Africa v. Israel* (2024) and ICC referrals, the ICJ advisory opinion shows a more nuanced picture, with some European countries (e.g., Belgium, Spain, Norway, Slovenia, and the EU) supporting the Court, while others (notably Germany) oppose it. Different positions within the Global North have been deepened by the Trump administration’s hostility toward international justice. Some states, like Hungary and Greece, have also refused to enforce ICC arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, reflecting selective engagement with international law.

In contrast, Global South solidarity is embodied by The Hague Group, a coalition led by Colombia and South Africa. In July 2025, it convened an emergency conference in Bogotá with 30 member states, agreeing on six coordinated legal, diplomatic, and economic actions to hold Israel accountable for its actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including arms restrictions, maritime blocks, contract reviews, and support for universal jurisdiction (The Hague Group, Emergency Conference of States, July 2025).

Moreover, non-state actors play a key role in pursuing accountability for Israeli violations of international law. The BDS movement calls for an end to the occupation, equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees, as outlined in UN Resolution 194. Additionally, international civil society organizations—such as Belgium’s Hind Rajab Foundation—have leveraged universal jurisdiction to pursue legal action against perpetrators of violence against Palestinians. Notable cases include the July 2025 arrest of two IDF soldiers in Belgium (Hind Rajab Foundation, 2025a) and a December 2024 case filed in Brazil against IDF soldier Yuval Vagdani (Hind Rajab Foundation, 2025b).

Finally, in the last two years, there have been collective mobilizations of thousands of people across the world in solidarity with the Palestinian people (university encampments, protests, and rallies to blockades and strikes) and a growing number of grass-roots movements and collectives both in the Global North and South.

On November 21st, 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence chief Yoav Gallant, as well as a Hamas leader, Ibrahim Al-Masri, for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza conflict.

The ICC judges said there were reasonable grounds to believe Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant were criminally responsible for acts including murder, persecution, and starvation as a weapon of war as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population of Gaza:

Each bear criminal responsibility for the following crimes as co-perpetrators for committing the acts jointly with others: the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare; and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts (ICC Press Release, 2024, Warrants the legal characterization of genocide are, in Brazil’s submission, fulfilled.” (ICJ, 2025, p. 27)

over Arrests section, para. 4).

On this matter, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has immediately reacted, dismissing the warrants as “absurd and antisemitic”: and the ICC as a “politically biased and discriminatory body,” his office said (Al Lawati et al., 2024, para. 5-6).

ICC Member States have the legal obligation to cooperate fully with the ICC (art. 86 of the Rome Statute), including arresting individuals sought by the Court and surrendering them to its custody (art. 89) if they enter their territory. Hungary’s blatant refusal to arrest Netanyahu on its territory, as well as Netanyahu’s flight to Greece in June 2025, raise serious doubts about the warrants’ effectiveness.

Conclusion

The “map” of legal actions and State positions before international courts in the Palestine-Israel context shows that international law remains a tool for accountability and social justice. However, the practical effects of court decisions remain uncertain. Some States have disregarded the ICC arrest warrant against Netanyahu, hosting him on their territory (e.g., Hungary, Greece), and have not halted political, diplomatic, or economic relations with Israel despite the 2024 ICJ advisory opinion. The genocide in Gaza continues, and Israel’s deliberate starvation of Gazans remains unaddressed by major legal interventions. From the perspective of Universal Jurisdiction, the recent arrest and interrogation of Israeli soldiers in Belgium, following a complaint by the Hind Rajab Foundation, and the opening of an investigation, offer hope for further legal actions.

The landscape of actors engaged in legal prosecution is complex. The predominance of Global South states pursuing justice for Palestine at the ICC, highlighted by the “Hague Group”, reflects shifting geopolitical dynamics, especially following the Trump administration’s policies. The Global South/Global North divide is more nuanced at the ICJ, where some European states support decisions but fail to implement them. While the ICC focuses on individual accountability, the ICJ offers a broader justice framework: reparations, ending occupation, and dismantling apartheid. Non-state actors, including NGOs and grassroots movements, show growing solidarity with Palestinians and demand adherence to international law and accountability for Israel’s actions.

Transitional justice should be a comprehensive framework that transcends the “conflict/post-conflict” narrative, aiming for accountability, reparations, and institutional reform beyond prosecutions. In Palestine, this includes dismantling settler colonialism and apartheid, with reparations and restitution for affected communities.

The ICC and ICJ face a pivotal moment to uphold universal human rights and ensure accountability for serious violations by the Israeli government. Meanwhile, Global North states must end selective applications of international law and apply consistent standards regarding Palestine.

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Science Without Conscience. Or How a Criminology Conference Bared the Discipline's Dead Soul

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I was looking forward to this year's EUROCRIM in Athens. Even for a reluctant conference-goer like me, there was much to look forward to. Meeting, supporting and reuniting with colleagues, making friends and basking in the lush Mediterranean sunshine are sources of (de)light, even in the shadow of global ecocide. It was another '-cide', however, that filled the air with downcast despair: the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the (Western) world's complicity in it (Albanese, 2024; Borrell, 2025). Arming, bankrolling, or providing ideological support for Israel's war crimes and crimes against humanity (Khan, 2024) loomed large as topics for discussion and featured in dedicated panels and working groups. Little did we know that the European Society of Criminology (ESC), which organises the EUROCRIM conference, would open its doors to Israeli universities that operate on occupied Palestinian territory, in violation of international law (Albanese, 2025; Academics for Palestine, n.d.; Wind, 2024).

It took Criminologists for Palestine and their supporters to act as the critical conscience that the ESC betrayed, in favour of stale clichés about “scientific exchange” vs. “political declarations” (ESC, 2025). Needless to say, trading in spurious notions of scientific neutrality/objectivity makes for bad science and even worse politics. Unless we believe in mythical “view[s] from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986) that deceive us into thinking that we can think our thoughts and live our lives as isolated individuals, quarantined on some imaginary neutral ground that is uncontaminated by the social and political world that we are otherwise educated and socialised into. This would require us to mistake political beings for lab animals and to forget that most criminologists are in fact social scientists, that is to say: scientists of the *social*—not the atomic, molecular, cellular, individual, or psychological realms of human life.

Alas, the ESC seems content with taking the ‘social’ out of social science, adopting an apolitical, asocial—and one might say ‘antisocial’ and amoral—position and refusing to side with, acknowledge, or apologise for what the conference's hosts (Panteion University and the Municipality of Athens) criticised it for: namely, “the legitim[isation of] policies which, under present circumstances, contribute to the perpetration of war crimes” (Panteion, 2025) and the lack of due regard for the “sensitivities affected” in the current “international context” (City of Athens, 2025). Other local academic societies (EEMEKE) and activist groups (BDS Greece) also appealed to the ESC's conscience, to no avail, criticising the Society's decision to peddle platitudes about “[s]cientific neutrality” which “in this case does not constitute respect for a different opinion, but “a state of denial, with enormous scientific and broader political consequences” (EEMEKE, 2025) and even declaring that “[i]f the ESC wants to remain the European Society of Criminology and not *Criminality*, it would do well to heed the demands of its membership to support the calls from Palestinians” (BDS, 2025).

In response, the ESC Board rejected accusations that blamed it for “legitimising war crimes in Palestine”, lamented that it was “pressurised to institute a boycott of individual ESC members based on their country of origin and institutional affiliation” and “deeply regret[ted]” that “such campaigns have led Panteion University and the Municipality of Athens to revoke their involvement in EuroCrim 2025”, claiming that there is “widespread misinformation circulating on social media about the ESC, its principles, and its practices” (ESC, 2025). What the ESC Board called “gross distortions” that “risk damaging the reputation of our Society and the integrity of its scholarly mission” (ESC, 2025), however, accurately describe how it conducted itself—even in the writing of the statement quoted above.

By choosing *not* to take sides in the midst of genocidal slaughter constitutes silent complicity. Have Board members not read Howard Becker's (1967) *Whose Side Are We On?* in their introductory criminology classes? Furthermore, taking a stand is neither unscientific nor unprofessional, unless the European Association of Social Anthropologists, the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology, the American Anthropological Association and several other educational bodies around the world (Davis, 2025) are unprofessional and unscientific. Boycotting Israeli academic institutions inevitably involves boycotting those who represent them, but the latter are not targeted as *individuals*. They are taken to task as representatives of and perhaps willing participants in the political function of universities that: (a) are located *illegally* in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (ICC, 2024), (b) remain directly involved in oppression against Palestinians by offering “degrees as a means of expanding Israeli sovereignty and advancing the annexation of the OPT” (Wind, 2024, p. 84) and (c) profit from scholasticide in Gaza (UN, 2024). All the above amount to a systematic boycott of Palestinian life, which in the eyes of the ESC must not count as a boycott at all.

It is equally remarkable that the ESC Board decided not to join forces with its local partners in Athens,

preferring instead to criticise them for criticising it—while also implying that the locals didn't arrive at their decisions independently, but were rather swayed by “campaigns” that are not even named (presumably, they are referring to BDS Greece and Criminologists for Palestine). That this smacks of a colonialist mentality that denies ‘the natives’ the ability to reason is obvious enough, as is the haughty dismissal of criticisms levelled against the ESC as “widespread misinformation”. But what exactly is *not* true of the criticisms voiced above? What *are* the ESC's “principles and practices”, at the present juncture, if not inaction, gaslighting and an arrogant dismissal of colleagues and ESC members who committed the terrible atrocity of calling the Society out?

I wonder what is “principled” about the ESC Board's elaborate hedging that gives off a superior air of neutrality, professionalism, respectability, nuance and calm while effectively casting doubt on the logic and veracity of those who challenged the ESC to actually defend the values it proclaims to uphold. Was it “principled” of the ESC Board to send a message to the conferees (at 9am on the 5th of September), informing us of “multiple documented reports of disruptions and harassment directed at Israeli participants during the conference”, without bothering to check whether the same, if not worse, behaviour came from Israeli academics? I personally witnessed (a) the interruption of a conversation circle about academic complicity in genocide, (b) harassment of colleagues who distributed a [motion to the ESC's General Assembly](#) to end collaboration with Israeli academic institutions, (c) disruption of panels on the topic of Israel's genocide in Gaza that required the intervention of the Chair and (d) loud singing by Israeli academics who wanted to drown out the reading of statements that informed delegates of the role of Israeli universities in Palestinian oppression. And what exactly is “principled” about [denying the ESC's own members a vote on a motion that called against “complicity in Israeli atrocity crimes”](#), *despite* the overwhelming support for it by those present in the room—to say nothing of the 656 signatories of a [petition](#) that demands action from the ESC?

In response to the criticisms described above, the ESC Board would probably reply as it already did (on 31 August 2025)—insisting that: “ [t]he Society's key contribution to challenging the atrocities happening in Gaza is to provide fora for rigorous scholarly debate, in academic and publicly accessible settings, thereby strengthening criminological knowledge and informing the public and policymakers, rather than boycotting individual members or issuing political declarations in the name of the entire ESC membership” (ESC, 2025). So there we have it! What is happening in Gaza is no wholesale genocide (Lemkin Institute, 2023). It can just be filed under “atrocities”. As for the contribution of criminology, it *must* be limited to “scholarly debate”. The ESC cannot take a stand, or speak truth to power, even if other professional associations do. They must be less democratic, or have weaker constitutions than ours. Besides, isn't criminology a science after all? Does it not suffice to calculate the square root of ‘criminality’ and leave politics to the politicians, the diplomats and the hot-headed agitators?

W.E.B Du Bois (2007, p. 34) *must* have been wrong when proclaiming that “one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved”. Edward Said *must* be thought of as a lesser scholar and a renegade extremist who threw stones at an Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) guard tower (Sheehi, 2024). Violence can and should be condemned ‘on both sides’ even though one side has all the power and the other fights back for its own liberation from decades of settler colonial rule (Sayegh, 2012). Michael Burawoy *must* have been reprimanded for comparing Israel's “apartheid regime”, in Ehud Barak's words (McCarthy, 2010), with South Africa and doing so at the [European Sociological Association's conference](#). The ESC *must* be right in defending a (non-)stance of neutrality/objectivity and there is *nothing* political about that. But surely, we must also understand that remaining neutral and not taking a stand in the name of science *is* political—especially when doing so reproduces wrongdoing instead of exposing and opposing it, not just as sentient human beings but as soul-searching and truth-telling scholars too.

It may well be ‘scientific’ to claim that “scientists collaborated even with the Nazis” as a German Professor who is judged to be distinguished said during the General Assembly. But it is morally wrong. And while such crude criminological scientism may shock us, it should hardly surprise us. Michel Foucault, who reigns supreme as one of criminologists' most admired theorists, bared the discipline's dead soul fifty years ago—expressing his astonishment at its “garrulous discourse”; wondering how “it has been able to go on at this level” and reminding us of criminology's “entirely utilitarian” character that is “so vital for the working of the system”. Despite the *grand penseur's* own pro-Israeli sentiments (Said, 2000), I would like to think that he would have probably balked at the ESC Board's logic “out of astonishment”, not

“aggressiveness” (Foucault, 1977, p. 47). For their brand of criminology is not just science. It is science without conscience.

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Interview with Ruth Jamieson

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Teresa Degenhardt: So, thank you very much for this interview, Ruth. We are very excited to have your contribution to the journal. Let me first ask you a very broad question on your interest on the study of war. Can you tell us how you became interested in the study of war, even though your background is in criminology? Well, that's a two-parter.

Ruth Jamieson: I think there is an autobiographical element to it. I was born in 1947, coincidentally the same year as Primo Levi published *If This Is a Man*. Even though this was during the post-war into the Cold War period, the war was all around us when I was growing up. People just referred to it [WW2] as 'the war'. They didn't say World War II; they said THE WAR. It had had a profound impact on many people's lives. I was aware, even as a child, of relatives or neighbours who had lost fathers, brothers, sons, or been separated from them for years, or had themselves witnessed terrible things, had been injured, been prisoners of war or had been displaced or persecuted. You were aware of their suffering even as a child. People did not talk about it much but they did find things to joke about in that way that humour often disguises pain. I remember a story about a woman in our town who had gone to the cinema and she saw her son in a newsreel about the Normandy landings. She had not seen him since he had been sent overseas at the beginning of the war. She kept sitting in the cinema every single day that particular newsreel was shown so she could see her son in case she never saw him alive again. The story points obliquely to more recent examples of the power of politicised mothers war and dictatorship, like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina or the mothers of the 'zinky boys' shipped home from the Soviet-Afghan war.

I think my awareness of war was also rooted in a more immediate personal experience. When I was about four or five years old there was a brief period when I had to go to an Army hospital for treatment every week. There were always veterans in the outpatient receptions area. This was the early 1950s. Many of these men were amputees or had other terrible visible injuries. As a child, I was afraid of them, but, at the same time, I also had a sense of their pain... they were just trying to be friendly to a child, trying to cheer me up. I knew intuitively that I should try to connect with them, not recoil. I found it hard and felt guilty that I wasn't very good at it. So those were formative childhood experiences shaped by biography and history. That's one thing.

You mentioned my background being in criminology. Actually, I only studied criminology as a mature student. Before that I worked as social worker and then as a civil servant in the Department of Justice in Canada on access to justice issues. That experience gave me some familiarity with how governments develop social and justice policy and all the contestation and deliberation involved in that process. When I came to do postgraduate study, it wasn't that odd for me to want to look at the government policy on welfare and social regulation in wartime. I was particularly interested in gender and governmentalities. I guess what I would say is that I never saw myself then as any kind of an '-ologist'. I was just interested in states of exception and social life. If I were to style myself anything then I suppose I would have called myself a sociologist. I didn't really identify with criminology as a discipline to begin with. I guess I would say that. I don't know if that's an answer to your question or not.

TD: Thank you very much for that. What obstacles, if any, did you have to overcome in the work on war within the discipline?

RJ: This follows on from what I just said about my undergraduate degree being in sociology. I first studied criminology as a mature student. For my M.Phil. I had to submit a research proposal outlining what I wanted to do for my dissertation and I proposed to look at gender and social regulation in wartime Britain. I was interested in the relationship between welfare, governmentality and states of emergency. I was told that it wasn't criminology and I could not do it. That was 1987. I am grateful to Colin Sumner for intervening on my behalf so that I could do it. I found the subject engrossing and just carried on doing it. When other academics asked me what I was working on and I told them the response I usually got a blank look. I got tired of hearing people say, "That's not criminology." So, I decided to make the case for why we needed a criminology of war. I did that at a 1996 conference in Manchester on European Criminology organized by Ian Taylor, Nigel South and Vincenzo Ruggiero. I was lucky to meet a number of people who had been thinking about war, e.g., Heinz Steinert and Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović. That was when I first aired the idea I suppose. But to be clear, I don't present myself as some lone crusading Joan of Arc of the criminology of war because I did get encouragement, a lot of encouragement from Vincenzo Ruggiero, Nigel South, David Nelken, Jock Young and my partner [Ian Taylor] too. Stan Cohen also supported the work though we did have some challenging conversations about whether a criminology of war rubric was more restrictive

than a human rights one. My position was that a human rights perspective cannot capture the materiality and transnationality of war, the operation of war markets, profiteering or even ordinary people's venality – all those sort of dirty money relationships feeding off war. We agreed to disagree. Another factor was that my partner was a criminologist and I wanted to do something completely different from what he did, to plough my own furrow. I wanted to define my own intellectual space. That was a secondary reason, along with the more personal influences I mentioned earlier. I do think that because positivism and the idea of objectivity are so strong in criminology, many people act as if part of what we do is not autobiographical or personal, but I think it often is. At least one's commitment is.

TD: Can you please reflect on what has changed since then, both in terms of maybe contemporary conflicts, and the way in which we discuss them?

RJ: I think that in the mid-90s there was beginning to be a greater awareness of armed conflict and international humanitarian law after the war in the Balkans, the Rwandan genocide, not just in criminology but among ordinary people. I think those conflicts reminded people that war was still with us and had not gone away. The fact that there was an international effort to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide suggested that positive change and affirmation of humanitarian values was underway. People had started to pay more attention to armed conflict, especially feminist victimologists. The conduct of war in Iraq produced many criminological issues. We became more aware of war and also more aware that the nature of war had changed. There were now more asymmetrical, hybrid wars with more non-state actors involved, more private military companies and irregular combatants, more use of technology, changes that were mixed, uneven and incomplete. There were ever more flagrant breaches of international humanitarian law, quite open breaches, things like targeted assassinations using drones. After the assassination of Osama bin Laden, suddenly it became okay to just kill your perceived enemies pre-emptively. I think at this particular moment in time more people are aware of the problem of impunity, and particularly the abandonment of commitment to international criminal justice by major powers, like the United States. It is doubly disillusioning because the Americans were so central to the creation of the Nuremberg Tribunal and also the International Criminal Court (ICC). Walking away from the ICC and the international normative order we took for granted feels like a subversion of the whole project. I think people are very aware of that particularly in terms of unfolding events in Gaza, Ukraine and elsewhere. It's easier to talk about war within a criminological framework now, because it's so omnipresent and so appalling. It's out there in a more an obvious now than it was the 80s and early 90s.

TD: You mentioned before the issue of gender in war; can you elaborate a little bit more about this aspect that has been quite important in your work?

RJ: I was interested in looking at an historical example of how the gender order and modes of governmentality changed in a war emergency and how much ideological work went into exhorting people to a certain 'exceptional' version of gender and its differentiated hierarchies of masculinity and femininity. In Second World War Britain women were defined in terms of men in general and their men in particular along with other racial, class or national categories of identity. Deconstructing that ideological work through the lens of intersectionality was a good way to see how different aspects of identity, like nationality or loyalties interplay with sex or gender and how they become more salient in different contexts. Dubravka Zarkov's work (2001) on the representation victimization in the Balkans or the Rwandan genocide is a good example of that sort of analysis. Are you a Tutsi first and then a woman? How does that work? The salience of ethnic or nationality categories becomes acute in a state of warfare. In terms of sexual violence and victimization, you may be victimized because you're a man or a woman. Or you may be victimized in a specific culturally symbolic way because you're a particular type of man or woman, e.g., a Croatian woman or a Muslim woman. Intersectionality is a really good way of teasing out that specificity.

I looked at the Second World War in Britain. It was fascinating to trace the way the Army Welfare interventions into the private lives of soldiers and their wives worked out in both policy and practice along intersectional gender, race and class lines. The British Government set up an Army Welfare organisation staffed by 'suitable' volunteers to address the needs of soldiers and their families. Over time its activities became more focussed on the issue of marital infidelity and women Army Welfare officers were sent out to check up and report back on the behaviour of soldiers' wives. This semi-detached mode of state intrusion into private lives operated on a certain social logic which I termed 'the etiquette of intrusion'.

Here a middle-class woman could interfere in the private life of a working-class woman, but it would never work the other way around. One government committee discussed the question of British Army welfare practice in India. The minutes of the meeting noted that a white, British woman acting as an army welfare officer in India could intrude in the private life of Indian soldier's wife, it would not work the other way around. Social hierarchies of dominance and difference came clearly into play in terms of these forms of social control and regulation.

I think states of emergency are moments of transparency where it is easier to trace how ideology works; there's so much extra effort expended encouraging people to adhere to certain practices or forms of identity, or censoring people that don't or won't. Discourses on men who are conscientious objectors to military service are a good example. Conscientious objectors might be represented as un-men, or feminized men or disloyal, unpatriotic, and so on, yet those discourses may change as war goes on. So, in the First World War, conscientious objectors were represented that way but as people became more attuned to realities of warfare, conscientious objectors were more likely to be seen as having morale courage for standing on principle. States of exception are not static.

TD: Thank you. The next question relates to a claim you made in your work. You've argued that you did not care about the criminology of war, and you've also kind of mentioned that earlier. Could you share your reflection on the limits of the disciplinary boundaries in researching war or violent conflict?

RJ: Well, I'll try to clarify. I *do* care about the criminology of war, but I'm more interested in work on war actually getting done than debates about disciplinary boundaries. Basically, I think people get too hung up on disciplinary boundaries. And I suppose I am guilty of it myself, because I did argue for the criminology of war. I wanted to encourage people to explore the subject and also wanted to rebut the idea that studying the war/crime nexus had nothing to offer 'proper' criminology. Ultimately, I just wanted people to be able to do the work because I think it enriches criminology.

Thinking more about this, I admit that the boundaries of criminology do count at practical level. All Western states have criminal justice systems and need ways of informing their criminal justice policies and practices. It is inevitable that much of criminological research have a domestic focus, e.g., on policing, probation, prisons etc. Most funding for criminological research comes from the government and government funding priorities work like a sort of centrifuge. The questions of probation, imprisonment, etc., are propelled to the centre and all the other issues are flung out to the margins by this centrifugal force. Non-domestic questions of international criminology, criminology war, environmental crime – all that tends to flung to the edges in terms of funding. Perhaps that's one reason people are preoccupied with disciplinary boundaries.

I do care about a criminology war, but I think all of criminology, not just criminology concerned with war can be enriched by interdisciplinarity. It would be really worthwhile for criminologists to consider concepts generated by scholars concerned with war and its effects who work in other disciplines. Thinking of some examples of that interdisciplinarity – take Jonathan Shay's notion of 'moral injury' developed in his work with Vietnam War veterans. Or Michael Rothberg's concept of 'implicated subject' developed out of Holocaust studies which offers a more nuanced consideration of criminal responsibility that goes beyond the victim-perpetrator-bystander triangle that underpins so much of our victimological and transitional justice writing. Anthropology also has a lot to offer criminology in terms of reflexivity in research methods and ethics. For example, anthropologists working in conflict zones have talked about the problem of 'seduction' in the research process. Criminologists need to think about that too. I was conscious of that when doing research in Northern Ireland, where one often has to go through local gatekeepers who may attempt to manipulate the researchers' perspectives and control the information that is conveyed. So, that's another one. Then, lastly for me, historical context is fundamental to criminological thinking because there are so many resonances and continuities between war, crime and colonialism and oppression. Judith Butler's elaboration (2004) of Agamben's work (1995) on the concept of 'bare life' is a good example of philosophy providing us with a vocabulary and conceptual framework for thinking about what is being done in Gaza now. All these different ideas from other disciplines underscore the need for criminology, including domestic criminology, to be open to interdisciplinarity.

TD: So many very useful points to think about for future research. You've published widely on topics such as state crimes, political prisoners, blame and victimhood and gender dynamics in the context of war.

Much of your work has focused on Northern Ireland, a conflict that officially ended in 1998. In what ways was Northern Ireland important in your writing and your development as a scholar?

RJ: Well, I think you live in Northern Ireland, too.

TD: Yes.

RJ: I guess the first thing I would mention is Gramsci's notion of war as a parenthesis; I think it was in *The Prison Notebooks*... it's just one of those tantalizing throwaway comments that he doesn't really elaborate on. He talks about war or military government being a parenthesis wherein normal social relations of domination are suspended for the duration of the war and then apparently things revert to the status quo ante. I'm not convinced that is true. The conflict in Northern Ireland didn't really end in 1998 in the sense that, yes, there was a ceasefire and a new structure for power sharing. But the political conflict, grievance and contestation is definitely not over and the *effects* of the violence and counterinsurgency measures taken to deal with it are not over. The effects of war reach well into peace. They are intergenerational. You realise how much fear and suffering people experienced. I found the immediacy and complexity of people's lived experience really enlightening, both in terms of people I met through research and also friendships. Another thing that permeates public life is the politicisation of victimhood and the concentration of blame on one specific group of people [paramilitaries] allowing most others consider themselves blameless (Steinert's point). The issue was compelling because virtually all justice initiatives taken by the Stormont government are contested through that lens of victimhood and blame.

In the research on ex-political prisoners I did with Adrian Grounds, there were many crossovers between the experience of war veterans and ex-paramilitary prisoners. Our findings on the effects of long-term imprisonment on political prisoners were useful counterpoint to thinking about 'ordinary' prisoners and those wrongfully imprisoned through miscarriages of justice. It really added another dimension to criminological thinking on the effects of imprisonment. I particularly enjoyed working with Adrian because our interests and backgrounds were complementary. He is a forensic psychiatrist and I approached the work from an army welfare perspective. I suppose the other thing I would say is that one of the things that people who have not been in Northern Ireland probably don't appreciate is how sophisticated the ordinary people are in terms understanding power and politics. It impacts on the whole research process from thinking about research ethics on harm and consent to power relationships in the research.

TD: Finally, what suggestion would you offer to new generations of researchers working on the topic of war in criminology, which is a very broad topic?

RJ: Firstly, just keep doing it. Ignore the noise from other people. Just ignore the noise about what is or isn't criminology and follow your own interests. You are a good example of that. You were interested in war as punishment, followed through with it and produced a great piece of work on it.

Secondly, be open to other disciplines and perspectives. Really open. So much of criminology is from a Western, Northern perspective. The global South has so much to contribute, especially about war and colonialism, we have to listen.

Thirdly, be aware of the pitfalls researching war from afar. Obviously, it is not always practical or possible to research in war zones so, of necessity, a lot of this work will be desk-based research. You have to be acutely aware of where your sources come from, evaluate how they were produced and for whom, how they're filtered through specific perspectives or are the product of censorship, spin or erasure.

Fourthly, one of the things that really struck me about Northern Ireland was how many resonances of colonial discourse and state practice there were during the Troubles. One obvious connection would be how counter insurgency measures the British Army developed in Kenya during the Mau Mau uprising were adopted in Northern Ireland. The same applies to the emergency measures taken in Palestine, or those of the French in Algeria where local people are placed a position of extreme precarity outside the ordinary ambit of justice. It is arguable that there are contemporary echoes of this logic in domestic carceral settings and places of detention. There's that.

Lastly, read a lot, read widely, read history. I have the luxury of having more time to read now and I

just finished a book called 'Afterlives of the Terror' about how the Republic dealt with crimes committed during the Reign of Terror in revolutionary France. The post Terror tribunals adjudicated individual cases for reparation but also adopted the concept of community loss which I thought was quite interesting. It's just one example. It might be something people working on transitional justice might look at.

So, since you asked, I would say – ignore the noise about what is or isn't criminology; be open to ideas about war from other disciplines; be aware of connections between war and colonialism and make sure you do at least some of your reading outside criminology.

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Ruth Jamieson, now retired, was a lecturer in criminology in the School of Law at Queen's University Belfast. She worked extensively on war and political conflict. The primary focus of her work was on gender and political imprisonment. She is recognised to be the first person to launch a call for a criminology of war.

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Interview with Maryna Shevtsova: A Feminist Reading of the Russian War of Aggression in Ukraine

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Teresa Degenhardt: Your recent book is called *Feminist Perspectives on Russia's War in Ukraine*. Can you please explain why a feminist perspective is important in this context?

Maryna Shevtsova: The first reason, as much research confirms, is that in this war, as in all wars, women and other vulnerable groups, including queer people, Roma communities, and people with disabilities, are among those most severely affected. These are the same groups that already experienced structural inequalities in so-called peaceful times. Yet despite being disproportionately impacted, they are largely excluded from discussions about post-war recovery. And when I say *post*, the term should be placed in parentheses, since the full-scale invasion is ongoing. Nevertheless, recovery efforts are proceeding in parallel, as Russia continues to attack civilian targets and critical infrastructure that must be rebuilt or repaired as quickly as possible. Much of this reconstruction burden falls on the shoulders of women and other marginalised groups. Yet they remain excluded from decision-making processes. We see a striking absence of gender mainstreaming or even a basic gender lens in recovery policies, and the situation is worse for queer people. For instance, among the military administrations currently operating across Ukrainian regions, only two out of 23 are led by women. This systematic exclusion offers a clear and direct answer to why a feminist perspective is missing, and why it is so urgently needed.

The second reason lies on the discursive level. This war has been framed by the Kremlin, the Russian Orthodox Church, and their main supporters as a crusade to defend “traditional family values.” As scholars such as Peter Kratochvil and Mila O’Sullivan have noted, this framing encompasses everything from the reinforcement of rigid gender roles and the restriction of reproductive rights to the intensification of reproductive pressure on women. It also fuels attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, as well as on feminists and queer activists, the groups that have long stood at the forefront of resistance to Putin’s regime. This logic of “defending tradition” is typical of contexts where civic space is shrinking and authoritarian power seeks to delegitimise dissent. We see attacks against gender and sexual equality and queer rights in Europe and in the US which has turned from being the major ally to the main opponent of LGBTQ+ rights. This, of course, affects the situation of feminist and queer communities in Ukraine. This is why, again, a feminist perspective is needed.

Third, this war has also paradoxically created spaces for emancipation and visibility for women and queer people. On the one hand, Ukraine now has one of the highest numbers of women serving in the defence forces globally—more than 70,000 in various positions as of 2025. On the other hand, women are also highly active in civil society and the diaspora. Many of them were forced to flee the country, often with children, and have since become the most vocal and engaged actors abroad, partly because they take on an enormous amount of unpaid labour in sustaining these networks. This reminds us that women are not only victims or passive recipients of violence; they are also active agents of resistance and transformation. Their agency must be recognised, and their voices must be heard.

Finally, I would like to point out that when studying Central and Eastern Europe, and Ukraine in particular, there is a strong tendency to prioritise Western perspectives, especially within mainstream political science and international relations. Even within feminist scholarship, Western voices often dominate the discussion. This is something I have been reflecting on in conversations with colleagues from Central Eastern Europe and other feminist collectives. The title of our book, *Feminist Perspectives on Russia's War in Ukraine: Hear Our Voices*, captures this concern well. The call to “hear our voices” is not metaphorical—it is literal. It means: nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine.

This stance is crucial to challenge persistent inequalities over who gets to speak *for* Ukrainian women, *about* Ukrainian women, or even *instead of* them, when they are absent from international debates. It is also a way to confront the problem of academic extractivism, or the tendency to use local scholars, activists, and knowledge as raw material for building Western careers or theories, while excluding the grounded perspectives that emerge from Ukraine and the broader Central and Eastern European region. Too often, these contributions are overlooked simply because they are written in other languages or because they do not fit neatly within dominant Western frameworks. Acknowledging and engaging with these locally grounded knowledges is essential if we are to produce genuinely inclusive and decolonial feminist scholarship.

TD: So many important points! Can you please tell me how the attack by Russia on Ukrainian soil changed the life or the situation of women and LGBTQ+ people?

MS: These groups were already among the most vulnerable even before the full-scale invasion. From an intersectional perspective, it is important to distinguish between the experiences of women in smaller towns and rural areas, single mothers, carers of elderly people or persons with disabilities, and those with non-heteronormative sexualities. These are precisely the groups that have been most severely affected. The inequalities they faced were already exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had not yet fully subsided when the invasion began. For many, the pandemic had devastating social and economic consequences that deepened existing vulnerabilities.

When the war started, women made up the vast majority of refugees, since men of military age were not permitted to leave the country. Many women fled with their children, elderly parents, or other relatives. Yet in Ukrainian public discourse and media, their situation is not always represented with sufficient nuance. Women are sometimes portrayed as the “lucky ones” who managed to escape the hardships of war. While it is true that they are not being bombed daily, much less attention is given to the profound difficulties of displacement—arriving in a country where one does not speak the language, facing economic precarity, or negotiating a fragile sense of belonging. Some discussions have also highlighted racialised dynamics in the reception of refugees: Ukrainian women, being perceived as “whiter,” are often more readily accepted than refugees from the Middle East or North Africa.

However, remaining under-discussed are the persistent inequalities that shape these women’s everyday lives abroad. In many host countries—such as Italy, Spain, or Poland—the largest share of support for newly arrived refugees is provided not by the state but by the Ukrainian diaspora. This burden once again falls primarily on Ukrainian women who are already living there, often working in low-paid and care-related sectors. Italy, for instance, has long been a major destination for Ukrainian labour migration, particularly in domestic and elderly care, while in Spain, many Ukrainian women work in hospitality and service industries. The arrival of new refugees means even more unpaid or underpaid work for these migrant women. It also creates conditions that heighten risks of human trafficking, psychological exhaustion, and depression. Many women have found themselves torn between two worlds—caring for others in the host country while worrying about family members and partners still in Ukraine, including those serving on the front lines.

But I would like to speak also about the emancipation of women. Women who have actively joined the military and continue doing so. Women who took on roles in local governance, you know, filling the places men had to leave. At the same time, Russia’s attacks on a lot of infrastructure, the destruction of kindergartens, the destruction of hospitals, of the homes for elderly people, mean, again, that women have to fill those gaps too. Education in Ukraine is more than 80% feminised (the share reaches 98% in pre-school education) because this is an area which is largely underpaid.

The Ukrainian government often likes to boast about the resilience of its citizens, which is, of course, commendable and true. Yet much of this resilience is built on women’s shoulders. Neither school nor higher education ever stopped: there were no interruptions in teaching, even during blackouts, without electricity, or in inadequate shelters. Lessons, lectures, exams, master’s and bachelor’s thesis defences—all of this continues thanks to the women working in education, who are largely underpaid. Now even those limited salaries are being cut. Hardly anyone, except perhaps a few NGOs, pays attention to the enormous burnout in this field. The fact that many positions have been eliminated means that people are now teaching 10 or 11 classes per week, often without stable electricity or heating. This issue has not been properly addressed. Neither education nor the care sector are priorities for the Ukrainian government at the moment.

The military is not really adjusted for women. Just last year they started designing proper uniforms tailored for women, even though women have been active in the military since 2014. There is still no law or policy to prevent sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the military. But for some reason, the Ministry of Defence does not want to adopt a policy. Anecdotally, a lot of women face very negative treatment when they go to recruitment centres, wanting to join the army. So on the one hand, we have the situation where men are basically caught on the street and forced to serve and join the army, while on the other hand, women are rejected, or the conditions created for them are difficult. It’s very difficult for women to join the military. I have colleagues who tried to do that and faced obstacles. This is something that is not talked much about at an official level because it might be seen as critical of the Ukrainian government and the military. But we have to be critical. This is how Ukraine should be different from

Russia: for our ability to freely criticise the government and address issues.

An ongoing research project called “Invisible Battalion” is available in both Ukrainian and English language online. This is a collaborative research project involving several Ukrainian scholars, studying Ukrainian women in the military since 2014-2015. The last part of this project is related to sexual harassment and violence in the military. It is very challenging to research, as there are difficulties reaching out to respondents. People are afraid to talk, and now when the war is really ongoing and in full scale, women, but not only women, as sexual harassment in the military applies to all the other groups too, depend on their commander, on their seniors, so they are obviously very careful voicing criticism—you don’t know how it will affect you.

TD: A persistent problem in all military forces. Maryna, can you tell us how ideas about femininity and masculinity are manipulated by the state in this conflict?

MS: Even though much more will be said once the war is over, what we can already see clearly is that in terms of masculinity, nothing is particularly surprising. There is a strong appeal to the ideal male citizen, the Ukrainian man who is ready to drop everything and join the military, or at least the territorial defence forces, or volunteer in some way. Government campaigns focus on encouraging mobilisation and conscription, celebrating patriotic men ready to die for their country. There is also a softer touch of humanity: soldiers are often shown with kittens, rescuing pets from burning buildings, or holding children. This helps to humanise the image of the Ukrainian soldier in contrast to the Russian one. Yet none of this is new; such portrayals have accompanied almost every war. What is more concerning, as Olena Strelnyk and Sarah Phillips (2025) point out in their recent article, is the manipulation of ideas of the “good citizen” and “taxpayer” in Ukraine.

On the other hand, the ideas about Ukrainian femininity needed to be adjusted because women too needed to join the military and because it’s the 21st century. So President Zelensky has changed his address to refer to defenders twice, first as a male noun and then as female noun. Furthermore, if they do postcards or promotional material, they always try to represent women in uniform.

However, there is a second layer, this expectation, which is always on women and never on men, of taking on the care of people coming back with severe damage or disabilities. Ukraine has a huge number of people coming back from the front who are in need of intensive healthcare, mental healthcare, but also people who are missing hands and legs. Women are expected to take care of these seriously injured men. There are already some success stories of women fundraising for the highest technological processes or prosthesis or surgery for their friends or colleagues or partners. There are strong narratives that support the view that women are expected to stay forever with these men. There are reports from hospitals about a wedding or engagement of a woman with a veteran soldier coming from war with severe disabilities. It is absolutely not clear how this will be supported financially by the state. We don’t have infrastructure, and Ukrainian cities are not accessible for people with mobility issues. The scale of this catastrophe is still to be evaluated.

Another thing to mention is, of course, that until the full-scale invasion, Ukraine was the capital for European surrogacy and reproductive technologies. There is a certain hypocrisy on the part of European institutions, because we know that in the EU, commercial surrogacy is forbidden, yet it is OK for EU citizens to go to Ukraine and do surrogacy there. Ukraine was one of the major suppliers of surrogate babies to the EU. Now, first with COVID, and second with the full-scale invasion, this became a problem, but the clinics are still there. Now they are promoting their services with a discount or even for free: i.e., they freeze the reproductive material, biological material. There are already stories of women who froze their biological material and that of their partners, so that if their partners died in war, they could get pregnant with their babies. We will hear more and more of these stories, and they are fundamentally praised and normalised and expected. There are already court conflicts between, for example, the parents of a soldier killed in war, and his fiancée, or his wife or widow, over who has the right to use the biological material. This is another thing that is not really discussed much. Western countries are to blame because the industry existed to support the huge demand from Western countries, and there were no proper regulations. While surrogacy is a complex issue, as are the assisted reproductive technologies, the way it is being handled and run is completely unregulated.

I cannot call it a black market, because Ukraine has technically allowed it, but it is extremely problematic. This is something that needs to be discussed as part of the recovery, when we discuss healthcare generally and the healthcare of women specifically. But it's really not discussed enough.

TD: There were a number of rapes by Russian soldiers reported internationally, like Bucha, for instance. What can you tell us about the issue of sexual violence in general, and violence against women or LGBTQ+ people more specifically?

MS: Of course, the issue has been there from the very beginning. It has been presented somewhat one-sidedly, as the focus has mostly been on women being raped, while other groups are rarely mentioned. When it comes to documenting sexual violence or conflict-related sexual violence against LGBTQ people, this work is carried out predominantly by NGOs. We have reports from occupied areas describing torture, sexual violence, and even killings of LGBTQ people. These reports usually come from NGOs that maintain contacts in those regions and collect information through anonymised networks. Although international organisations are trying to help, their efforts are insufficient. To protect their networks of monitors and ensure their security, they must operate with caution. Much more funding and far greater technological support are needed.

Progress is largely due to activists and scholars, but also to a new generation of Ukrainian femocrats, women who have been in Ukrainian politics for the last 10-15 years or who pushed for and achieved the ratification of the Istanbul Convention to adopt a National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). This enabled organising shelters for survivors of domestic or gender-based violence, training police, or social workers and psychologists, the judges, etc. There's always a problem of police, judges, and social workers/psychologists who are not coordinated and have different views on the issue.

Yet this is still not enough, even if we consider only the violence coming from the Russian side. What is discussed far less is the rise in gender-based and domestic violence within Ukraine itself, linked to the growing militarisation of society. This increase is not only due to veterans or soldiers returning home on leave or after demobilisation, but also to the general tension and anxiety among men who fear being mobilised and therefore spend more time at home. The streets of even the largest Ukrainian cities are often empty—not because of bombings, but because people are afraid of patrols that might force them into conscription. This situation has led to a rise in domestic violence, which remains largely unacknowledged at the governmental level. Officials avoid addressing it, fearing that doing so would appear to discredit the army or Ukrainian men, as if acknowledging these problems would equate them with Russians.

Although I understand their reasoning, I think they are creating a bomb ready to explode later. This merits more cooperation from the international community; the humanitarian organisations need to have a careful understanding of the local context—why local officials are reluctant to name things the way they should be named.

TD: I wonder whether you have any trust in international criminal justice?

MS: International organisations and experts provide legitimacy by documenting cases. The reports by locals unfortunately are often seen as biased. There are questions around who the people are who are collecting this data. If UN or UNHCR or OSCE speak of genocide or of a number of raids, then people agree it is true. We need these actors for recognition. Of course, I remain very critical of them because they tend to reproduce the same hierarchies. They are more likely to recognise as victims and survivors those who they expect to be, as they might not have the time, patience, knowledge, or sensitivity to approach certain things in the nuanced, sensitive, sensible manner that is needed. This is why they need to engage more with the work of the people on the ground. I remain very critical because their engagement is limited because of their lack of knowledge of the language, knowledge of the people, and the same local organisations tend to be involved with international organisations. Usually these are very competent organisations, but sometimes because of the above issues, much work on the ground is overlooked. There are grassroots organisations, local mobilisations that may not have access to international resources because of how they expect the project management to be run, or because of their level of English, which may not be perfect, because they do not write funding applications, or because they don't have the right connections. Many people have written about that, and Ukraine is no different at all.

I think it is very important for us to work with other countries who have similar experiences. such as, for example, cooperation with Colombian colleagues. They had a lot of problems, and they continue having issues with transitional justice and with their Truth Commission, La Comisión de la Verdad. They can tell us how they made sure that LGBTQ victims were included, that the issue of transphobia was included in the reports and became part of the process of transitional justice. We have talked to people from Kosovo, from Bosnia, but I think we need more dialogue with the so-called Global South, or global majority, a term that I prefer. I think it is useful to learn from each other's mistakes, and push the big organisations to listen to people on the ground who do not fear getting their hands dirty.

TD: Thank you Maryna. So finally, how can we provide solidarity to women in Ukraine? Or to LGBTQ+ communities?

MS: First of all, I would like to underscore that solidarity is not an event or putting an avatar on Facebook, even if it is appreciated. Solidarity is continuous action.

It is important to stress the need to challenge systematic inequality when we try to challenge institutions and policies or even research practises. We need to centre the agency of Ukrainians. Although this may appear easy, for some reason, three and a half years into the war, it's still not there. Even if we speak about feminist solidarities and feminists and queer activists, we still have discussions and panels on Ukraine without Ukrainians. We still have a preconceived understanding of what's going on, especially people who have been working on the Central Eastern Europe region or, say, Eurasia, and have spent time and effort on Russian studies. They are influenced by Russian propaganda—the so-called soft power. It might be very difficult to decolonise their perspectives on the region and see the complexity not only across the region, but also within Russia. Russia is often perceived just as Moscow, or St. Petersburg, or the Eastern parts with Slavic Russians, without understanding the complexity of the regions and the other fights and struggles. We need to invite Russian feminists to the table. We tend to invite Russian Slavic feminists, and do not see the many other active movements, such as in Bashkortostan or in Tatarstan or in Chechnya. Somehow, it's always people from the imperial centres. This is not to say that none of them is good, or they are not trying to fight the regime, but if we speak about inclusivity, we need to move beyond the centres.

Second, it is important to place some emphasis on long-term support, funding, and institutional support for organisations working on the ground. Donors prefer working with projects, creating a perpetual grant-writing application culture, rather than building work in the field where it is most needed, such as education or care, or in documenting the crimes committed. It is not a financial problem, but an issue of trust—donors don't trust what local people do with the money.

Local colleagues who are based in Ukraine tend to import certain concepts or certain ideas from Western literature, drawing on scholars who are based in the West. We do it for two reasons. First, of course, these are well-established concepts and it makes sense to use them. Second, because you're pushed in that direction—you cannot not quote certain people, and you cannot not use certain complex concepts. The problem is that this erases a more nuanced understanding of what is going on. Just to give a very simple but also a very complex example, let's think about the concept of nationalism. It is a loaded concept in Western Europe, especially because of the German past. At the same time, nationalism is a bad word used by Russia as the central concept to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Now, I do not work on nationalism. I work on the LGBTQ+ movement, queer migration, and gender more broadly, but for the last 12 years, I have been asked about nationalism, especially right-wing nationalism. What about nationalism? And it is very difficult to explain in five minutes, or sometimes in even a shorter time, what Ukrainian nationalism actually is, how it is being shaped, or what Westerners label Ukrainian nationalism. For example, in Ukraine, there is a struggle to switch to the Ukrainian language as the language of communication. From the moment of independence in 1991, Ukrainian has been the official language of Ukraine and the only one, as in many other countries. Nobody problematises Italian as the national language of Italy, or English of the UK, or Russian of Russia. Nobody questions why Russian is the only national language in Russia. But there is this big hostility about the Ukrainian language. There are many questions about that. Nobody wants to understand how the Russian language was imposed, or how the Ukrainian language was cancelled. In the last 300 years, the Ukrainian language was banned on the territory of Ukraine from 130 to 170 times according to various historical sources.

Now there is an attempt to reclaim the language which everybody speaks anyway, because it was a



language of education. It creates the idea of Ukrainians becoming right-wing nationalists and Nazis. And these labels are attached very easily.

This is just one example. The same can be said about *homonationalism*, a concept easily applied across Central and Eastern Europe, where local activists use the idea of Europeanisation to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. Yet it is something much more nuanced. To understand it, one has to go there, talk to people, read local news, and grasp the country's history. This, I believe, is the most straightforward yet also the most complex form of solidarity. If you decide to write about a country and cannot do all this, then at least try to practice co-authorship: engage with local scholars instead of merely interviewing them and then writing about them in your own article. Try to write something *together*. This is relatively easy to do, and people are often open to it, yet it remains rare. There are still few examples of co-authorship as a genuine practice of solidarity in academia. It is crucial that we invite colleagues and say, "Let's try to understand things together." Through such practice, we might begin to challenge the rigid academic structures that continue to persist.

TD: Thank you very much Maryna for all these very important insights.

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In Memoriam: Vincenzo Ruggiero (1950-2024)

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A Radical and Visionary Scholar

Vincenzo Ruggiero stood out as one of the most original voices in Italian critical criminology and was undeniably a remarkable thinker within wider criminological field. He referred to himself as an “anti-criminologist,” rejecting the conventional aims of the field, which he saw as inevitably tied to state and corporate definitions of crime. In contrast to the narrow scope of traditional administrative criminology, Ruggiero championed a broader vision rooted in social justice.

During Italy’s politically turbulent “Years of Lead,” Ruggiero critically examined the role of prisons through an abolitionist lens. Driven by his political activism, he began by creating and supporting alternative narratives—most notably founding the publishing house “Senza Galere” (“Without Jails”), which released poetry and literature written by inmates or recently released individuals, revealing the harsh realities of incarceration. This initiative can be viewed as an early form of convict criminology—not so much an academic perspective, but rather a counter-narrative aimed at reaching and influencing a broader audience. Following this period, Vincenzo relocated to the UK, where he joined Middlesex University, a leading centre for critical criminology, and immersed himself in the vibrant, multicultural life of London.

Vincenzo’s extensive body of work spans a wide range of topics, including prison abolition, drug policy, organized crime, human trafficking, corruption, corporate crime, crimes of the powerful, political violence, terrorism, and war. While it’s difficult to single out his most remarkable contribution, he is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking analyses of the relationship between criminality and the economy. In these works, he compellingly challenges the notion of a clear divide between legal and illegal activities, arguing that the system itself promotes and sustains certain practices and blurred boundaries. Notable books such as *Economie Sporche* (1996), *Dei Delitti dei Deboli e dei Potenti* (1999), *I Crimini dell’Economia* (2013), along with the English editions *Crime and the Markets* (2000) and *Crime and Literature* (2004), and his award-winning *Dirty Money: On Financial Delinquency* (2017) — which earned him the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Society of Criminology — showcase his influential scholarship. His writing reflects a vast and diverse intellectual background, drawing on classical Greek and modern literature, political theory, history, economics, and multiple languages.

Vincenzo’s legacy extends beyond his rich and original body of work to encompass his deep passion for social justice and vibrant intellectual exchange—often accompanied by a shared love of good food and wine. Perhaps because of this warmth, he was a regular presence at the Annual Conferences of the European Group of the Society of Deviance and Social Control, where many of us had the privilege to raise a glass with him while benefiting from his profound insights. His radical perspective consistently uncovered the hidden political and economic structures underlying both criminality and its definitions. Committed to challenging common assumptions, he explored issues through their historical origins and ongoing processes. In his later years, his writing took a strong stance against war and militarization. It is this final dimension of his vast scholarship that we will focus on here, in line with the theme of this special issue.

On Political Conflict: Of Democracy and Terrorism

Ruggiero’s focus on political criminality and crimes of the powerful naturally led him to examine war and conflict. He served as editor for Ruth Jamieson’s influential 1998 work on “war in criminology” (see her interview in this special issue) and soon began developing his own critical analysis in response to the “war on terror” following 9/11. Early in his writings on this subject, Vincenzo identified how cosmopolitanism and liberal values became intertwined with militarism and imperialism, facilitating predatory exploitation by corporate and industrial interests in distant regions (see 2007; 2016).

While not wholly rejecting the term “terrorism,” Ruggiero recognized its inherently political character and posited that terrorism may originate both “from below” and “from above.” He conceptualized terrorism as a manifestation of democratic failure and inequitable resource distribution within political systems. Regarding the events of 9/11, Ruggiero contended that they were the result of political dynamics in distant regions, wherein certain groups endeavoured to challenge the prevailing social order under Western liberal hegemony, coupled with a fundamental communicative impasse among the involved actors (2003). He argued that the de-escalation of such conflicts necessitates deliberative processes. Subsequently, Ruggiero (2017) further highlighted the reciprocal shaping of actors engaged in political



conflict and armed struggle, noting that terrorism and counter-terrorism practices mutually reinforce and escalate one another. He articulated that power operates by “cloning” the enemy—constructing it in rigid, fixed terms—which both solidifies the adversary’s identity and legitimizes the application of military force in response.

Demonstrating notable prescience, Ruggiero analyzed the contemporary crisis of democracy as fundamentally linked to the growing intolerance of dissent and the increasing secrecy surrounding democratic decision-making processes. He termed this phenomenon “democracy offshore,” describing a process whereby political institutions become progressively less accountable to their citizens while simultaneously responding to social mobilization and contentious politics with militarized tactics. This shift effectively transforms policing into a form of internal warfare against perceived domestic enemies, rendering the public sphere into a contested battleground—a dynamic that remains critically relevant today. Ruggiero argued that the criminalization of dissent exacerbates societal distance, which in turn escalates both the violence inherent in contentious politics and the corresponding state responses (2017, p. 11). In sum, the closure of communicative channels and the repression of social movements serve to intensify the violence surrounding political contestation. One might thus wonder how Ruggiero would interpret the current widespread criminalization of some social movements and forms of solidarity.

Criminology Against War: Criminalizing War

As a committed pacifist, Ruggiero unequivocally condemns war as inherently criminogenic (2005). Drawing on the civilizing process—which has successfully outlawed certain forms of private violence such as sexual and domestic abuse—he argues that the use of war to resolve conflicts must likewise be prohibited. Achieving this requires a critical challenge to the prevailing culture of heroism surrounding war, as well as a re-examination of the widely held belief that war can produce transformative effects on power, identity, solidarity, and social integration. In contrast, Ruggiero contends that war exacerbates the most destructive elements of human conflict, functioning as a malignant force within communities, facilitating corporate war crimes. Consequently, it is imperative to recognize the profound harms caused by war and to label it as a crime—specifically, a crime of the powerful.

Ruggiero’s view of the crimes of the powerful is set against an articulated theoretical background, which allows to develop a complex view of power relations, as well as to shed a light upon the mechanisms of the production of deviance. His interpretation of the crimes of the powerful unwinds through a long path, that starts from *Delitti dei deboli e dei potenti* (2003) and reaches its peak in *Perché i potenti delinquono* (2016), with a stopover in *Crimini dell’economia* (2013). Vincenzo Ruggiero rejects all those simplistic, mechanistic views that draw inspiration on dogmatic Marxism. Power, in Ruggiero’s view, does not only relate to material wealth. Symbolic and relational aspects must be taken into account. On the other hand, it is not possible to rule out the material dimension and focus solely on relations and symbols.

The powerful can fuel public opinion with a production of imaginary that proposes inspirational models moulded on tycoons and politicians, and make the less powerful identify with them. That is the reason why people keep voting for Trump and Berlusconi, and will turn a blind eye on their crime. Moreover, the relational network of the powerful, will work in two directions: under the symbolic aspect, friendly media either will diminish the seriousness of such crimes as environmental harm, genocide, weapon trafficking, exploitation of workers, while focusing on street crimes. On the other hand, a tightly woven network of relation will manage to pass lenient penal laws on the crimes of the powerful, or even to decriminalise them. It becomes by this token understandable how the production of deviance follows a pattern shaped by class inequalities. A tri-dimensional inequality: material, symbolic, relational.

In his last article on war, Vincenzo reiterated the urgent need to shift from merely situating war within criminological analysis to actively developing a criminology against war. Central to this endeavour is a critical interrogation of traditional justifications for war—namely, just war theory and its principles of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. Ruggiero highlights the problem that states often claim their use of force aligns with these legal frameworks, portraying their actions as defensive or protective (2016). However, they frequently extend the permissible limits on civilian casualties through concepts such as “collateral damage” and “human shields,” or constructing their own enemies, or enabling the plunder of resources by corporations and security mercenaries. To counteract war, he advocates for a peace-making criminology that emphasizes robust engagement with civil society and its leaders on all sides of conflict (2023).

Further elaborating on this idea Vincenzo promotes a ‘bottom-up perspective able to forge networks and relations processes of legitimation that can replace state promoted or international interventions’ (2023, p. 10). While these principles are commendable, Ruggiero does not seem to acknowledge the practical challenges involved: civil society often is deeply committed to the war effort. In this sense, Vincenzo observes that trauma deeply imprints wounds and ideologies upon individuals, making the dissolution of war and its enduring consequences profoundly difficult without substantial healing efforts. The visionary scholar mostly characterizes war as predominantly orchestrated by powerful states pursuing economic interests and focusing on the production of chaos through technological tools that support and sustain private interests and plundering. In his analysis, economic imperatives and power dynamics drive war, and while populations possess the capacity to perceive and resist these state-led agendas, current realities show that, even as corporate interests aggressively pursue militaristic objectives, civil society is not always willing or able to engage in peaceful alternatives.

Vincenzo Ruggiero was among the visionaries who dared to imagine a society where equality prevails over privilege and economic growth, and where abolitionism and peace-making criminology stand as central objectives of contemporary critical criminology. Ruggiero paved the way for an original, multifaceted critical approach to crime and criminology. We hope many others will follow this way.

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ASHTAR Theatre's *The Gaza Monologues*: Documentary Theatre as Counter-Archive of Palestinian Life Under Occupation and Genocide

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Abstract: In highlighting ASHTAR theatre's *The Gaza Monologues* project, this article examines the role played by documentary theatre to witness, remember and make visible Palestinian voices. Through personal testimonies by young writers Mahmoud Balaoui, Amjad Abu Yasin, and Heba Daoud, the monologues bear witness in a time of media silence. As international legal frameworks refuse to recognise Palestinian lives, we argue that *The Gaza Monologues* serve as a counter-archive documenting the testimonies of a population living under occupation, siege and genocide. Performed worldwide since 2010, *The Gaza Monologues* transforms theatre into a vehicle for truth-telling, global solidarity and visible accountability in the face of ongoing erasure.

Mahmoud Balaoui

The Hour in Gaza is Different than the World
(2014)

Every day we hear about Gaza in the news, not because our economy is booming, and not because we have one of the World's Wonders, and certainly not because of our strong aviation industry. All countries have entered Guinness Records, we did too. We have the highest record of the longest war against civilians and the most intense cry of a mother moaning her children.

Time in Gaza is not like the rest of the World; the hour in Gaza is made of 60 martyrs and 3600 injured, and the minute is made of 60 destroyed houses while the second is 60 cries of moaning mothers. One night in Gaza during the war is equal to a hundred stories of the One Thousand and One Nights fable.

At night when it's dark, the sky is lit by falling rockets, roaring above our heads, and the night becomes a bright day.

A mother is sleeping next to her young children who ask her: "Mother, what is this sound, is it bombing? Mother, we are afraid." The mother, unable to soothe her children, starts to tell them a story about 'Hassan the Brave', so they could sleep in peace. However, the children no matter what you tell them, they will only think of death and destruction for that is all they see.

The next day, her son goes out, he hears an explosion; he remembers last night's story and trusts that Hassan the Brave is dead, that Hassan has become a Martyr. He rushes back to his mother and tells her: "Mother, Hassan is dead. All our little adventures together, all our memories have vanished. How can I go to school after Hassan has died? Mother, Hassan is dead."

Before she answers her son the mother receives a phone call from the Israeli army: "you have 30 seconds to leave your house." 30 seconds?! What can she do in 30 seconds? What can she take? And who should she inform? Should she run away with her children? Or should she tell the neighbors? The mother stands in the street and starts to scream: "Hey people, our house is going to be demolished, our house is going to be destroyed." 30 seconds later, everything became deadly silent!

Gaza is remaining, Gaza will never die, even when her children die. Their names will be written in history books for their children and grandchildren. If you ever Google Gaza, you will see pictures of destruction and devastation, and one day, you might see my picture among the killed ones, during one of these wars against Gaza.

- Mahmoud Balaoui (2014), *The Gaza Monologues*, ASHTAR Theatre.

As Konrad Suder Chatterjee (2025), Communications Manager and Resource Developer at ASHTAR Theatre, observes, this monologue situates Gaza's temporality against the outside world, exposing how war and blockade distort time, waiting, and survival. Like this mother's intimate everyday experience, violence structures even the smallest unit of time.

This is a fitting entry into ASHTAR Theatre's *The Gaza Monologues*, a project that since 2010 has documented life under siege, occupation, and genocide through the voices of Palestinian youth, men, and women. Founded in Jerusalem in 1991 and now based in Ramallah, ASHTAR, led by Iman Aoun and Edward Muallem, has long seen theatre as a vehicle for justice and pedagogy. For Aoun, the project arose out of necessity:

Living under occupation, when we are constantly under threat of losing our lives and our narrative has been jeopardized and shunned down, when the first assault took place on Gaza by the Israeli Occupation, I wanted the world to know the reality in the voice of our children and to create solidarity among the young people throughout the world with our young theatre students. Because I believe in the power of theatre to create change and because I believed that the children of today are the leaders of tomorrow. (Aoun, 2025)

From its beginning, then, the project was designed to counter erasure: to serve as both archive and repertoire, documentation and action. It transforms theatre into a form of testimony that resists silence, demands recognition, and insists that Palestinian voices be heard. Each monologue is therefore both a personal account and a political act, weaving memory, grief, and survival into an enduring counter-archive; one that stands in defiance of the impotence of legal accountability and the persistent refusal of dominant frameworks to acknowledge Palestinian suffering and harm.

Here, theatre takes up the task law refuses: naming, remembering, witnessing.

Law's Failure and the Ungrievability of Palestinian Lives

Martha Minow (2000) stresses that courts are inadequate to address mass atrocity: they cannot restore destroyed communities or repair psychic wounds. The urgency of *The Gaza Monologues* is sharpened by the failures of international law. In the absence of legal frameworks that account for the genocide of Palestinian lives, the project functions as an art-based framework for witnessing and accountability—preserving Gaza's narratives since 2010 and standing as testimony against erasure, insisting on recognition where legal institutions refuse.

This statement echoes a wide body of critical scholarship. Judith Butler (2016) theorises ungrievability as the condition in which the deaths of those excluded from international recognition and protection fail to register as losses within dominant global frames. Noura Erakat (2019) demonstrates how law is weaponised to perpetuate “colonial continuity,” denying Palestinians sovereignty or protection. Achille Mbembe (2003) describes Gaza as an archetype of necropolitics, where populations are governed through infrastructures of death.

The current war on Gaza has made visible “the prevalence of the idea of the dispensability of Palestinian life in European and American political and media spheres. This widespread tolerance of the dehumanisation and existential negation of Palestinians is the result of decades-long discourse and systematic construction of Arabs in ways that deny them humanity and legitimise their ungrievability” (Ali, 2024). As Aoun herself insists: “Documentary Theatre as *The Gaza Monologues*, is holding the narrative and the stories of the people in Gaza since 2010 and for many more years to come. It is a form of documentation, and accountability. The more the atrocities are widening, these stories become a strong witness in the face of reality and humanity” (Aoun, 2025).

Art as Counter-Archive / Counter-Evidence

The Gaza Monologues exemplifies what Diana Taylor (2003) terms the repertoire: embodied practices that safeguard cultural memory where official archives collapse or refuse to speak. Each monologue is not merely a record but a performative act of truth-telling, generating meaning through the very act of narration (Felman & Laub, 1992). Read through Jacques Rancière (2004), the project reveals its political force: by disrupting dominant regimes of visibility, it brings into public consciousness lives otherwise silenced, redistributing the sensible and demanding recognition.

ASHTAR recognises this duality. As they note: “The aim of the reading of the GMs since 2023 is to raise international awareness and ask the people to act against the genocide. Theatre is a strong means of action when it is used in the proper place and time” (Aoun, 2025). The project has circulated globally, performed at demonstrations, universities, and community events. It is an international call. By inviting communities worldwide to stage and circulate *The Gaza Monologues*, the project transforms art into a collective global tribunal—mobilising solidarity, enlisting new witnesses, and demanding accountability in the face of legal and political failure.



Amjad Abu Yasin - November 10, 2024 *The New Gaza Monologues* by ASHTAR Theatre, read by Luke Monday, *In The Now Productions*.

Amjad Abu Yasin
I Am Not Jesus to Take All the Sins of the World
10/11/2024

My last letter... I really wish it's the last one

I'm not Christ, to bare on my shoulders the sins of humanity and I don't have the power to forgive all humanity.

How is it logical, that for being Palestinian, we have to endure a doomed fate since the beginning of creation. That the world blames us for all its guilt and anger.

From the beginning of time. Palestinians are destined to suffer, to roam and to die.

No one is spared, not the weakest or the strongest of us, nor the most villain or the prophet.

400 days have passed, I've seen in them children wishing to die from what they are experiencing. When every time I hear a child wishing to die, everything in me dies. I've also seen kids clinging for life and a lot of bodies and a little life.

It seems that the world doesn't want to open its eyes to what's happening to us; it's choosing to be blind so it doesn't feel guilty. Ignorance is better than truth. But there are who see and listen and read these words and hear them. You are our last hope.

Million of stars light our skies, but aren't able to give light to a bombed family under the rubble waiting for its fate.

Not a year passed since last October, it seems like centuries. Day after day we are using our minds when this war ends I wish that I find the courage to call myself human again. Regardless of their efforts to strip us from our humanity, I resist it. I don't wish this pain we are enduring on any other people.

A few months ago, a school next to us was bombed. Tons were martyred. I still smell blood and death. I started picking parts from the ground, me and others. After minutes the schoolyard turned into a mountain of human parts. For a few minutes I was inside Hell.

I used to hold children's hands and play with them on stage, not carry their missing parts. Their hands and their legs are spread on the ground with wires.

The children were spread everywhere like clothes waiting to dry, but I no longer feel anxious. I was feeling calm.

All the world's leaders said, this war had to stop and I believe them all. Every time I hold a hand or a leg or see a dead body, I believe them. For a year I have been believing them all that the war has to stop and I still believe them.

It's a good thing and a bad thing to be a Palestinian. Because you know the truth about the world. Human rights and all these principles that the world has been talking about, it doesn't apply to everyone. Only the strong ones, they invite whoever they want and for us, the unlucky ones, we aren't invited to this feast.

- Amjad Abu Yasin, *I Am Not Jesus to Take All the Sins of the World* (November 10, 2024), *The New Gaza Monologues* by ASHTAR Theatre.

Abu Yasin's testimony, written during the 2023–24 genocide, articulates survivor guilt and the moral burden imposed on Palestinians to endlessly bear suffering. As Konrad Suder Chatterjee (ASHTAR Theatre, 2025) notes, it is a recent text that powerfully foregrounds witnessing and the imposed moral burden, intersectional in its concerns and opening multiple conversations and angles. The Christ metaphor within it exposes the expectation that Palestinians embody sacrifice while the world absolves itself. His vivid description of carrying children's severed limbs, "I used to hold children's hands and play with them on stage, not to carry their missing parts", stages the unbearable transformation of theatre from play to horror.

This resonates with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's (1992) claim that testimony is always marked by the impossibility of full transmission: it attempts to speak the unspeakable. Abu Yasin's words are also accusatory, directed outward to an international community that repeatedly declares "this war must stop" while it continues. ASHTAR highlights that the monologues have been taken up internationally in demonstrations, where they stirred emotions, raised awareness, and shaped the ideas of participants. Abu Yasin's monologue therefore operates not only as an intimate confession but also as a tool of mobilisation.

The story of Heba Daoud (young woman's voice)
Gaza October 29, 2023

We were all together in one house, but no place was safe. In fact, there is no single safe place in all of the Gaza Strip... You could say there were at least 50 missiles. 50 missiles they fired at us and we were waiting our turn to die. In fact, we thought it was our turn, and every missile that fell was heading directly towards us! For at least half an hour death was in front of our eyes, plain death [...]

I climbed over the pile, into the saloon; There were no human features anywhere! In the living room the pile was on top of the men, on top of them all. There was no one there. There was no one raising their voice. There was no one living [...]

Nine martyrs in the house. Nine martyrs, nine. Among them is my niece, a 28-day-old baby. She was born during the war and died during the war; we obtained her death certificate before her birth certificate [...]

I saw death, I saw death. My husband is suffering from severe psychological trauma. Really severe psychological trauma... I have seen death with my own eyes. I try to look like I'm okay in front of them [my family] but inside, I'm completely broken. I'm completely shattered internally [...]

- Heba Daoud, *The Gaza Monologues*, 2023, ASHTAR Theatre. Read full monologue [here](#).

Heba's testimony can be heard in her own voice through the audio recording available at the bottom of this [page](#). Listening to her words underscores the visceral power of her story, transforming text into lived voice. Daoud's voice brings us into the domestic sphere, narrating the collapse of a home under bombardment. Her account dramatises the gendered labour of protecting children and holding families together amid terror. The imagery of cracked ceilings, trembling relatives, and whispered prayers captures what Ann Cvetkovich (2003) calls an "archive of feelings," where trauma is stored in intimate detail. Daoud's story also connects testimony with transnational solidarity: her survival depended on



networks of donors, sponsorships, and medical support in Egypt. Thus, the monologue bridges embodied endurance and global mobilisation.

Read together, Balaoui (2014), Abu Yasin (2024), and Daoud (2023) trace a decade-long arc of testimony through an intersectional lens that considers the gendered and classed dimensions of genocidal harm. Balaoui situates Gaza in distorted temporality, Abu Yasin stages survivor guilt, and Daoud records gendered domestic survival. The continuity is striking: from 2010 to 2024, Gaza has endured repeated assaults and writers have defiantly continued to create new monologues. As ASHTAR notes, “as Gaza was undergoing a war every two years, the Gaza Monologues were never stopped” (Aoun, 2025). The project thus forms a longitudinal counter-archive, documenting recurring violence and sustaining memory.

ASHTAR's Praxis: Theatre as Infrastructure of Survival

ASHTAR Theatre's practice is not limited to performance. It provides psychosocial interventions, financial support for trainers, and continuity for displaced youth. As they describe: “ASHTAR is in direct daily contact with all the writers in Gaza and those who had been displaced... They were able to do psychosocial intervention inside Gaza City and displaced refugee camps... helping the trainers survive financially for a short while” (Aoun, 2025). In this sense, ASHTAR embodies both cultural and material infrastructure: sustaining community, providing care, and preserving dignity.

The Gaza Monologues functions as an art-based framework of justice. When law is complicit in violence, theatre preserves the record; when international institutions refuse to acknowledge Palestinian lives as grievable, performance insists on their humanity and worth. Janelle Reinelt (2009) reminds us that the power of documentary theatre lies in its ability to connect spectators to an absent but undeniable reality, borrowing the structures of the courtroom to anchor its truth-claims. *The Gaza Monologues* embodies this potential, staging testimony as counter-evidence and positioning global audiences as jurors in a tribunal of witnessing and accountability. As Aoun (2025) affirms, “the children of today are the leaders of tomorrow”: the project is not only a repository of memory but also a rehearsal for the futures Palestinians continue to imagine and demand.

Beginning with Balaoui's account of time reconstituted in martyrdom, moving through Abu Yasin's survivor's guilt, and Daoud's gendered endurance, *The Gaza Monologues* stand as counter-archive, counter-evidence, and counter-tribunal. They record temporality, grief, and survival while ASHTAR circulates them as acts of pedagogy and solidarity. Where law erases, theatre remembers. Where institutions fail, art mobilises. Where lives are deemed ungrievable, these monologues insist on their value. *The Gaza Monologues* is therefore more than theatre: it is a living archive, a form of justice enacted through words, bodies, and performance. They have spoken. The question remains: as witnesses, what will we do?

Anyone can join this act of witnessing by requesting to read or perform the monologues through ASHTAR's registration form [here](#).

There are other calls to action people can take, that include:

- Boycotting companies implicated in arming Israel. There is a full list here and more information about the BDS movement: <https://www.bdsmovement.net/Guide-to-BDS-Boycott>
- Donations to organisations on the ground in Palestine such as [ASHTAR Theatre](#), [Operation Olive Branch](#) and [PAL Humanity](#).

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**CRIMINOLOGICAL
ENCOUNTERS**

NON-THEMATIC SECTION





How Interactional Relationships Matter for Victim Resistance During Robberies: A Video-Observational Analysis

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Abstract: Victims report resisting the offender's demands in around four out of ten robberies. Yet so far, little research has examined how and why people perform such fearful and potentially dangerous resistance behaviors. Based on a qualitative analysis of video-captured shop robberies, we argue that victim resistance may be interpreted as a response to a violation of an interaction-ritualistic order: robbery victims resist and repair disruptions of this micro-social order, which are emotionally pleasing and a ground for everyday solidarities in the commercial setting. Adding to this interpretation, we find that resistance is disproportionately displayed by persons who had a face-to-face interaction with the primary robbery victim before the event and, as such, engaged in establishing an interactional relationship the moment the robbery started. We discuss theoretical implications, study limitations, and the prospect of using video-observational methods for the study of micro-interactional processes in robberies and beyond.

Introduction

Like most violent crimes, robbery events unfold through sequences of victim-offender actions and reactions (Block, 1981). The focal point of this interaction is the offender's attempt to force those robbed to accept their role as a victim and abstain from resisting (Liebst et al., 2019; Luckenbill, 1980, 1981; Nassauer, 2018). The central question in this regard is whether potential victim resistance actions are linked with the more or less violent reactions of the offender—and the jury is still out regarding this association (Katz, 1988; Kleck & DeLone, 1993; Liebst et al., 2019; McCluskey, 2013; Tark & Kleck, 2004).

While extensive literature thus has focused on violent offender reactions to victim resistance, few studies have considered how the victims take action and why they might resist in the first place. For the most part, such victim resistance is simply treated as an *independent* variable—that serves the purpose of explaining the dependent robbery-violence variable or injuries of the victims (Cook, 1980; Guerette & Santana, 2010; Kleck & DeLone, 1993)—rather than being considered as a dependent variable that needs explanation. Despite the knowledge that victim resistance is common and occurs in around four out of ten robberies (Wolfgang, 1982), little is known of how the victims do it and that to such a large extent.

Probably, the understudied status of this question is because it appears self-evident how people do it: to protect their economic valuables, reflecting some underpinning utilitarian rationality. While such economic motive may be fruitful with respect to explaining robbery offenders' use of violence (Feeney, 1986; Lindegaard et al., 2015), the fact that the robbery is not premeditated on the part of the victims makes such cost-benefit considerations of economic gains a less obvious explanation (De Haan & Vos, 2003; Van Gelder, 2013).

In fact, we know from emotionally stressful emergencies that people often demonstrate a willingness to self-sacrifice for the greater good and their group (Buchanan & Preston, 2014; Drury, 2018). However, a significant difference from this body of emergency research is that group feeling of “we-ness” is assumed to emerge between complete strangers who happen to be present at the emergency site (Philpot & Levine, 2022). By comparison, robberies occur in a context where the victims present often have some degree of personal familiarity, either because they are colleagues or due to repeated customer-employee exchanges in a commercial setting over time. Research shows that prior social relationships foster helping (Liebst et al., 2019; Lindegaard et al., 2017). As such, we cannot analyze the emergency event in isolation from the interactional routines and social relationships that lie before the robbery and which plausibly influence how the victims act in the robbery event. In appreciating this, we draw on Brekhus's (1998) argument that our understanding of “extraordinary” events—such as violence, emergencies, or deviance—gets distorted if we lose sight of the “ordinary” nature of everyday life. That is to say, the victims in the robbery have an ordinary everyday routine together, which preconditions how they act when the extraordinary robbery event happens.

The role of social ties, understood as interactional relationships in everyday situations in the shop before the robbery, or more long-term relationships, were not previously considered in studies of victim resistance. One video-based study showed that social relationships mattered for victim actions in the aftermath of robberies, with colleagues, and thus people who know each other more long term, being more likely to help and console victimized colleagues (Lindegaard et al., 2017). By contrast, victim-based studies explained resistance as a response to the violence used by offenders, and, as such, as a form of self-defense (Block, 1981; Kleck & DeLone, 1993; Tark & Kleck, 2004). Similarly, one offender-based study explained victim resistance as a natural emotional response to unexpectedly being threatened on your life, but distinguished such initial resistance from calculating and escalatory resistance later during the event (Lindegaard et al., 2015). Additionally, offenders explained resistance as related to the streetwiseness of the victims, and with reference to their previous experiences with engaging in violent interactions (Huston et al., 1981). Video-based studies showed that victim resistance was related to the way the offender carried their body and weapon in the interaction (Nassauer, 2018), with the lack of dominance and conviction leading to resistance (Mosselman et al., 2018). These studies thus emphasized that victim resistance needs to be understood as related to the actions of the offenders, but not how the actions *between* victims—for example, during their everyday routines in the shop before they are victimized—might explain actions during the robbery.

Shop robberies tend to involve many people, and of all those people present, only some of them resist.



How come some people resist, and others do not? We here investigate whether interactional relationships, established during everyday encounters in the shop, might play a role for who resist and who do not resist. As such, we add evidence to existing knowledge that social relationships, including short-term routine interactional relationships, might foster helping behavior during emergencies (Levine & Manning, 2013; Liebst et al., 2019).

In theorizing these everyday matters, we follow the micro-sociological tradition, which offers a rich vocabulary for understanding how face-to-face routines influence human interpersonal behavior and crystalize into a micro-social order that we care for (Garfinkel, 1964; Goffman, 1963; Lawler, 2002). Specifically, we find inspiration in the insight that face-to-face exchanges in commercial settings are likely to produce mild positive emotions that, in turn, transform instrumental (e.g., rational choice-based) transactions into non-instrumental feelings of commitment (Lawler et al., 2009). This should be expected from interaction ritual theory (Collins, 2004), which would attribute this to how focused interactions build up shared attention, synchronized behaviors, and collective emotions that we enjoy partaking in and, in turn, develops feelings of solidarity with the other ritual participants. Closely related to this argument, both classical (Homans, 1950) and more recent exchange theory (Lawler et al., 2009) suggest that repeated exchanges in commercial contexts produce group affective sentiments and a micro-social order we feel committed to.

Notice that these micro-sociological insights agree in rejecting a narrow rational choice focus on the instrumental acquisition of economic gain and losses. Commercial exchanges may initially have been structured around such gains—but soon, we develop solidarity for our colleagues and the shop we are visiting as regular customers. From the presence of these prosocial feelings, it follows that a robbery experience breeds negative feelings such as anger and resentment that, in turn, motivate victims to defend and repair the micro-social order and the group ties that we care for (Turner, 2002). This may be expressed as righteous anger targeted at those who violate the local morality reproduced by successful interaction rituals (Collins, 2004), alongside an urge to repair the broken interaction order (Schegloff, 1992). Based on this literature, we expect that people who have engaged in face-to-face interactions with the victim before the robbery takes place, and as such have had the possibility of transforming instrumental transactions into emotional commitment, are more likely to intervene in the robbery than people who have not developed an interactional relationship with the victims.

Method

Sample

The Rotterdam and Amsterdam police granted us access to robbery case files with permission from the Netherlands Public Prosecution Service.¹ This comprised 202 robbery cases, which took place between 2011 and 2018 and were mainly recorded in supermarkets, specialty shops, restaurants, or hotels. None of the videos involved sound.

From this sample, we selected cases that conformed to a number of specific criteria: in addition to having a recording quality and full capture that allowed for detailed behavioral analysis, the clips should include footage of the situation prior to the robbery taking place. Further, the footage should capture cases with victim resistance. To evaluate an act as victim resistance, we observed the victim's actions and the immediate response of the offender: if the victim act had no effect on the offender's action, we did not consider the act as resistance. As such, we did not perceive resistance as an isolated objective act that had meaning without considering the response of people experiencing the act in the situation (Becker, 2004). For example, "standing still" would not always be considered resistance in the interaction, but if the response of the offender indicated that they experienced standing still as resistance, we defined it as such. The final sample comprised 11 robberies, including two unsuccessful robberies.

Role-Taking Video Observation

Most studies on victim resistance draw on victim surveys or offender interviews capturing retrospective accounts of the events. However, retrospective accounts are known to be biased due to memory failures

¹ Note that the current sample is part of a wider dataset of video-recorded robberies that has been analyzed with other study purposes or methods (Liebst et al., 2019; Lindegaard et al. 2017; Lindegaard et al., 2018).

and social desirability answers (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). Additionally, they provide limited micro-details about how the robbery unfolded behaviorally, including the sequential order of behavior, non-verbal communication, movement, focus, and emotional expressions in face and postures (Philpot et al., 2019). By comparison, video footage provides detailed insights into such *in situ* behaviors and thus offers a fine-grained window to study why people do what they do (Collins, 2008; Nassauer & Legewie, 2018).

With this argument, we follow the tradition of other video-based scholars in the field (Katz, 1999; Nassauer & Legewie, 2022; Philpot & Levine, 2022; Sytsma et al., 2021; Weenink et al., 2022) by arguing that video observation allows researchers to examine what some ethnographers have criticized a video-based approach for being unable to understand: the lived, subjective perspective (Geertz, 1973). Thus, by trying to position ourselves into the shoes of the victims—utilizing the human capacity for role-taking (Mead, 1934)—we tried analytically to get closer to what is at stake for resisting victims in robberies. As such, we took an “emic” perspective of the victims (Pike, 1967) by literally asking ourselves what the situation looked like from their perspective. In doing so, we asked ourselves questions like “why now and not later,” “why in this direction and not another,” and “why in this way and not another.”

Rather than utilizing the bird’s-eye view that CCTV footage also offers the researcher, we watched the footage as we did not have such a privileged view—but only the view of the particularly positioned victims that we were trying to understand. The possibility to rewind and watch again was key here, as it allowed us to scrutinize the flow of the movements, gazes, and actions as experienced.

Analysis Strategy

The robbery cases were analyzed with both “categorizing” and “connecting” strategies, respectively aimed at labeling all cases by categories and identifying the interactional elements that tie the single cases together (Maxwell, 2012). These strategies go hand in hand with and allow for two complementary manners of explanatory inference: variance and process analysis: a categorizing strategy entails a between-case examination of factors that vary with a social outcome of interest (e.g., victim resistance), while a connecting strategy involves within-case analysis of the causal processes at play.

In implementing these logics, we initially described the interactional unfolding of the events, and then chose a single and particularly rich case for in-depth process analysis. To strengthen the internal generalizability of our analysis, we then examined whether the victims’ resistance varied systematically across all cases in a manner consistent with the mechanism identified in the process analysis. In doing so, we took seriously the suggestion to make use of numbers in qualitative data analysis as a means to identify patterns and summarize the evidence for interpretations (Becker, 1970; Maxwell, 2010).

Note that we worked on the reliability of our connecting and categorizing interpretations by first carrying out data analysis sessions with shifting groups of colleagues, followed by transcriptions of the videos with a trained assistant. The first author first analyzed the 11 videos and transcribed six of them. The assistant then analyzed the six videos according to these transcripts, and disagreements were settled through discussions. The assistant further transcribed five videos, which were discussed until consensus was reached (note that the full anonymized transcripts are available at tinyurl.com/5n9xtaju).

Table 1. Overview robbery characteristics

ID	Location	Ratio of primary target and victims resisting	Characteristics of resisting people	Primary target and victims had prior interactional relationship	Robbery successful
R61	Construction shop	2 of 3	Employee, customer	Yes	Yes
R63	Kiosk	1 of 3	Customer	Yes (but alone in resisting)	Yes
R80	Bike shop	2 of 4	Employee, employee	Yes	Yes
R69	Restaurant	2 of 5		Yes	Yes
R72	Supermarket	2 of 3	Employee, customer	Yes	Yes
R13	Supermarket	1 of 6	Employee	Yes (but alone in resisting)	Yes
R6	Fast-food restaurant	2 of 4	Employee, employee	Yes	No
R8	Kiosk	3 of 5	Employee, customer	Yes	Yes
R17	Goldsmith	2 of 2	Employee, employee	Yes	Yes
R3	Supermarket	2 of 5	Employess, customer	Yes	Yes
R60	Supermarket	2 of 3	Employee, customer	Yes	Yes

Elaborated more in detail, the *connecting strategy* involved that we described the step-by-step unfolding of interpersonal behaviors in the transcribed cases. Here, we found inspiration in the micro-sociological traditions of interactionism and conversational analysis, with their micro-detailed focus on behavioral turn-taking, synchronicity, and sequentially (Collins, 2004; Sacks et al., 1978). In doing so, we traced the sequence of the events, with particular attention to their turning points—such as the change from doing ordinary business to the robber's entry and staging of the drama, or the point where the victim begins challenging the violent interaction order established by the robber.

In analyzing the unfolding of these trajectories, we included attention to all actors involved in the interaction to understand in what ways the acts of victim resistance were a response to the actions of other people involved in the robbery. In doing so, we identified who engaged in interaction rituals with whom before the offender entered the scene. Interactional rituals were indicated by the performance of several behavioral cues: shared focus, close proximity, nodding, smiling, glancing, and touching. We also noted wherein the setting the interaction took place (e.g., central stage, door opening, or periphery) as previous studies show that claiming the centre of the locality guide the actions of both offenders and victims (Liebst et al., 2019; Nassauer, 2018). We then focused on the resisting victim, trying to understand the aim of their actions. This analysis involved analytical attention to how the victim moved in space, their actions, the timing of these actions, and what alternative movements, actions, and timings they could have followed but did not. This latter counterfactual reasoning informs why they chose to do this rather than that (Katz, 2002, 2015).

The *categorizing strategy* involved that we initially distinguished offenders from non-offenders through their actions, clothes, and weapon use. Any non-offender was considered a victim, given that the threat posed by the presence of offenders influenced their actions. We also distinguished customers from colleagues by taking into consideration their clothing and activities in the shop. We did not attempt to interpret other kinds of potential relationships between victims, like, for example, friends or family, as we considered such interpretations unreliable given the limited information from the video-recorded shop

settings. Further, all cases were labeled according to the type of victim resistance (e.g., refusing to move away from the offender or throwing objects at the offender) and whether or not the person performing resistance had interaction with the primary target of the robbery prior to the event. As we shall see, the existence of such prior face-to-face interaction was found to be critical for the performance of resistance, given that this signifies and stimulates solidarity that, in turn, may elicit negative emotions and resistance action. Bystander/strangers often intervene in street fights, though they have no prior relation with either party. That's the pattern in the existing literature that you should have discussed.

Analysis

Process Analysis

In what follows, we illustrate a micro-detailed process analysis of a single case (see online appendix for ten other cases) that encapsulates how interactional micro-sequences flow into victim resistance. We show that the reciprocal customer-employee interaction in the pre-robbery phase continues into the robbery phase and thus makes the customers refuse the orders of the offender. The robbery we describe took place in a restaurant in a large Dutch city in 2017, just before closing time in the evening. From the wall decorations and roof lamps, it appears like a Chinese restaurant. Customers enter the restaurant to the left of the camera frame through a double door. Upon entrance, there is a spacious walking area with a desk to the right. The desk is rounded and long with a long high cashier to the right and lots of bottles and glasses at the back wall. To the left side of the entrance, you can enter a seating area with space for approximately 30 customers. A low wall with lighted fishponds surrounds the seating area. The restaurant is dark, and the lights are soft.

A young man, that we interpreted as a deliveryman and short and lightly built, stands in front of the cashier, chatting to a young female employee standing at the opposite side of the desk. They are both looking at a booklet on the desk while talking together [inferred from non-verbal cues] in close proximity, smiling at each other with relaxed body postures. She notes down something in the booklet and walks slightly to the right side of the desk. The young man keeps talking with her while keeping his eyes on her, and when she makes that move, he also slightly moves to the right in order to remain in close proximity to her.

She now opens the cashier and takes out two notes, which she hands over to him. He smiles at her while receiving the notes, and they keep chatting, holding their gaze at each other, still in close proximity and with relaxed body postures. He puts the notes in his pocket, and looks like he is getting ready to leave. She points at the booklet at the desk with her index finger, asking him to sign, holding her finger on the booklet, while he smiles at her. He leans over the desk, still smiling, and signs while she still keeps her index finger on the booklet, now looking up, seeing the offender entering the restaurant. Theoretically, this exchange illustrates, with its social easiness, shared focus, relaxed body postures, close proximity, and smiles, how an essentially commercial transaction also is an emotionally pleasing interaction (Lawler et al. 2009)—a low-intensity interaction ritual in successful action (Collins 2004).

Three colleagues of the young woman employee are located in the seating area—on the left side of the entrance, surrounded by a half wall of fishponds—before the offender enters the restaurant. One sits at the table while the two others bring food and plates to the table, and they start eating. They now and then glance at the interaction at the desk without saying anything. At one point, one of them looks at her watch and stands up to get a glass of water from another table. She mediates contact between the two groups via her glances at the desk. She is the first one of that group that sees the offender entering, still with a glass in her hand.

The offender is a man in his 30s. He is widely built and wears grey clothes, gloves, and a baklava. His outfit comes across as unusually stylish, with his mask and gloves having the exact same color as the rest of his clothes. He carries a disproportionally large knife in his hand, which he holds in front of him. He points the knife toward the young man and woman at the desk. He moves the knife in the direction of the woman, leaning with his body over the desk, while he pushes the young man to the left of the desk, backward into the restaurant, displacing him from the center stage of the interaction that just took place. When he points the knife at the woman, the woman moves to the right side of the desk. Note that this negotiation of emotional domination, illustrated by who controls the center stage, is typical for robberies (Liebst et

al., 2019; Nassauer, 2018) and violent encounters in general (Collins, 2008).

The young man does not make the same move to avoid getting closer to the offender but stays put at the desk. This refusal to move away—a subtle but active form of resistance—makes the offender push the young man away, entirely removing him from the center stage and the interaction with the woman. That pushing movement makes the young man follow him, now moving backward out of the frame toward the backside of the restaurant. The offender looks in the direction of the young man at the back of the restaurant. He says something to him and, afterward, leans over the desk to pull away the cash register. He grabs the whole thing and holds it under his arm, now pointing the knife in the direction of the young man at the back, again saying something to him. When he pulls the cash register over the desk, notes of money fall out of the cashier, and the whole action comes across as desperate and messy. The colleagues sitting at the table in the seating area watch it happening while moving into hiding. They make themselves invisible behind the half wall with fishponds.

Before the offender turns around and starts moving towards the front door, he pauses for a few seconds with his back towards the service desk. He faces the back of the restaurant where the young man had moved, holding his knife in front of his body, pointing in the direction of the young men, stressing his position at the center stage of the space. He stands wide-legged in the middle of the room, with his breast towards the employees in the seating room, looking in the direction of the young man. One colleague in the seating area gets up and holds the back of the chair as if she needs to cling to something. Another colleague moves furthest away in the direction of the kitchen to hide, while the third employee remains hidden behind the half wall.

The offender now disappears out of the frame through the front door. This move makes the young man and the young woman at the desk make the same move toward the front door. The young man is tipping on his toes, moving slowly toward the front door from the back of a restaurant. His movements towards the front door happen at the same pace as the young woman, moving from behind the service desk towards the front door. When he reaches the front of the service desk, right next to the front door, he stops and starts moving backward again, now at a faster pace, still in movement synchronic with the young woman. His sudden shift in pace and direction is caused by the sudden return of the offender. The young woman makes a step backward to the right of the desk so that she now stands a little behind the desk but also not fully covered by it. The young man makes several steps toward the restaurant's back where he came from.

The offender does not come back into the image. The young man re-emerges in the frame, now running back to the center of the interaction while pointing his finger toward the front door and the offender—i.e., possible behavioral cues of anger (Dael et al., 2012) stressing that the robbers' attempt to monopolize the emotional dominance over the situation seems lost. The last two steps he makes before going through the front door are on his toes, giving it a light but also sneaky appearance as if he is still busy hiding or doing something undercover. While he makes this movement, the young woman also makes two steps in the direction of the center of the interaction, following him but staying parallel to the desk, not putting herself in the middle of the interaction like the young man is doing, looking to the left to follow what he is doing. She has an open body posture, leaning a bit forward, making small worried steps, stretching her neck to look out of the door as if she is worried the offender will come back again, without posing her full body in front of the door. When the entrance is clear, she moves through the front door and disappears out of the frame.

The three colleagues in the seating area remained on that side of the room but move towards the front door when the offender left. They gesture to each other and stay in close proximity while discussing what just happened. They look through the front door and take over the center stage when the young man and woman have left the restaurant through the front door, looking through the door as if they are expecting them to return. Throughout the robbery, the two groups—at the desk and at the seating area—remain connected and aligned.

Let us highlight the key analytical insights of this case. The behavior and resistance of the young man were not performed in a social vacuum but were contingent on and coupled with the behavior of the woman. They seemed to have a successful interaction ritual in the pre-robbery phase, and the young man insisted on staying interactionally aligned with her by staying put when he was commanded to move away. This resistance may be interpreted as an extension of the emotionally giving and meaningful interaction

ritual they had before the robber entered—a ritual order they also collaborate in upholding with their micro-coordinated action throughout the incident. Plausibly, positive emotions and a sense of solidarity produced in the pre-robbery phase thus seem to have carried over into the robbery phase. In turn, the robber's violation of this interaction-ritualistic order elicits feelings of resentment and righteous anger underpinning the resistance behavior. Further, their micro-coordinated actions may be interpreted as an attempt to counteract the negative emotions by clinging to or collectively repairing their emotionally pleasing interaction-ritualistic order.

Variance Analysis

If the above process analysis is valid, it should be mirrored in a simple behavioral pattern across the included cases: victims resisting the offender's demand are disproportionately likely to have a face-to-face exchange—i.e., a successful interaction ritual—with the primary robbery target before the robbery started. In line with this expectation, we found that a disproportionately large proportion of robberies, nine out of 11, conformed to this interactional pattern (see Ragin, 2000). In two robberies there was an interactional relationship but only one person that resisted. In one robbery (R63), the primary targets were two employees behind a desk, who were engaging with a customer. When the offenders entered the shop, the primary targets immediately escaped into a safe, leaving the customer alone in the shop, and she refused to move when the offenders asked her to do so because she blocked the route to the desk. As such this resisting victim had engaged in an interactional relationship with the primary target but resisted on her own. In another robbery (R13), the primary target was an employee and when she refused to let go of the money in her cashier, the offender grabbed her by the neck from behind to force her to let go. The customer she had interacted with prior to the robbery remained close to her and consoled her after the offender left but did not attack the offender when he grabbed her. As such the resisting employee was alone in her resistance.

In dissecting these patterns, it should be noted that seven of the nine resisting persons were shop customers rather than a colleague. In our view, this offers a compelling argument against that they are motivated by some economic consideration about the loss of the valuables: it is not their money, yet they involve themselves with potential personal risk. In other words, resistance indicates that robberies are disturbing, not because of the potential loss of valuables but because of the loss of a micro-social order. Based on these results, we hypothesize that the interactional relationship established through everyday shop interactions works protectively for victims who are more likely to receive help from people with whom they have established such relationships. While we see customers taking on this role slightly more frequently than colleagues, our sample is too small to draw conclusions about the importance of prior social relationships for the observed behaviors.

Discussion

Resistance is a common occurrence in robberies, yet research attention has centered on how offenders react to victim resistance, neglecting how and why victims are motivated to resist in the first place. In addressing this gap, we examined what happened between the moment the offender announced the robbery and the moment the first victim displayed resistance to their demands. In this relatively short period, victims often divide tasks between them, and the coordination of these tasks takes place between people who had already established an interactional relationship before the offender entered the setting. We proposed that victim resistance becomes a resistance of in-group members towards an outsider threatening the social order of the shop—plausibly driven by the feeling of anger and resentment that humans experience when our meaningful interaction ritual order is violated (Collins, 2004; Turner, 2002). From the perspective of the victims, the everyday interaction rituals in the shops do not break down but need temporary repair (Goffman, 1971). Victim resistance may be understood as repair work to restore the viability of the everyday interaction order.

Our identification of the importance of interactional relationships for the actions of victims is in line with previous studies of behavior in violent incidents showing that social relationships rather than categorical ties are key for understanding bystander intervention (Liebst et al., 2019; Lindegaard et al., 2017). These studies highlight that people who have a social bond with someone in a conflict situation are dramatically more likely to help. The question is whether the interactional bonds build up just before the crime takes place are more influential on victim resistance than the social relationships. Future studies should



investigate that.

In our study, we cannot rule out that what we identified as an interactional relationship might also involve long-term social relationships. As such, our analysis proposes that any form of relationship, whether established in the interaction of the shop prior to the robbery or having a more long-term nature, has an effect on the way people act. The question remains, however, how intense relationship bonds need to be for people to feel committed to engaging themselves. Additionally, it is unclear why social relationships matter for victim resistance, e.g., whether people do it because of potential social precautions of remaining passive (Fischer et al., 2006), or maybe to get rid of their own distress (Dovidio et al., 1991), or empathize with the distress of others (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Future studies need to distinguish between different kinds of relationship bonds in order to establish how much interaction is needed for people to feel committed to helping others and to further study motivations for actual involvement.

This perspective on victim resistance as repairment work for everyday interactional orders is a rare empirical example of the idea that instrumental transactions in depersonalized spaces might translate into non-instrumental feelings of commitment through everyday interactions (Lawler et al., 2009), in this case in shop settings. Often studies inspired by symbolic interactionism focus on single cases, or on retrospective meaning-making processes. Video observations, however, offer a rare opportunity to systematically study instrumental transactions and acted commitment as they unfold in various kinds of video-recorded face-to-face encounters in everyday life. For example, video observations of street fights revealed that bystanders are committed to helping (Ejbye-Ernst, 2022; Philpot et al., 2020), but little is known about the ways in which instrumental transactions in face-to-face encounters play a role in acting out such commitments.

Our micro-sociological interpretation of the data at hand offers an alternative to understanding resistance as aimed at protecting the economic valuables. The fact that the majority of resisting persons were costumers—who have no direct economic incentive to protect the valuables—conflicts with such economic interpretation. For transparency, we note that this pattern is not uniformly robust, with the robberies starting with the destruction of objects being an exception. In three cases, the victims responded by throwing objects at the offender, which seemed focused on defending objects rather than the social order of the establishment.

However, the fact that these latter cases are exceptions does not imply that the majority of resisting persons, because of their emotional motivations for action, are simply acting in an “irrational” manner—as a traditional dualistic understanding of emotions and rationality would suggest (Weber, 1978). Rather, the behavior of the resisting persons may be considered strategic decision-making, centered on optimizing our participation in the interaction rituals (Collins, 1993). This argument resonates with the insight that emotions are what makes rational decision-making possible (Turner, 2009), as well as rational choice-oriented theory of helping behavior, which acknowledges that a sense of “we-ness” fosters stronger negative emotions in emergencies and thus a greater incentive to help (Piliavin et al., 1981). For humans, our strategically selfish and emotionally self-sacrificing motives may coincide.

The current results support studies showing that people involved in violent events act collectively in a process that happens in a flow of sequences without anyone assigning tasks but by people observing and sensing what is needed of them. This observation resonates with evidence showing that there is a surprisingly high level of group coordination during emergency events (Drury, 2018), and that affiliative behaviors serve as a social buffer against acute stress (Kikusui et al., 2006). Prior micro-sociological violence studies have mainly examined such emergent group action among bystanders coordinating help in the aftermath of emergencies (Bloch et al., 2018; Weenink et al., 2021), and we add to this research by showing that similar interaction-ritualistic behaviors unfold among victims during violent mid-events.

We hope that the current analysis illustrates the value of using video data for the study of violent events. As highlighted by Collins (2008) and others (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018; Philpot et al., 2019), video data allows for a more fine-grained behavioral analysis than any other social science method available (Goodwin, 2000; Mondada, 2008). For example, the micro-coordinated actions between the man and woman in the illustrative case would simply not have been possible to capture if observed on-site (Morrison et al., 2016). Such information cannot be derived from interviews with robbery victims, but they could provide additional insights about, for example, subjective perspectives and experiences involving retrospective

meaning-making processes about resistance (Lindegaard & Bernasco, 2018). Interviews with robbery victims, however, previously showed inconsistencies about sequential patterns in the behavior of the involved people when compared with offender perspectives on the same event (Indermaur, 1996). However, one limitation of video data analysis is that it invites a bird's-eye view perspective on social life, uncoupled from the phenomenologically lived perspective of those recorded (de Certeau, 1988). This limitation may be partially overcome, however: as we have demonstrated, repeated and role-taking observations of the video clips allow one to take the perspective of those present (Mead, 1934), and thus interpret their actions in light of how they perceived the situation unfolded (Valach et al., 1988). We hope that future micro-sociological video analyses of robberies and other everyday phenomena will utilize this role-taking potential of video data analysis.

A limitation of the current work is that video data offer limited information on the inner dimension of emotional motivation underpinning the resistance acts, also because the video clips do not capture sound and communication (Philpot et al., 2019). Although this point should not be exaggerated, given that emotions are displayed in and can be read from external nonverbal cues (Hochschild, 1979; Keltner et al., 2019), it would have added to the validity of the current analysis if we had triangulated our observational data with self-reports of experienced emotions (Lamont & Swidler, 2014), and with on-site studies of interactions in the analyzed localities of the robberies.

Another limitation is that video analysis does not provide insights into the personal characteristics and experiences of the people interacting in the robbery, which might influence the behavior observed, e.g., whether they have been trained to act in certain ways during robberies or have perhaps experienced victimization to robberies before. Future studies need to take these characteristics, and the potential variation in the type of shops, spatial layout and physical structure, into consideration when studying the interactional dynamics of violent encounters, for example, by referring them from police case files.

Further, it should be acknowledged that the current sample has limited external validity, given the small sample size and the reliance on recordings from only one urban national and Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) study context. Future studies should investigate the proposed hypothesis about the influence of social bonds on victim resistance in varied samples of robberies with and without victim resistance. They should also establish if victims follow culturally-specific behavioral toolkits when navigating robberies (Lindegaard, 2017), whether their responses depend on the type of robbery setting (e.g., does the physical architecture of the shop matter?), and how victims perceive their own behavior (e.g., what are their self-reported motivations for resistance?). Additionally, comparing the way victims resist in successful and non-successful robberies (Nassauer, 2018) would enhance our understandings of the impact that resistance has on offender actions, and as such of the interactional dynamics of crime (Lindegaard, 2022). Broadening the analysis to include attention to understanding motivations for victim responses in other kinds of violent interactions—e.g., comparing sexual violence, homicides, and gang-related violence—would help explain victim resistance.

In conclusion, robberies violate everyday interactional orders, and through this disturbance, they expose what binds people together. People establish meaningful solidarity ties through their engagements in everyday interaction rituals, and they cling to this micro-social order in unexpected events like robberies. Robberies do not break down the social but expose it: humans resist violations of the interaction-ritualistic order they care for and become collectively engaged in repairing its functionality when disrupted.

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