VOLUME 1

# ON VIOLENCE

Centre for the Study of Violence

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

# ON VIOLENCE

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On Violence is a bi-annual magazine produced by the Centre for the Study of Violence, based in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Bath. Dedicated to exploring in an accessible and educative way the multiple forms violence and its responses take across the world, the magazine brings together leading authorities, policy makers, critical thinkers, artists and cultural producers, Centre affiliates and students from the University of Bath community. Pursuing scholarship and education in the public interest, On Violence provides a dedicates space in which some of the world's most pressing and challenging issues will be addressed.

**Submissions**

We welcome submissions on a range of subjects related to violence at international and local levels. Articles should be between 1000-2000 words in length. We are open to consider other formats. Submission ideas should be pitched to b.evans@bath.ac.uk.





Cover art: Chantal Meza, Obscure Beasts X, 2018. Coal, ink, pastels, watercolour, pigments and glue. 100cm x 76cm. Copyright reserved by artist.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Deborah Wilson**

Not a single day passes where we don't read or hear about another atrocity, terrorist attack, mindless act of violence or tragic loss of human life. It doesn't really matter whether we are just more aware of the horrors of the world or whether or not the world we live in is more violent than it has ever been: suffering is not a competition, and such comparisons are of little concern to victims. But what is the point of being aware of such atrocities if we simply stand back and believe there's nothing to be done? There is a need to hold onto the idea the world can be a better place, today, tomorrow and into the future. This however can only be achieved through better understanding.

There are many important roles a University plays in helping to shape societies and equip young adults with the skills to navigate and respond to our complex world. This requires honesty and humility, courage and determination to confront what might seem intolerable in ethically sensitive ways. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Bath has a proud tradition of engaging in such ways. We undertake cutting edge research and have developed innovative pedagogical methods that address and engage with the most pressing global challenges. Among them, as this newly launched magazine testifies, concerns the problem of violence.

What is particularly welcome about this new initiative is an appreciation to address violence in its multiple forms. There is no single discourse on violence, and certainly no single author or researcher is going to resolve it: violence is a problem that requires trans-disciplinary thinking. This is the guiding ethos for On Violence, which as readers will note, contains a compelling series of articles from a variety of authors, including internationally renowned scholars, leading voices from the humanitarian sector, acclaimed artists, faculty members and our own undergraduate student community. Giving each of these voices equal prominence is precisely the kind of response violence demands.

"Nothing good ever comes of violence", Martin Luther King once exclaimed. It is hard to disagree with this statement, especially as we see too many lives suffering from the ravages of war, conflict and everyday abuses of power. But the world doesn't need to be that way. What is needed is courage, conviction and above all else a willingness to listen, to learn and to try and inform the next generation about the mistakes from the past, while instilling the very idea that the world is not lost. Violence is not inevitable; nor should it be ignored. That is why I am delighted that members of our Faculty have taken the lead in responding with this publication, which promises to open up new conversations on a problem that continues to blight humanity.

Deborah Wilson is Professor of Public Policy and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Bath.

# ARTICLES

# Collateral Damage

## On the Disappearance of Disappearance

**David Theo Goldberg**

Collateral Damage is the damage of death and social death. It is the damage of side-effects, the damage that for those inflicting it has steeply discounted if any significance. It is the damage of death and destruction without pause, with no respite. It is the damage of extended and extensive disfigurement and disappearance, even erasure. In all this, it is the damage taken not to matter or to matter less.

Collateral Damage is the damage aside the damage, the lesser or under- or un-seen destruction before our very eyes. It is the damage lateral to, alongside that roughly predicted, the probabilistic damage because specifically targeted.

Perhaps one can comprehend Collateral Damage in a more expansive, generalized mode. Here it is to be understood as the damage of damage taken multidimensionally. It is the absolute damage as if there is none other than the intended target. It is the damage of rationalizing away, of waving aside, of rendering invisible the obvious. It is the injury, wound, death, destruction as if never occurring, that without register. It is the absolutized damage without damage, the damage maximized that has no elaborated description. The damage without specificity, imputed to be non-damage. A damage with no proper name.

Collateral Damage is the death, injury, or destruction by proximity, and by approximation. It is targetless adjacency, and assessment by the "more-or-less," the known, but never exactly. Who was there before, what was there when, what or who remained after. Abstraction is all that is left in the rubbled concretion. Abstraction is the look-away while staring at. It is the ghost of those obliterated by the machine.

Collateral Damage, in short, is the disappearance of disappearance.

It is the damage of namelessness, of death and injury unnamed because ignored, or invisible to those causing it, or just too numerous so the names are made numbers. The convenience of numeration erases any guilt of nomination. Collateral Damage is the burial of individuated suffering beneath collective anonymity. It is the identification of body parts with bits of buildings

Erasure is the collateral damage of the always more, the too-much and too-many, the obliteration of attentiveness. Inattention generalized and anonymized refuses the necessary condition for any responsibility.

Collateral Damage is pervasive uninhabitability and homelessness, generalized famine, evisceration of education, the blowing up of all health provision. It is the forced movement of self-survival, the threat of termination incessantly nipping or really ripping at the heels. It is

the senselessness of nothing less to lose than the disappearance of loss itself. It is the Vietnamizing of all wars to come, after all the source of the concept. Collateral Damage is nothing less than the degeneration of any generation. It is the production of futureless futures for the maligned population to secure the singularity of a divinely ordained future for the self-anointed.

The point of all this vacuity is the evacuation of responsibility for the death that isn't, the destruction that is inevitable, the permanence of damage that is faultless. Collateral Damage is the preservation of innocence, the refusal to vacate the Garden of Eden after the tainted apple has been tasted. It is insistence on inhabiting the landscape of inevitability, colonizing the terrain of unavoidability, insisting on the insecurity of the broadcast claim to invincibility. *They* made Us do it. *We* are just fulfilling the Mission of Self-preservation. Collateral Damage is evaporation into the ether of purifying determinism.

Life goes on, even as death doesn't. Targetless targets evaporate guilt. The evaporation of guilt condenses as anger, materializing in more missiles raining down, further destroying the already destroyed, bringing death to the dead. Imagination. Dead. Imagine.

Collateral Damage is the never to be seen again, the future unknowable, the past terminated.

Numerating the scale requires recognizing the deaths beneath the rubble, the smell and touch of those closest made instantaneously beyond reach. Limbs gone missing, for life. Eyes never seeing again, bomb-deafened ears. The additions of each particular to the general pile undercuts the moral and juridical weight of the whole. Diffusion anonymizes the full burden of universalization, zeroing out any individuated accountability.

Collateral Damage is the double-blinding to the disutilities for others in the cost-benefit calculus. The beneficiaries self-bury the costs beneath the rubble of collaterality. The discounted are those taken not to count, denuded of all value and so non-factors—bearing no weight, weightless--in the calculus. The Itzchaks and Miriams are named, the Ismaels and Maryams as if having none. The calculus, it follows, always registers overriding benefits because considered costlessly effected. Collateral Damage is the sidelining of all death and destruction to the de-nominated in the calculation.

The structures of social life—hospitals, schools, playgrounds, religious institutions, offices of records, of birth and deaths, of nomination and denomination—are leveled indistinguishably. Lived environments are shattered, mementoes never again to be embraced, replaced by nightmares of worlds fragmented, memories shuttered out, darkened, never to come to light again. To be replaced by settlers and settlements, beachfront luxury apartments as the victors' inheritance, the Chosen assuming their rightful place built upon the skeletons haunting the basement.

Where the damage aside far outstrips that targeted, and does so with repeated largesse and enlargement, it is made possible only by way of collusion: Provision of strategic information, coordinating supply of weapons of mass destruction without delimitation in number or use, lack of condemnation or requisite restraint. Supporters and co-travelers bear the weight of collusion too.

What Collateral Damage entitles is elimination. What it obliterates is truth, justice, human being and relation.

Collateral Damage is what gets begrudgingly acknowledged in the wake of the targeted necessity. It is, in short, not apology, but nothing more nor less than rationalization. Apologetics is the soundtrack of Collateral Damage once the deafening explosions fade to a deathly silence. It is the turning of any possibility of doing otherwise into unquestionable requirement. Collateral Damage, accordingly, is the instrumentalizing logic—if it can be said to have any logic at all—of the disappearing of disappearance, the invisibilizing of invisibility, before our very eyes. Fade to the chill of darkness.

Collateral Damage, all told, then, is the unseen seen made the seen unseen. It is elimination, in the end-state analysis, of any of the terms necessary for recognizing elimination. Of people, of landscape, of history.

The archive of living memory, of history in the making of its undoing, is the insistent refusal of the totalizing project of erasure.

David Theo Goldberg is Distinguished Professor at the University of California, Irvine. He is also former Director of the University of California Humanities Research Institute. Among his many publications, includes *The War on Critical Race Theory* (Polity Press, 2023) and *Dread: Facing Futureless Futures* (Polity Press, 2021).

# From Grievance to Governance

## What Becomes of Trump, the Victim, in a New Era of Absolute Power?

**Lile Chouliaraki & Kathryn Higgins**

"There has never been a President who was so evilly and illegally treated as I," complained US president-elect Donald Trump. His lament came in response to a New York judge who scheduled his sentencing for his criminal hush money conviction on January 10 (Politico, Jan. 4th, 2025) – just days before his upcoming inauguration on January 20th. That sentencing, we now know, offered very little in the way of actual punishment, let alone accountability – yet Trump's narrative remains as it was during his campaign: one of persecution, rather than of demonstrable impunity. That a President-to-be of the United States publicly presents himself as a victim of the very institutions he will soon be presiding over is a rare thing to witness. But, for Trump, claiming to be a victim is not a one-off statement. It's a deep-seated identity and a core narrative spurring his swift return to power.

Vivek Ramaswamy, head of DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency), best captures the spirit of Trump's winning narrative. In his best-selling "Nation of Victims", Ramaswamy complains that meritocracy is now replaced by performances of victimhood by minorities who push their ways to the top, marginalizing those who are truly excellent – and it the nation that hurts, as a result. This idea that the nation is in pain and that minorities, or "woke.inc" (the title of yet another of Ramaswamy's books), are to blame has been a recurrent theme in Trump's politics since his first electoral campaign in 2016. His core message has been that he is a victim and, like him, so are "the people.": "He made one essential bet", the NYT's first post-election headline announced, "that his grievances would become the grievances of the MAGA movement, and then the G.O.P., and then more than half the country. It paid off." (NYT, Nov. 6th 2024).

How did grievance manage, yet again, to capture the electorate and catapult Trump to a second, non-consecutive U.S. Presidency– the first candidate to achieve this feat in the past one hundred and thirty years? Trump himself, of course, is not an enigma. His forthcoming return to the White House in the United States is part of a global ascent of right-wing populism, with grievance-driven political rhetoric delivering a growing number of (previously fringe) far-right, ethnonationalist and authoritarian rulers to seats of power. The forces precipitating this wave of global grievance are being openly debated. Some have blamed social media, arguing that the wide window it offers into the lives of more affluent others calibrates the public mood to dissatisfaction and resentment. Others have pointed to the very real material basis for contemporary grievance: widening economic inequalities, a deadly and broadly mismanaged global pandemic, and in the United States, the first generation of citizens who find themselves with fewer rights and opportunities than their parents.

The *causes* of grievance, then, are not elusive. Yet, whether grievance can serve as an effective basis for governance remains unclear. To borrow rhetoric from the now-defunct Harris/Walz campaign: why, in a time of profound grievance, can an "enemy list" inspire more

hope for the future than a “to-do list” can? How does a multi-millionaire, running on little more than vitriol and self-aggrandizement, position himself as the benevolent redeemer of a suffering public?

To answer these questions, we need to approach grievance as a form of political communication. For many, grievance is a negative term associated with populist resentment, hate speech and the disinformation wars. Fundamentally, however, grievance is about pain that has long been felt without recognition or resolution. And we cannot explain its appeal, unless we grasp how pain participates in politics and how it can be leveraged for electoral gains. Important to note is that being in pain is not a singular concept, but a powerful language that connects communities through shared feelings of hurt and neglect, hate and resentment, hope and gratitude. The victim has entitlements to empathy, compassion and often legal protection; it has moral worth and social capital. And there is no victim without those responsible for the infliction or relief of its suffering: a perpetrator to be castigated for inflicting the suffering, and a benefactor who promises to soothe the victimized public precisely where it hurts. These roles—victim, perpetrator, benefactor—are not set in stone once and for all but are key stakes in political struggles for visibility, recognition and power. And it is these roles and their relations that help illuminate Trump’s electoral game and ultimate victory in at least three ways.

To begin with, Trump consistently styled himself as the ultimate victim—a symbolic proxy for a victimized American public and, more specifically, victimized American men. While Democrats counted on Trump’s legal woes counting against his character, Trump’s lean towards victimhood transformed *prosecution* into *persecution* as he steadily appropriated narratives of victimization by the state that were not his own. The charges levelled against Trump shored up waves of empathy and support, consolidating his image as an anti-establishment hero, while the now-iconic photographs of him bleeding after a failed assassination attempt in Pennsylvania turned him into an icon of defiant survivorship: “God spared my life for a reason,” he said shortly after his electoral win, “We are going to fulfil that mission together.” This iconography of the rising martyr is already appealing enough to millions of discontented Americans who, like Trump, feel “forgotten” by those in power.

At the same time, Trump crafted exactly such a narrative of blame and hate that targeted immigrants, the trans community, and the “woke liberal elite” as national enemies. He offered a suffering public a culpable other—a *victimizer*, the vanquishing of which could (quickly and cheaply, he insisted) deliver the public from its pain. His message sets up a clear duel between himself as the sole agent of collective redemption and “them” as the enemy: things are bad, but because “they” are responsible, things are fixable if “they” are punished and purged. This amorphous, nefarious “they” will likely endure in Trump’s rhetoric during his second term—though he may find it increasingly difficult to position himself as a subjugated victim. With the Republican party—remade in Trump’s image—now set to control both the Senate and the House of Representatives, Trump will have more individual power than, perhaps, any person on earth. How to claim victimhood from such stature? Talk of “deep state” interference has always insulated Trump from accountability for the power he wields; how long this ruse can hold in a new era of absolute power for Trump remains to be seen.

Finally, Trump capitalises on the spectacular force of victimhood. Victimhood involves struggles over whose pain is the loudest and the most visible in public. Trump wins these struggles because he knows how to stage pain as a public spectacle. This is as true for his

intuitive use of iconography—the Philadelphia "bleeding ear" photograph being an example of defiant survivorship *par excellence*—as it is for the way his rallies were staged as carnivalesque theatres where pain is vanquished by performative strength. Trump was a pop culture icon, a reality star, long before he was a politician. The fusion of pain and entertainment is familiar terrain, as is the contortion of reality to suit the demands of sentiment. The actual content of Trump's public discourse has become harder and harder to follow in these later years of his political career, but his *style* of discourse is consistent: an irreverent, improvised and unincumbered brashness that suggests that he is saying out loud what everyone else is too afraid to say. He has, in other words, the demeanour of a man unshackled—an aspirational, even triumphant figure for an emboldened ethnonationalist masculinity that feeds from his victimhood. Both the ultimate victim and the champion of the disenchanted.

In Ramaswamy's "Nation of Victims", healing the nation's pain is about "reviv[ing] a new cultural movement in America that puts excellence first again." Yet, the new Trump administration, comprising tech moguls, Fox news host, and sceptics of science, has already offered a glimpse of Trump's own idea of "excellence". Despite using victimhood to win, these people are not interested in the nation's hurt and will do little to alleviate the suffering of the public, benefitting only wealthy men like themselves – with the FT reporting, just after the 2024 election, that "Musk's wealth is to hit new heights, as deals fire up SpaceX and xAI" (Nov. 16). As Trump is about to take office as the 47th president of the United States next week, one thing is clear: victimhood can be a potent catalyst for change, but at what cost?

For progressive voices, this question poses an urgent challenge: how to shift the focus from weaponizing pain for division and hate to envisioning a future grounded in healing and justice. Progressive politics is about addressing the injuries of the people and much discussion today revolves around whether the Democrats failed to acknowledge and discursively respond to the frustrations of millions who are impoverished and feel uncared for, unseen or unheard. Now, it is important to ask: How can a politics take seriously people's pain while resisting placing grievance and resentment at the core of its message? Going forward, this radical recognition of injury while striving for a more equitable society will be crucial. Without such recognition, Trump's grievance politics will continue to change the world, but the most probable change will be to a world with more, not less, suffering.

Lilie Chouliaraki is Chair in Media and Communications at LSE. Her most recent book, *Wronged. The Weaponization of Victimhood* (Columbia University Press, 2024), is about the victimhood politics of the far-Right. Beyond this, Chouliaraki has published extensively on mediated vulnerability, the ethics of witnessing and humanitarian communication, and other publications include *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (Sage, 2006), *The Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the Age of Posthumanitarianism* (Polity, 2013 – ICA Outstanding Book Award) and *The Digital Border. Migration, Technology, Power* (with Myria Georgiou, NYU Press, 2022).

Kathryn Claire Higgins is Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Global Digital Politics in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is the co-author of *Believability: Sexual Violence, Media, and the Politics of Doubt* (together with Sarah Banet-Weiser) and her research and writing are additionally published in *Feminist Media Studies*, *Television and New Media*, *Journalism* and *Visual Communication*, among others. She writes about media, culture, vulnerability politics, and the cultural strategies of the far-Right.

# Beware the 'Tepid Waters' of a Managed Humanitarian Decline

**Gareth Owen**

"Global humanitarianism is on its knees and British humanitarianism is on its back." This was my blunt assessment of the state of humanitarian civil society at a recent inter-agency meeting of UK humanitarians with the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office. There were nods of confirmation – I had uttered a collective truth rarely acknowledged in public: humanitarianism had risen and now it had fallen.

Why was I moved to be so outspoken? It was in part a response to a year of unimaginable violence in Gaza and the destruction of eighty years of hard-won international humanitarian law by supposedly liberal democracies that had championed its creation. But more than that, it was a personal lament to years of managed decline in the humanitarian sector, despite a world filled with pain that needs international solidarity and hope more than ever. The realisation of a brutal truth laid bare: Western capitalism's increasingly indifferent stance to human suffering. We the strongest will do as we wish, while those who are weaker shall endure what they must.

On 4 December 2024, Tom Fletcher, a former British Ambassador and the latest Briton to hold the post of UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, confessed to mixed feelings of 'shame, dread and hope' as he launched the Global Humanitarian Overview for 2025. Fletcher described humanitarians as 'under-funded, over-stretched and under assault', while laying out the UN's latest 'boundary setting' measures – code for cutting back planned assistance due to financial constraints – to focus on the most life-threatening needs 'accompanied by efforts to enhance cost-efficiency and effectiveness'.[1]

Despite the number of people in humanitarian need rising globally to 300 million in 2024, compared with 80 million people in 2014[2], resourcing of the world's humanitarian response has not kept pace. At the beginning of December 2024, just $22.55 billion (43.4%) of $49.6 billion requested by the international humanitarian system for 2024 had been secured. Meanwhile the UK Government's contribution to this stood at $1.7 billion (5.7%), compared to $1.9 billion (7.9%) a decade ago.[3]

The UK government's annual financial contribution matters enormously because humanitarian aid agencies have long used the private funds, they raise from public donations to leverage substantial additional grant income from major donor governments like the UK, US and the EU. In effect, the agencies budget to increase their humanitarian reach by acting as state sub-contractors.

[1] https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2025
[2] https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfres
[3] https://fts.unocha.org/

One might consider the possibility that in a post-Brexit era of financial austerity and aid scepticism, the UK has done well to maintain its financial contribution, even at relatively reduced levels, and this represents sustained commitment to internationalism. Indeed in 2015, the Conservative Government, led by David Cameron, finally legislated the UK's 0.7% foreign aid obligation[4] and was rightly proud of that, even though austerity meant it was subsequently reduced to 0.5%. However, there are other aspects to the story that speak to the banalities of modernity actively working against civil society humanitarianism.

The constraining of domestic civil society is a global phenomenon in which the UK has been a legislative participant. Post 9/11, the introduction of the Patriot Act in the US prompted governments the world over to introduce similar anti-terror legislation to which all civil society organisations should comply, and which could be used to suppress organised domestic opposition. To an eco-system of securitised legislative control have subsequently been added anti-fraud, data protection and safeguarding legislations, alongside an expanding set of financial compliance requirements for administering state aid. Such extensive control and accountability measures, albeit important, have added a giant mountain of red tape to the burden of delivering aid.

This pervasive regime of compliance, however necessary, has led to a form of bureaucratic 'state capture' of the internal aid landscape; one that has rapidly transformed the sociology of humanitarian executive leadership in its institutional forms. Gone the political activists and boundary challenging philosophers of yesteryear, most senior executives are now full-time risk managers and only part-time humanitarian cause-propagators. No surprise that many aid agency CEOs today are drawn from corporates and the civil service as opposed to products of humanitarian civil society itself.

Here in the UK, there are arguably more politically motivated elements in this story of increasing humanitarian constriction, such as the introduction of The Transparency of Lobbying Act in 2014. 'In 2013, Helen Mountfield QC warned that the proposed Lobbying Bill would be likely to have a chilling effect on the expression of views on matters of public interest by third sector organisations.'[5] Indeed, it became known as the 'gagging act' among UK charities and efforts to have it subsequently amended have proved unsuccessful.

In 2016, the UK Government ended the Programme Partnership Arrangements that had been in place since 2011 to support selected charities, including well-known humanitarian aid agencies.[6] As the government's own website stated, these flexible funding arrangements 'achieved real results in terms of poverty reduction and provided good value for money'. A 2019 ICAI[7] Report concluded 'DfID values civil society organisations (CSOs), but its funding and partnership practices do not fully support the long-term health of the civil society sector.' While cutting back its core funding to civil society, the UK Government continued to provide strategic flexible funding to UN agencies at a much greater scale, arguing that this was part of being 'good shareholders' in internationalism. Coupled with cuts to the number of humanitarian personnel in the civil service who administered aid funding, the net result today

[4] The International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 made it a legal requirement for the UK government to spend 0.7% of its gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance (ODA). The UN General Assembly first agreed to this target in 1970. The UK met the target for the first time in 2013.
[5] https://smk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SMK_The_Chilling_Reality_Lobbying_Act_Research.pdf
[6] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/programme-partnership-arrangements-ppas
[7] Independent Commission for Aid Impact – the UK body that scrutinises Government aid effectiveness

is that the UK government provides very little humanitarian funding directly through civil society.

While its legislative decisions were suppressing domestic dissent and tightening the bureaucratic vice, paradoxically, at the same time, the UK government maintained the strategic aim of helping national civil societies around the world hold state actors to account. Aid-funded programmes of 'good governance' were being rolled out across the world to try to prevent nascent civil society movements from being suffocated by powerful domestic authorities.

Like any charitable enterprise, UK humanitarian agencies are answerable to an independent regulator called the Charity Commission, responsible for overseeing public trust and confidence in charities. It is headed by a Government appointed Commissioner. Though supposedly independent, aid observers have long pointed to the 'quasi-politicisation of the commission',[8] suggesting that rather than increasing public confidence it has had the opposite effect. Meanwhile, in the wake of the 2018 aid scandal that rocked the UK sector, humanitarian aid agency PR machines have developed a siege mentality towards potential negative publicity; one that has become ever more pervasive with the increasing dominance of social media.

All modern institutions function the same way: their core purpose is propagated within a hierarchical structure, the architecture of which is primarily designed for efficiency and managerial control. This is why working culture guru, Edgar Schein, said 'all organisations are by their nature coercive systems'. As a result, in today's hyper-regulated environment, it is arguably not Boards of Trustees nor the CEOs and Executives who wield real institutional power. More likely, it is the lawyers, risk managers, procurement, finance, HR and compliance experts whose explicit role is to maintain the status quo as laid down by external regulators.

The cumulative effect of all these external and internal factors is a suffocation of creative, entrepreneurial humanitarianism within aid agencies, hindering exploration of new solutions to address the increasingly complex problems of our VUCA[9] world.

This chilling effect derives its force from the overriding human emotion of fear and a desire for the safety of social conformity. Staff begin to operate according to an unspoken maxim: don't rock the humanitarian boat, even if the boat is heading for an iceberg or already going down. By merely writing these words, I can feel shivers of habitual compliance running up my humanitarian spine. The 18th Century British Philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, forewarned of this risk in his description of a Panopticon: a prison he designed that allowed a single watchman to observe all inmates without them being able to tell whether they were being watched. The intention was to cause prisoners to subdue their own sense of agency - an eerie historical portent of the widespread surveillance culture we experience today.

In economic terms 'managed decline' is the sunset phase at the end of a lifecycle. Many industries have experienced this, such as coal and steel in the UK. The aim of managed decline is to minimise ongoing costs towards an inevitable demise. Perhaps that is why I was so prompted to speak the truth as I did at the FCDO meeting: it was out of an urgent human

[8] https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/ups-downs-shawcross-years/governance/article/1455092
[9] Volatile, Uncertain, Complex & Ambiguous

concern that if humanitarian agencies continue to progress along the current path of technocratically caged compliance, staff are condemned to remain in the institutional 'TOMB' of Trauma, Organisational stress, Moral injury and Burnout.

So where does this all leave us now? UK humanitarian civil society is certainly at a crossroads. Its aid agencies can either continue to enact a soul-weary management philosophy drawn from what British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, himself called the 'tepid bath' of managed decline[10], or they can look beyond the immediate exigencies of the business model to re-imagine humanitarianism.

Humanitarian action has always been a political venture and to think otherwise is a delusion. It's also true that humanitarian action takes place in the prevailing zeitgeist – that is the defining spirit or mood of the present time. As Michael Barnett says, 'humanitarianism is a creature of the very world it aims to civilise'. If the world at large feels anxious and depressing, then little wonder that humanitarians feel the same way. Furthermore, old habits die hard and what gets ingrained in institutions tends to endure, especially when it comes to the business model – even one in obvious decline.

Today's aid agency executives could be tempted into hoping that the UK's new Labour government will eventually offer British humanitarian civil society a cost-effective financial stimulus package like the old PPAs or a return of large bilateral grants. However, the real lesson here is that independence of civil society really matters. Aid agencies cannot allow themselves to be held financially hostage to political - often short term- fortune, which means the maintenance of a healthy relationship with their generous public supporters is essential. This is a relationship founded on trust, shared values and courageous moral accountability. It requires a willingness to stand up for the truth and bravely bear witness no matter the financial cost.

As the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Lebanon and now Syria once more show all too painfully, these are radical times for international relations. Governments that championed the rules-based humanitarian order are complicit in its wanton destruction such that there appear to be no humanitarian red lines left to cross. This is a dangerous trajectory to violence on an almost unimaginable scale. Such injurious moral wounding should be met with more than acquiescence and fearful handwringing.

Humanitarian aid agencies with long histories would do well to remember that their institutional armour is there to protect the integrity of the cause, not enshroud it in the moribund deliberations of a financial struggle for survival. Even as aid organisations experience sharp financial decline, they must always mobilise the courage to resist inhumane use of power. Managing the institutional decline is a necessary leadership reality at present, but humanitarians within must maintain the fight, or risk the institutional 'TOMB' sealing over them.

A re-imagining of humanitarianism will therefore demand new knowledge production to make sense of these radical political times, a different leadership mindset more curious towards the unfamiliar and for all humanitarians to embrace and celebrate the vital human connections that constitute the lifeblood of international solidarity. In this way they can build

[10] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/dec/05/starmer-accuses-whitehall-of-being-comfortable-with-failure-in-landmark-speech

creative new partnerships to counter the self-limiting effect of diminishing humanitarian institutions.

Tom Fletcher is therefore right to always speak of hope alongside the dread of reality, as the enemy of every humanitarian is their own despair. But hope must be truly embodied for it to be made real. The mechanical pacemaker of managed decline can never be allowed to shrink the hope-filled heart of courageous humanitarianism in action.

Gareth Owen is a leading figure in the international humanitarian aid sector. He worked with Concern worldwide, VSO, Action Against Hunger and Oxfam before joining Save the Children UK in 2002 and becoming its Humanitarian Director in 2007. Owen has led responses to some of history's most devastating crises from the Iraq conflict and the Asian tsunami to the Haiti earthquake. Owen also played a pivotal role in the establishment of collaborative entities including Elrha, the START Network and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy. He was awarded an OBE in 2013 and has capitalised on his wealth of experience to become a coach, author and lecturer. Owen published his first memoir, 'When The Music's Over – Intervention, Aid and Somalia' in 2022 and a second memoir on his time in Angola is forthcoming.

# Violent Ways of Seeing the Image

**Chantal Meza**

In this moment, the mastering of painting may be in a period of twilight. It is the medium I have chosen as my preferred language, and it is hard to admit that in our daily lives its importance as a visual medium is not only in decline, but its social value underestimated, while it remains unexplored in its truthful depths. The rigor of an art requires the total commitment of a life. To begin that path it requires understanding the commitment can never stop. The acquired knowledge is an open exchange, that is; in the individual, but above all, to the social changes.

**Photograph & Paint**

Let us take a close look to the creation of an image. It may be pertinent to divide the history of image production between the first cave paintings to the invention of cameras or photographs. Let's go back to 400BC and think for a moment about the invention of the Camera Obscura, where in a dark room light passes through a small hole projecting an inverse image onto a wall, providing us with a fleeting observation of the same image. This camera developed throughout the centuries and a variety of professions experimented with it, people like: Mo-tzu, Aristotle, Giambattista Della Porta and Johannes Kepler, to name a few. A portable version later designed made painters like Canaletto want to experiment with it. Commenting on its use, his so-called biographer A.M. Zanetti suggested the following: "...when the maker trusts the perspective which he sees in the camera, and trusts the colors of special situations, he is not able to deftly take out what could be offensive to the senses"[1]. This is a principle known to painters, the simple act of inverting the canvas or more commonly the use of mirrors to observe the process of your painting to achieve a "more accurate image of reality" can distort what your eyes can observe by themselves. We can say, then, that the invention of the Camera Obscura expanded our knowledge of light and shade, and it is at this point that centuries of labour and mental knowledge in painting began to converge with this invention.

Further explorations continued and in 1816 the first ever-photograph was discovered by J.N. Niépce, to whom the invention of this technology is attributed. He called his method "heliography" which translates to: "sun drawing". With the arrival of this technology, we begin to observe the reproduction of images captured by sunlight and humans' ability to use it in a device, which through the addition of various chemicals, the impressions of life have been captured on paper. Our usage of the photograph has made us understand in various degrees the power of mechanical apparatuses and exploring their possibilities has brought new ways of engaging with the image, particularly for Painters. In his book 'The logic of sensation' Deleuze, for example, analyses these two relations: photograph vs. paint. One important contribution is directed to ways in which the object, comes out to you in ways only explainable through the experience of observing a live object. He describes its effects with this simple and yet poignant phrase: "Sensation develops through the fall by falling from one

[1] Zanetti, Antonio Maria. *Della pittura veneziana e delle opere pubbliche de' veneziani maestri*. Nella stamperia di Giambatista Albrizzi. Venezia. (1771)

level to another".[2] If we think about the way matter is perceived and how we can differentiate between real live and a screen, his description is not something far fetched from what we already know. Painting then, is more easily perceived as a living matter due to its textures, mixed with a million brushstrokes creating depths thorough shadows and lights slightly changing with the passing of days and time, its colour captures and reflects different levels of light, a painting then is perhaps close to the luminescence certain molecules have.

In an interview to Bacon conducted by John Russell he explains how Bacon refers to the photograph: "... (Bacon) thinks the photograph tends to reduce sensation to a single level and is unable to include within the sensation the difference between constitutive levels".[3] To conclude, Deleuze ends by saying: "In short, even when the photograph ceases to be merely figurative, it remains figurative as a given, as a 'perceived thing' the opposite of painting. It won't create the kind of deformation that art produces". This deformation as presented above with the Camera Obscura is not only a mere physical and rational deformation, but a philosophical one.

A photograph is a language in itself, with its own complexities and its own powers. It's different to painting and different to film. The works of photographers like Sally Mann, Sebastião Salgado, Lola/ Alvarez Bravo, Alexey Titarenko, among others, explore this medium with great mastery. And yet the way the image is seen and understood is different to that of painters, the mediums in themselves set the demands. Their photographs are still capturing the reality as a tangible and given action, it is difficult to portrait the unimaginable when you can only have reality to capture. Even when they try to express -through alterations of various exposures, chemicals or photo editing programs a sense of mystery or to to follow the process of painters, it still remains a photograph.

**Consumed by the Lens**

In recent decades, new technologies have exposed us to new ways of seeing by integrating the camera into "smart" tools like cell phones and computers, but the emergence and ongoing survival of these devices wouldn't have been possible without the invention of the Internet. Even social platforms have been pivotal in exploiting their potential and have shaped the ways in which we perceived the image. It is now a "consumption process" that make us understand the world through its mechanisms.

If we were to think about our daily encounters, a pertinent question should be asked: Can we imagine our human life outside these cameras? We will agree that photographs are everywhere, whether our own or others, in media stories, when researching, or during idle moments, most of our still image consumption is done through a photograph. Even most paintings are encountered through a photographic copy of the original. But instead of opening our eyes to an observable world, the mass consumption of the image has in fact made us blind. There is no doubt we all share an obsession for the image, centuries of human existence have proven this, as well of centuries of painting have made us see that to observe, you must overcome first impressions. To perceive is to unveil the layers of the variable changes. Whether we photograph and atrocity or curate our daily lives we are portraying the palpable violence of the world. And yet, the power of a camara lens that is now embedded in the screen has produced a split between the body of the consumer and the producer in the body of the self.

[2] Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press (2003) p.67.
[3] Russell, John. *Francis Bacon*. London. Thames and Hudson (1993) pp.56 -57.

Let's take the example of social media artists who using the medium of paint are focused on producing images of self-depiction that attempt to show the artist at work. When the artists attention is focused on taking a photograph of their painting process, such a photo reveals the vanity of the artist who is now intent on placing themselves *in the picture*. Such picturing interrupts the motion of an act which demands a non-present attendant observation of the other - the outer and inner world all at once. It is thus a foregoing not only of sensorial intelligence, but an intellect that receives and lets everything else go. The painter in fact becomes a curator, more concerned with the subsequent affect of the image than sensation itself. Here we have established a difference. A shared image on social media is for others to look at you, but a painting is an object in and for itself. Painting belongs to a different sense of an observable world and its up to the world to look at it without you being present. In a painting, you could say, you are seeking to destroy yourself, to follow the changes, to exhaust the movement and to merge with what you observe.

**The Things We Don't See**

There is a contradiction that now needs be introduced as we attempt to make sense of the violence of images. Despite the fact that photography offers a truthful depiction of a reality that is captured within a technologically enabled frame by curating, manipulating, or overexposing. It only makes us see what the camera sees; hence, in the contemporary moment we are not just intellectually apathetic, we are emotionally numbed. Painting in contrast, begins with a non-truth, which attempts not to depict reality but to encounter the palpable violence by entering the image disarmed, to later become the well of human suffering and surrender to the violence. The question is why?

In painting, to unveil an image is to know how to observe, to learn to meditate in all that you see, not to trust only in one organ, only in one sense, not even on a single idea. You have to learn about time perception; how, when and where there is a division between the parts of the body that track the consciousness that exists everywhere in you. Therefore, when we create an image, time-life is a sole entity, even within "The Void"[4]. In painting you have to understand that "the image" is not about the image, but about ourselves and everything else which is not tangible. This knowledge leads you to an uncomfortable place, where you never believe you have captured reality because you always doubt what reality is, you trust and you don't, you abandon but you believe.

Perhaps painting is passing through a period of twilight, but our obsession with the image and our believes of making what is best for creating life will always leave and opening through which art can enter. The tragedy of the human condition will insist upon it. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *What is Philosophy?*, "they (artists) have seen something in life that is too much for anyone, . . . that has put on them the quiet mark of death"[5]

In death we cannot see, and still too often in life our ways of seeing are dictated by those who want us to look at the seductive bright lights. Violence is hidden in the act of not seeing, this is often done to prolong the violent act. But violence can also be hidden in the act of not seeing, in order to create a spectacle, which attempts to accelerate the forces of history

[4] Dealing with the concept of "The Void" has been part of my work for several years. I first dealt with it in a large public commission titled "Mirrors of the Void" which is currently exhibited at BUAP in Puebla and later expanded on it in both a series called "The Void" and a set of writings with Professor Brad Evans. For more details on all of these refer to the website: www.chantal-meza.com

[5] Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Felix. *What is Philosophy?* London: Verso (2015)

exploding the particles that will produce a reactive acceleration until everything is so scattered it ceases to be visible.

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# Remembering the Disappeared of History

## From Antigua to Auschwitz

**Brad Evans**

The start of a new year is often a reflective moment to consider our own place in time. As another number is added to the Gregorian calendar, it's also a reminder of the passing of history and the start of something new. What are we leaving behind? What will be forgotten? And what will we remember as we move ahead?

I welcomed the New Year in the City of Veracruz, Mexico. There couldn't have been a more poignant place to be in that moment as it concentrates more than any other the complexities of time and place, history and the present. It was in Veracruz where Hernan Cortes and the conquistadors first arrived on the shores of Latin America in 1519. While some have debated whether this moment and not Columbus discovery of the Americas in 1492 starts the birth of globalisation and the colonial enterprise, to my estimation it properly begins a few years later, which is marked this year by its 500th anniversary.

Some 25 kilometres outside of the port City lies the quiet and tranquil town of Antigua. It was here in 1525 where the very first Spanish city was founded. It is also where Hernan Cortes built his first home and where the conquest of the entire continent was properly planned. Constructed by indigenous peoples, Casa de Cortes is accepted by historians and anthropologists to be the first building ordered for construction by the Spanish in the "New" World. The town also features, La Ermita, which constructed in the same year, was the first church built on the American continent. There is an important point to be made here. Colonisation should not be defined as the encounter between different peoples. It is defined by *settlement* and the desire to establish a permanent foothold, which included a decimation of the "old world" and conversion to the new.

Antigua would soon be home to some 200 Spaniard colonists and 600 African slaves, who were amongst the first of those abducted from places such Cape Verde, Guinea and later Angola and brought to the Americas for their exploitation. This created a complex multilayered system of domination, as the European, indigenous Latin American and African worlds collided. We should remember all this happened close to a Century before the first settlers arrived in Jamestown in the United States – the country which now tends to dominate discussion on the history of slavery. It is perhaps worth noting that when Cortes first arrived in Veracruz, he brought with him a single slave he bought in Cuba, which is symbolically revealing of his intentions.

What followed changed everything, from the start of the global project of colonisation to the decimation of the indigenous population due to massacres and the more devasting introduction of infectious diseases from Europe that furthered the demand for the importation of African slaves into Mexico due to forced labour shortages. What's striking about Cortes home today is how nature has reclaimed the building and is slowly devouring

its symbolic resonance. The trees growing over and within the facade were of deep spiritual meaning for the indigenous Totonac peoples who built it and who at the time joined forces with Cortes against other indigenous groupings, thereby sealing their fate. Stood amongst these ruins, it's hard not to feel a peculiar poetic justice as ecology returns as an invading force that is slowly reclaiming what was taken.

Back in the port area of the City, as my wife and I stood beneath the spectacular fireworks on New Year's Eve, the festive explosions were an audible reminder of the violence that has plagued the city and wider state. Veracruz today is full of tensions and contradictions. It is both welcoming and hostile. With the port being the 3rd most important in Mexico and the most important in terms of exports to the European market, it is a key battleground in the ongoing violence between Mexico's most notorious cartels, including factions of Los Zetas, Jalisco New Generation (CJNG), the Gulf Cartel, and even presence from members of the infamous crime group from Sinaloa. The war is about controlling the lucrative export trade in illicit narcotics, along with controlling illegal migration flows as the port is one of the main stop-off points for migrant caravans between Central America and the United States.

If Veracruz is the place where the erasure of the indigenous of Mexico began, due to it being a favoured method for terror and violence by organised crime groups, it has since become the point of reference for enforced disappearance. Disappeared activist Lucy Diaz, coordinator of the Solecito Collective of searching family members in Veracruz, referred to the state as "one giant clandestine grave". The scale of the problem was horrifyingly emphasised with the findings of the largest clandestine graves in all of Latin America, such as the ones containing 615 bodies in "Colinas de Santa Fe" and "El Arbolillo", which were discovered near the port area between 2016 and September 2022.

As Diaz however has constantly insisted, what's further revealing about the disappearance in Veracruz has been the direct involvement of State officials, the police and military forces, who are often working with organised crime. Back in 2017, Jorge Winckler Ortiz the state's attorney general at the time, commented "Veracruz is a huge mass grave; for me, when all the mass graves in the state are finished being opened, it will be the largest mass grave in Mexico and perhaps one of the largest mass graves in the world"[1]. He has since been charged with complicity in torture, kidnapping and disappearances and for working on behalf of certain organised criminal groups.

Upon our return to the state of Puebla, we passed the beautiful city of San Pedro Cholula. Backdropped by the magnificent snow-capped Popocatepetl Volcano, the skyline is dominated by the presence of the yellow Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (*Our Lady of Remedies Church*) atop of a large and lush overgrown hill. What that hill actually conceals is the world's largest pyramid, which was built by the previous Toltec-Chichimec peoples. Only 50 years after Cortes army massacred some 6000 local indigenous when he was enroute to conquer Mexico City, the church was built directly upon the former symbol of the indigenous empire between 1574/75. It now represents what we would describe as a quintessential example of a *spectacle of disappearance*. The old was literally buried so the new could become more visible and prominent.

[1] https://www.milenio.com/estados/veracruz-es-la-fosa-mas-grande-de-mexico-fiscal

When exploring the logics of colonisation, Michel Foucault put forward the idea of the "colonial boomerang" to argue that what was tested out oversees in terms of systems of rule and violence would eventually find its way home. This was elaborated upon by Hannah Arendt who argued that Hitlers greatest crime (at least as see in the eyes of Europeans) was that he effectively turned Europe into a colony.

January 27th set for International Holocaust Memorial Day, this year just marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. A site that has become synonymous with the most inhumane acts and where close to a million Jewish persons were slaughtered, it is also a defining point of reference in the systematic annihilation of human life. If colonisation in the Americas was premised on the conscious erasure of indigenous systems of power and culture, supported and overlaid with the forced abduction of peoples from Africa, it is with the Holocaust that the attempted disappearance of an entire peoples is both imagined and enacted as a conscious strategy of war and violence.

We might recall here the words of Henrich Himmler from a speech he delivered in Posen on Oct 4th 1943 to senior SS officers as he sought to justify the "Final Solution": 'we faced the question: what should we do with the women and children? I decided here too to find a completely clear solution. I did not regard myself as justified in exterminating the men - that is to say, to kill them or have them killed - and to allow the avengers in the shape of children to grow up for our sons and grandchildren. The difficult decision had to be taken to have these people disappear from the earth.'

It is however important to remember the Nazis didn't invent concentration camps. They first appeared in Cuba in the late nineteenth century, with Spain's "reconcentration" policy during the Ten Years' War that resulted in close to a quarter of a million casualties. What they did attempt was to push the extreme violence of disappearance to its limits as the very idea of the abyss would be weaponised.

One of the most astute commentators on the Holocaust, Zygmunt Bauman argued that in the face of such disappearance we have a duty to remember. One of the most brilliant responses to this is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, whose suffocating concrete slabs force those who walk among them to encounter the sheer terror of the void and the disappearance of life.

We have deluded ourselves if we believe the disappeared are a category that belonged to history. As we look across the world today, we see disappearance fault-lines appearing everywhere, from Syria to the Sonora Desert, Ukraine to its continuation throughout Latin America, Africa, China and into the planetary waters. History is only important if it allows us to us to make sense of the present. How we therefore remember the disappeared of history is not just a historical duty, it will have a profound bearing on any future claims we might have to a shared humanity.

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# The Spectacular Violence of Trump

## Assassinations, Conspiracy theories, and the Pro-wrestling-ification of US Politics

**David S. Moon**

In 2016, Donald Trump became the first WWE Hall of Famer to be elected U.S. President. In 2024, he became the first president to have a professional wrestler attend his inauguration: WWE Superstar Logan Paul. Accused by the comedian Theo Von of tampering with his chair during the ceremony after it collapsed, sending him into Paul's lap (conveniently while Paul was filming), the YouTuber-turned-wrestler hit back on *X*: "I'm a WWE Superstar! That's how you know it wasn't me. [...] Trust me, if I wanted to hurt you with a steel chair, I would do it!" Later that evening, Fox News viewers witnessed WWE legend and infamous racist Hulk Hogan tear his suit apart during the channel's live coverage of Trump's post-inauguration ball, revealing a 'Trumpamania' T-shirt.

If this is the new normal, how can we gain a handle on contemporary US politics? As mainstream approaches to the story of politics fail, we may need to search for answers in some weird and wonderful places. Two such areas, I propose, are the phenomena of pro-wrestling and conspiracy theory which, taken in conversation with each other, help expose the spectacular violence that suffuses Trumpian politics.

Professional wrestling has long been used as a flippant metaphor for the showmanship and performative theatrics of politics. With Trump, however, the analogy has become literal. WWE figures like Mark 'The Undertaker' Calloway, Glenn 'Kane' Jacobs, George 'Tyrus' Murdoch, alongside Hogan, and Paul, either hosted Trump or appeared at his rallies during the campaign. With the announcement of former WWE CEO Linda McMahon's return to the Cabinet as Education Secretary, the idea that the American public sphere has transformed into one massive wrestling arena, where the language and postures of pro-wrestling permeate the highest echelons of power, has gone mainstream. Articles arguing that an understanding of US politics in the age of Trump requires an understanding of pro-wrestling have appeared across the respectable media. We are all witnesses, in the words of academic Sharon Mazer[1], to the 'pro-wrestling-ification' of US politics.

It is not hard to see how the association of the Presidency with pro-wrestling carries violent connotations. While the contests are predetermined, pro-wrestling performances simulate violent encounters, anchored within storylines premised on the logic that all problems are solved through conflict, and where one conflict ends, another begins. Copious articles exist decrying pro-wrestling's association with hypermasculinity and misogyny – attitudes embodied in the figure of former WWE Chairman Vince McMahon, reportedly one of Trump's closest friends, who was forced to resign in 2024 amidst heinous allegations of sexual assault and trafficking. Before his ouster, McMahon oversaw the merger of WWE with UFC to form TKO Holdings, where UFC CEO and Trump superfan Dana White now sits on the board alongside Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson (who conspicuously refused to repeat his 2020

[1] Mazer, Sharon (2018) Donald Trump Shoots the Match. *TDR: The Drama Review.* 62 (2) p. 195

endorsement of the Biden-Harris ticket in 2024). That Logan Paul attended the inauguration with his former UFC champion Conor McGregor, just weeks after the latter was found guilty of rape, feels emblematic of the toxic stench around the Trump milieu.

Yet wrestling is not just about violence—it is about spectacle. The description of pro-wrestling as 'spectacle' comes from Roland Barthes, who described it as a performance that 'leav[es] nothing in the shade … a pure and full signification[2].' Modern scholars of pro-wrestling tend to view Barthes' description as outdated in an era of 'antiheroes'; and yet, from the fireworks and thumping entrance themes, the larger-than-life characters making over-blown gestures, and the mix of choreographed and improvised presentation of rage and hope under bright lights, pro-wrestling certainly remains a *spectacle*. The same features, of course, applies to Trump rallies. This is the world in which, to return to Mazer, 'spectacle trumps truth,' with 'the unreal violence of the [pro-wrestling] game now the all-too-real brutality of the current regime.'

Trump's most spectacular 2024 rally was also the most violent. On July 13, at an outdoor event in Butler, Pennsylvania, Thomas Mathew Crooks attempted to assassinate Trump with an AR-15-style rifle—the first of two such attempts that year. Whatever else can be said about firearm-based assassinations (and their attempts), there is a particularly spectacular nature to their violence. Just take Eric Wilson's Debordian reading of the 22nd of November 1963: 'the public spectacle of Dealey Plaza, a veritable outdoor amphitheatre, itself provides compelling but indirect evidence of the false-flag nature of the event and it is in terms of the spectacular nature of the act that the assassination must be understood'[3].

On July 13th Crooks killed one attendee and critically wounded two others. Trump, shot in the ear, clutched the wound and ducked behind his lectern before emerging, blood-streaked, to pump his fist, shouting "Fight!" As the immediately iconic photographs of the moment went viral so too did the conspiracy theories. And as those did, so too did the references to pro-wrestling. And why not? Conspiracy theories are deeply embedded in U.S. political culture for good reason—*real* conspiracies have shaped history**.** Just ask Jesse 'The Body' Ventura, former pro-wrestler, Governor of Minnesota, and visiting fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Ventura – who himself appeared on the 2024 Presidential campaign trail supporting the candidacy of RFJ Jnr, being briefed to the media as a potential running mate – is also the author of such New York Times Bestsellers as *American Conspiracies* (2015) and *They Killed our President: 63 Reasons to Believe there was a Conspiracy to Assassinate JFK* (2013), in which he details examples of once political conspiracy *theories* now established as conspiracy *facts*: Watergate, Iran-Contra, MK-Ultra; Operations Paperclip, Mongoose and CHAOS; COINTELPRO. All conspiracies. All real.

Then there are the assassinations. It's an established fact that President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated as part of a conspiracy, and while most people know the 1964 Warren Commission's conclusion that President John F. Kennedy's assassination was the work of a lone gunman, less are aware that the 1979 House Select Committee on Assassinations investigation – the only other governmental investigation to date – concluded 'that President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy'. That same

[2] Barthes, Roland (2009 [1959]) *Mythologies,* Annette Lavers (trans.). New York: Hillard Wang p. 25
[3] Wilson, Eric (2015) *The Spectacle of the False-Flag: Parapolitics from JFK to Watergate.* Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books. P. 32

committee concluded 'that there is a likelihood' that Martin Luther King was also assassinated 'as a result of a conspiracy.' But more on those later…

This historical reality influences public belief. Why do people fall for far-right fantasies like QAnon or 'Jewish Space Lasers'? In answer, Robert Guffey quotes sci-fi writer Cory Doctorow: "Because so many of the things that have traumatized so many people ARE conspiracies. […] In a world of real conspiracy scandals that destroy lives and the planet, conspiracy theories take on real explanatory power[4]." Mainstream political science, which largely ignores such state and corporate conspiracies, inadvertently cedes explanatory ground to bad-faith actors who use *real* conspiracies as a gateway to extreme ones. As Guffey describes:

'The entire purpose […] is to lure the viewer into the reality of Pizzagate by wrapping this modern American horror story in "intel" that's partly accurate (e.g., Project Paperclip, the various sub-programs of MK-ULTRA mind control operations, unconstitutional experiments with psychoactive chemicals performed on unwitting U.S. citizens by an intelligence agency run amok, etc.) in order to make all the bullshit seem that much more reliable.'

Yet in the wake of the Trump assassination attempt, it was liberals, not MAGA believers, who pushed the most viral 'bullshit' conspiracy: that the entire event was staged by the Trump campaign. In the shooting's wake the top two trending topics on *X* were "Trump" and "Staged" with a surprising number amongst these claims specifically accusing Trump of 'blading'[5], 'like he was in WWE'.[6] As one poster summed it up: 'they staged that and he bladed when they jumped on him. I'm familiar with this WWE ass script'.[7] What is blading, what does it have to do with WWE and what does its referencing here tell us about US politics, specifically regarding an underlying violence permeating it?

Blading, as the editors of *Performance and Professional Wrestling* describe, is the act 'wherein a wrestler will discreetly make a cut in their forehead with an otherwise concealed razor blade. The wound is self-inflicted, and the actual cutting of flesh is hidden from the audience, but the blood that flows is the wrestler's real blood'[8]. As a performative act, blading points to the strange, liminal nature of pro-wrestling, in which the fight is "fake", but the razor and the blood are certainly real. Performed violence (in pro-wrestling lingo, 'worked' violence) underpinned by real violence (or 'shoot' violence). The very idea and the subsequent attempt to disentangle the two is something that links the conspiracy theorist and the pro-wrestling fan. In both domains, the tension between the visible and the hidden creates a dual-layered narrative that fuels public scepticism and fascination: Were Oswald's three famous shots in Dealey Plaza a 'shoot,' or were they 'worked'?

The 'blading' accusations – that perfect mix of conspiracy with pro-wrestling – arguably reflect a broader way people engage with contemporary politics. Here we must reach for the pro-wrestling specific concept of 'kayfabe'. Originally, kayfabe referred to wrestling's commitment to maintaining the illusion of reality. Today, it describes how fans knowingly

[4] Guffey, Robert (2022) *Operation Mindfuck: QAnon & the Cult of Donald Trump.* New York: O/R Books. P. 59
[5] https://x.com/zerocontextAEW/status/1812287122323460254
[6] https://x.com/MateenStewart/status/1812258594118897824
[7] https://x.com/sjbasketball8/status/1812254077788508309?s=46&t=62Pu2WyATtQLHpytY7B0eg&mx=2
[8] Chow, Broderick, Eero Laine & Claire Warden (2017) Hamlet doesn't blade: Professional wrestling, theatre, and performance. In Broderick Chow, Eero Laine & Claire Warden (ed.) *Performance and Professional Wrestling*. Oxon: Routledge p. 2

engage with wrestling as an acknowledged performance while still investing in it emotionally. As Chow, *et al*. describe:

'Wrestling audiences are particularly adept at not only parsing the theatrical aspects from performance, but perhaps more interestingly, are very capable of holding them in mind at the same time. … To be a wrestling spectator is to both admire the technique and determination of the performer and to suspend one's disbelief regarding their character and the plot.[9]'
More than this, spectators actively collaborate in the performance, sustaining it by playing along as "believing fans", cheering and booing as conventions dictate. They embrace the *spectacle* of violence, even while recognising its pretence, while simultaneously disacknowledging the real violence they know to underpin the performance (the battered bodies of an ununionized workforce).

This, I argue, is also how contemporary electorates engage with our electoral politics. Trump and his base are just an extreme case. People know speeches are poll-tested, crafted by strategists, and designed to manipulate emotions—yet supporters play along, suspending disbelief. They too, keep kayfabe. For many, politics has become a game where to play along involves actively pretending their democracy functions as the pluralists portray it, yet implicitly aware of the violence – conspiratorial or otherwise – underpinning it. Viewed this way, Trump's gift is thus not so much his personification of pro-wrestling-ified politics, but that significant numbers of an understandably jaded electorate embrace the opportunity to suspend disbelief and keep kayfabe with his 'bullshit' ("Make America Great Again"). They get to play along with the anti-establishment posturing while an oligarchy openly infests their government. And what was one of Trump's first major executive action after re-election? Ordering the release of all remaining JFK, RFK, and MLK assassination files. Spectacular work.

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[9] Ibid p. 4

# Escape from Violence

**Timo Kivimäki**

Psychologists have written for decades about the decision to either "fight to give flight" in conditions of insecurity and violence. Often, given the asymmetrical nature of power, humanitarians have recognised the need to save strangers, which in turn means helping to facilitate the means to escape violence, through providing safe passage and also ensuring sanctuary. The United Kingdom has a rich history of this tradition, providing home to the likes of Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Albert Einstein, to name of few.

Despite the benevolence at work here, for some, helping people to escape violence is nevertheless politically controversial. This is especially true because participation in organized violence is not just an act of violence but also a defence of political values. Escaping violence, therefore, can also mean abandoning the defence of political values that may be worth protecting. This argument is central to critiques of sanctuary schemes in helping people escape violence. The logic of this argument is as follows: -

Political violence is instrumental; it is usually not an end in itself but a means to impose one's terms of peace on others. While violence is normally seen as negative, it is often considered justified, even virtuous, when it opposes unacceptable terms of peace imposed by adversaries. For instance, we would not support military aid to Ukraine—support that undeniably increases violence—unless we viewed the armed resistance to Russian violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity as critical. Some argue that encouraging refugee flows of conscription-age men from Ukraine might weaken the country's ability to resist aggression, even if it reduces violence or ends the war. Similarly, if one fears that Israel's war on Gaza/Hamas in reality is a cleansing of the areas from Palestinians so that Israelis could occupy Gaza, one may not be willing to offer asylums for Palestinians escaping political violence. In these cases, it would be possible to suggest that helping escape violence constitutes a delay to fair and just solutions to conflicts.

The first counter to this argument is related to the means of resistance. Academics can influence violence and injustice through arguments and knowledge, rather than through military action. Self-sacrificing resistance within a violent country is not the only option, especially for academics.

Moreover, military resistance is often counterproductive. Authoritarian and terroristic violence frequently arises as a reaction to the escalation enabled and justified by resistance. A dictator can more easily justify authoritarian violence when they can point to a credible military threat.[10] Recent research also reveals that terrorist mobilization responds more to

[10] Kivimäki, Timo. 2019. The Failure to Protect. The Path to and Consequences of Humanitarian Interventionism. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. Chapter 8

perceived threats than to hatred or ideological differences.[11] Violence tends to be interactive, although it cannot be assumed to be equally caused by all parties—whether terrorists, counter-terrorist forces, dictators, or freedom fighters.

More broadly, military power rarely protects people on either side of a conflict. Instead, it primarily serves as a tool for leverage in negotiations to impose one party's terms of peace. This has been demonstrated through calculations matching the share of populations killed by organized violence with the share of a country's Gross National Product allocated to military budgets. Militarily strong countries often protect their populations less efficiently than militarily weak ones.[12] Consequently, military forces should not be seen as "defence forces," as their activities are often tied to specific demands that may or may not align with broader principles of justice. Defence forces defend conflicting political values rather than people.

Efforts to address the root causes of violence often involve direct opposition to perpetrators of atrocities. We feel that only by challenging these violent people can we get to the bottom of the problem. Interviews with violent actors in West Kalimantan, however, revealed that the idea of addressing violence by punishing or destroying the perpetrator is shared both sides of the conflict. This mutual framing of themselves as "good" and the others as "bad," and the addressing of "root causes" of violence by enforcing norms to the "bad," constituted the cycle of escalating violence. The very efforts to confront the "root causes" of violence then became the reasons for its continuation. This way, violence was born out in the escalatory relationship in which muscular action "to deal with the root cause" was really the very reason for violence.

Still, fleeing violence can be more challenging than it appears. Around two decades ago, my interviews with men in West Kalimantan's camps for internally displaced people revealed deep trauma stemming not from physical violence but from the societal stigma of fleeing. These men felt emasculated by their decision to escape, which was seen as unmanly. Yet their decision to flee rather than engage in retaliatory violence ultimately de-escalated the conflict. In this sense, what was perceived as cowardice was, in fact, an act of restraint that promoted peace. There is a statistically very significant association between a power-centric approach in conflict based on changing someone else's (atrocity criminals, dictators, terrorists etc.) behaviour rather than helping victims of violence and the increase of fatalities of organised violence.[13]

Thus, escape from violence is often a better strategy, while traditional notions of masculine heroism may contribute to the perpetuation of violence. This calls for a re-evaluation of attitudes toward violence and masculinity, emphasizing restraint over masculine, forceful opposition of the bad guys. Supporting individuals escaping violence challenges hegemonically masculine attitudes and offer a more sustainable path to peace and justice.

Mindful of this, I am proud that the University of Bath is one of the UK's Universities of Sanctuary. This means the university participates in various activities to help people escape

[11] Kant, Gillian, Talip Alkhayer, Timo Kivimaki, and Christoph Weisser. Forthcoming. "The Word and the Bullet: Out-Grouping and Threat Framing as Predictors of Terrorist Targeting by ISIS, 2015-2019."
[12] Kivimäki, Timo. 2024b. "Negotiation as a Means of Conflict Prevention. Why Does It Sometimes Fail?" In Research Handbook on Conflict Prevention, edited by Timo Kivimäki. Elgar Handbooks in Political Science Series. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
[13] Kivimäki, Timo. 2024a. "Hegemonic Masculinity and the Power-Centric Method of Conflict Prevention." In Research Handbook on Conflict Prevention, edited by Timo Kivimäki, 180–97. Elgar Handbooks in Political Science Series. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

the violence of their countries. Together with partners, the university participates in helping refugees, asylum seekers, and even people in dangerous countries before they have had the opportunity to seek asylum. Offering scholarships to people seeking sanctuary is one of the main ways of supporting academic asylum seekers and refugees. These scholarships consist of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Sanctuary Scholarships that are open to asylum seekers in the UK, while undergraduate students with Refugee or Humanitarian Protection status have a guaranteed place in university accommodation, a smaller bursary, help with start-up costs, and a stipend on graduation. Other support includes possible means-tested bursaries and assistance through the Gold Scholarship Programme, Bath Bursary, and Income-Related Scholarships. One Gold Scholarship each year is ring-fenced specifically for refugee applicants.

In addition to support for asylum seekers and refugees in undergraduate and PGT programs, the university works with the UK Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) to rescue PhD researchers and postdoctoral academics. These scholars are offered CARA Fellowships to work at the university for two to three years. CARA has been rescuing academics from dangerous countries since it started its program in 1933, initially helping critical academics in Germany escape the escalating authoritarian threat to independent and critical thought. This spirit was captured by Albert Einstein in his address at the Royal Albert Hall in that same year, "If we want to resist the powers which threaten to suppress intellectual and individual freedom we must keep clearly before us what is at stake, and what we owe to that freedom which our ancestors have won for us after hard struggles. Without such freedom, there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Faraday, no Pasteur and no Lister."[14]

The organization is unique because its networks reach deeply into the academic communities of dangerous countries. As a result, CARA, in cooperation with UK universities, has managed to rescue scholars even before they were able to apply for asylum in the UK.

Two current CARA Fellows at the University of Bath are also members of the Centre for the Study of Violence. They contribute their insights, particularly regarding violence in their home countries, Sudan and Afghanistan. Both are fully integrated into the university's academic networks, providing access to conflict-related data harvesting and AI-based analysis in their own countries and globally. This integration benefits the university's research and teaching activities. In addition to working with CARA, the university administration collaborates closely with Bath students and the Student Action for Refugees program, and the City of Bath collaborates in various sanctuary activities closely with the university. Within the Student Action for Refugees, students at the University of Bath actively work to welcome and support students escaping violence in their home countries.

If two of the most essential principals of any university is to allow freedom to flourish and have the ability to challenge abuses of power and hold regimes to account, supporting initiatives that allow persons to escape violence must be central to its mission and humanitarian commitments. Furthermore, since power-centric approach to violence does not help reduce it, University of Bath's initiatives supporting individuals escaping violence are both ethically and pragmatically justified.

[14] Einstein 1933, quoted from https://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/

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# Hostile Environments

## Sexism & Gendered Discrimination in Election Campaigns

**Hilde Coffé**

### Introduction

Sexism in politics remains a persistent and significant barrier to achieving gender equality in political representation and leadership. Despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, women candidates continue to face unique challenges, particularly during election campaigns, where public scrutiny and media exposure are heightened.

This note describes the key findings of a study conducted during the June 2024 regional, federal, and European election campaign in Belgium.[1] The study examines the extent and characteristics of sexism directed at political candidates, with a particular focus on gendered differences. By studying both online and offline contexts through analyses of online message and semi-structured interviews with political candidates, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which sexism manifests itself during political campaigns and the impact it has on candidates' opportunities, interactions, and well-being. The findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sexism not only affects individual candidates but also shapes the broader political landscape, ultimately influencing the pursuit of gender equality in representation and leadership.

### Methods

Our study analysed 43,937 reactions to 2,922 messages posted on X, Facebook and Instagram by 40 candidates during the regional, federal and European elections held on June 9, 2024, in Belgium. Each reaction was examined to determine its tone (negative, neutral or positive) and the presence of sexism. Additionally, the analysis examined which types of candidate and types of messages attracted particular reactions and identified the individuals responsible for these reactions.

Furthermore, eight exploratory interviews were conducted with women politicians and journalists, key observers of the political landscape, to provide a broader context. Following the elections, 17 semi-structured interviews were held with both women and men candidates to document their experiences and explore the consequences of sexism.

### Key Findings

1. Women candidates face significantly more aggression on social networks compared with men candidates. While 38.5% of the reactions to men's posts are negative, this

[1] This research involved the collaboration of Audrey Vandeleene (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Elise Storme (Ghent University), Clémence Deswert (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Bram Wauters (Ghent University), Robin Devroe (Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Ghent University), Emilie van Haute (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Emma Collet (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Lore Baeten (Ghent University), Nina Dufourmont (Ghent University), Caroline Close (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Fanny Sbaraglia (Policy Lab, Université Libre de Bruxelles), and Justine Brunet (Policy Lab, Université Libre de Bruxelles).

figure rises to 42.7% for women's posts. Posts on X are most likely to receive negative reactions. While the vast majority of negative messages were not sexist, women candidates received more sexist reactions than men candidates (6.6% and 5.5% of all negative reactions respectively). The sexist reactions particularly relate to physical characteristics (31% of sexist reactions received by women candidates) or in the form of sexist insults (29%) or mansplaining (10%). Additionally, men were responsible for the majority of the negative and/or sexist reactions (68% men, 16% unknown, 15% women).

2. Sexist behaviour is not confined to the online world. One candidate who was interviewed mentioned, for example, "I get dirty looks from my young colleagues or comments saying 'yes, we'd vote for that one'." In addition to aggressive and negative behaviour, women candidates also report receiving fewer opportunities than men candidates. In the media and within the political parties, sexism takes the form of mansplaining and is accompanied by the confinement of women candidates to gendered roles and a feeling of not being treated as equals.

3. Sexism manifests itself in both hostile and benevolent ways. Hostile sexism, which refers to explicit types of sexism, accounts for 57.5% of sexist reactions towards women candidates online and is particularly prevalent in responses to posts about political content as opposed to those on more personal topics. Benevolent sexism, which is more subtle than hostile sexism, occurs both online and offline. It accounts for 23% of sexist reactions to women's posts on social networks. Comments like "You're nice" may appear positive but often refer to the candidate's gender rather than the content of her speech.

4. Sexism intersects, both offline and online, with other forms of discrimination, disproportionately affecting younger women candidates and those from minority or immigrant backgrounds. For example, 63% of reactions to posts by women candidates with an immigrant background are negative, compared with 31% for women who do not have an immigrant background. As one candidate explained: People often point to a perceived lack of legitimacy, forcing us to prove ourselves more simply because we are women. As a migrant woman, the expectations are even higher—we are always expected to be beyond reproach.

5. Sexism generates self-censorship among women candidates which limits their interactions with voters, both online and offline. As one candidate reported, "It's exactly the same as in physical life, when we explain the avoidance strategies that women have when taking certain streets. You can transfer that to online life, in other words, you develop avoidance strategies: not talking about certain subjects, not reading comments, not doing this, not doing that." This avoidance behaviour also exists offline, with women modifying how to dress, what to talk about, or where to go and when. Consequently, sexism can shorten political careers, harm mental well-being, and disrupt private lives, ultimately undermining women's collective political influence.

6. Visible sexism also has significant indirect consequences, as it may deter other women from considering political careers. Women who witness sexist behaviour directed at women candidates may avoid pursuing political careers themselves,

seeing the challenges their role models face. This makes it even more difficult for political parties to attract and recruit new women candidates.

**Conclusion**

This study highlights the pervasive nature of sexism faced by political candidates during the June 2024 election campaign in Belgium. Women candidates are disproportionately targeted by aggression and negativity on social media networks, and X in particular. These reactions extend beyond general political criticism to explicitly sexist comments and behaviours, such as insults, mansplaining, and undue focus on physical appearance. Moreover, women also encounter similar forms of sexism in offline contexts.

The findings reveal that sexism often intersects with other forms of discrimination, amplifying challenges for younger women candidates and those from minority or immigrant backgrounds. These women are subjected to heightened scrutiny and frequently forced to prove their legitimacy in ways their men counterparts are not.

Importantly, the consequences of sexism extend far beyond the individual candidates. In response to hostility, Some women adopt self-censorship and avoidance strategies, which not only hinder their engagement with voters but also affect their personal and professional well-being. Moreover, the visibility of sexist behaviour may discourage other women from pursuing political careers, thereby exacerbating gender disparities in political representation.

Addressing sexism in politics is essential not only for the well-being and success of individual candidates but also for fostering a more inclusive and representative democratic process. To counter these challenges, systemic changes in party structures, media practices, and societal attitudes are required to ensure equitable opportunities and treatment for all candidates, regardless of gender.

Hilde Coffé is Professor in Politics at the Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies at the University of Bath. Her main research interests include political representation, political behaviour, and gender and politics. She has published in leading academic journals, including the *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of European Public Policy* and *West European Politics*. Prior to joining the University of Bath, she held positions at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), Utrecht University and Victoria University of Wellington. She has also been a visiting scholar at several institutions, including the University of California (Berkeley and Irvine), the University of Sydney, Åbo Akademi University, Helsinki University, SciencesPo Paris, the Spanish Scientific Research Institute, Ghent University and the Weizenbaum Institut (Berlin).

# REVIEW ARTICLES

# Art on Campus

## Embracing Chantal Meza's State of Disappearance Collection

**Jimena Alamo**

On Sept 26th, 2024, the University of Bath launched an exhibition on enforced disappearance that featured the artwork of the renowned Mexican abstract painter Chantal Meza. Marking the 10th anniversary of the missing 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Mexico, it was an honor to be asked to speak at the poignant event and to be part of a project that allow us to reimagine what a university might become in the 21st Century.

At the University of Bath, we take pride in the diversity of our community. Increasingly, in the higher education sector, institutions' reputations and ability to recruit international talent also rely on diversity, and how welcoming their communities are portrayed. This is crucial, especially in the post-Brexit context. In my position as President of the Students Union, I witness first-hand the efforts that are made to welcome international students. Yet I also know there is so much more we need to do in order to understand the live sof others from beyond Europe's shores, especially their culture, their background, and their stories. Too often we seem to assume that academic communities are built in a vacuum, rather than it being the combination of all our individual stories. But in truth, the richness of our community comes from the contributions of the people that have different backgrounds, lived experiences, and perceptions of the world.

As I walked around 'The State of Disappearance' exhibition, I was overcome with a profound realization that it provided such a strong contribution to our community. As a visual testimony, the paintings that hang on the wall of our Chancellors Building are a necessary first step in recognizing our diversity. Chantal's work opens a space to recognize that those individual stories can sometimes be tragically contrasting to what the status quo is in Bath and the broader UK. Many students have moved to United Kingdom seeking a new beginning, a more peaceful life, a chance to have a more 'normal' existence. These people sit in lecture halls, sit at the table with their flat-mates, and interact with others, without realising what their personal stories are.

What the exhibition made me realise is that it is possible to create spaces where these people, whether from Mexico or anywhere else in the world, can feel like these situations are recognized. With the right vision, we can create spaces where as students, we stand and tell people across the world, 'you matter, we recognize what you've been through, and we care'. Such a powerful statement could not be made with anything other than art. The fact that Chantal Meza's pieces are featured in an academic building, amid teaching space, and not in some elitist or intimidating gallery represents a lot. Like those people that sometimes go through their day-to-day silently ignoring their pasts, the artwork is a constant reminder of the complexity of our and all communities.

Chantal has kindly given us an opportunity to start a conversation. Academic communities should take pride in allowing free speech and debate. But often, we do not do enough to encourage the creation of organic discussions, the ones that are born outside the lecture theatre, amongst people that do not discuss these things as part of their degrees, perhaps in the intimacy of a conversation with friends. I have already seen how these provocative art pieces naturally produce these discussions, teaching our students a thing or two about how different the educational experience can be in other countries, and make us a bit more grateful about the privilege that it is to live in a campus like our own, where these conversations are not censored but rather celebrated and encouraged. University campuses have the duty and potential to host so many of these conversations, to generate spaces of reflection and recognition of the condition of so many students and humans across the world.

I have been very moved by what this exhibition marks for Bath. It is the first step of many of using our spaces to host artists, their expressions, and consequent conversations that will enrich the experience and the minds of generations of students to come. I hope we take this opportunity to make this a broader movement in Bath and in the UK. Art on campuses is common practice in other parts of the world. In Caracas, Venezuela, some of the main universities' campuses are intervened all around with the contribution of artists from across the world. This stands in clear contrast to the autocratic nature of its current government. If, under those circumstances, art still has a place on their campuses, how is it not the case in ours, where we claim to be free to express ourselves and encourage others to do the same?

This is not an attempt to answer the question, but only to start a conversation. I hope that after reading these lines you may also be inspired to start a new conversation, one that leads you to a similar conclusion to mine: there is so much more we could do to promote these spaces. We were lucky that our university staff took this initiative, and that we had an artist as generous as Chantal willing to open this space for us. But, in those universities where that is not the case, there is no reason you cannot start this discussion yourself. I hope the 'State of Disappearance' exhibition hosted at Bath marks the beginning of a sector wide journey towards more art on campuses everywhere. And in terms of the students that this exhibition talks about, I hope its presence in Bath means that they will never be forgotten.

Jimena Alamo is the current President of the University of Bath Students Union. She is serving her second term in this post. Jimena is also Chair of the Board of Trustees.

# Ireland’s Disappeared

**Ahmad Alkuchikmulla**

On 13th Of November 2024, the University of Bath hosted a compelling event on Ireland's Disappeared, co-organised by the Island of Ireland Contemporary History and Politics Network (GW4) and the Centre for the Study of Violence. Attended by nearly 100 students, academics, staff members, and other guests and organisations, the gathering shed light on the heart-wrenching stories of those who vanished during Northern Ireland's Troubles. Held in the "State of Disappearance" Chantal Meza’s exhibition space, the event provided a poignant exploration of personal and collective grief.

**Setting the Stage**
The event opened with Sophie Whiting’s remarks, welcoming attendees and placing Ireland’s troubled history in a broader international context. Sophie underscored the universality of unresolved disappearances, connecting the narrative of Ireland’s past to contemporary global issues of violence and injustice. Her words resonated as a call for remembrance and understanding, bridging the local with the global.

Brad Evans, introducing the Centre for the Study of Violence, articulated the profound impact of enforced disappearances. Describing disappearance as an ultimate form of violence, he observed, "It stops the living from living and the dying from dying." This powerful statement set the tone for an evening that would delve into the enduring effects of trauma and resilience.

**The Work of the WAVE Trauma Centre**
Sandra Peake, CEO of the WAVE Trauma Centre in Belfast, provided a detailed account of the centre’s work and the historical context of the Disappeared. Reflecting on the 1970s in Northern Ireland, she painted a vivid picture of communities dominated by paramilitary forces, leaving families of the Disappeared trapped in silence. Threats from within their own neighbourhoods rendered them unable to seek help from authorities, schools, or churches.

Sandra’s presentation highlighted the psychological torment inflicted on these families. Stories were manipulated, with cruel hoaxes including fabricated letters or Christmas cards aimed at creating the illusion that their loved ones were still alive. Such acts deepened the wounds of those already grappling with grief and uncertainty.

**A Sister’s Story: Dympna Kerr**
Dympna Kerr, the sister of Columba McVeigh, gave a deeply moving testimony. She recounted her brother’s abduction on Halloween night in 1975 and the subsequent decades of anguish. Speaking with remarkable courage, she shared her journey of seeking justice and the unwavering hope of bringing Columba’s remains home to be laid to rest beside their parents. For Dympna, the support of organisations like WAVE and the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains (ICLVR) was instrumental in transforming

her grief into advocacy. Her account highlighted the unique bond among the families of the Disappeared, a network of shared loss and collective hope.

**Breaking the Silence**

Sandra elaborated on the silencing mechanisms that pervaded Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Fear dictated every facet of life, isolating families and preventing them from seeking justice. Yet, the 1990s marked a pivotal shift, as courageous individuals like Margaret and Mary broke the silence, igniting a campaign that gained momentum locally and internationally. Key political figures, including US President Bill Clinton, played an influential role, with moments such as Margaret McKinney's meeting with Clinton serving as turning points in the fight for truth and accountability.

**Forensic Efforts and Challenges**

The establishment of the ICLVR in 1998 represented a crucial step towards resolution. Initially optimistic about straightforward recoveries, the Commission faced significant challenges, including incomplete records and misinformation about victims. The appointment of forensic expert Geoff Knupfer in 2005 brought advanced archaeological techniques to the effort, yielding breakthroughs in the search for remains.

**The Weight of Loss and Hope**

Dympna's poignant account of her brother's disappearance underscored the profound burden of carrying a loved one's memory without closure. Her hope of reuniting her brother's remains with their parents symbolised the emotional weight borne by families. Sandra's reference to Seamus Heaney's reflections on Ireland's bogs added a layer of poetic symbolism, portraying the land as a silent witness to these tragedies. The recovery of well-preserved remains, such as pristine shoes, stood as haunting reminders of the enduring legacy of these losses.

**Reflections and Resonance**

The audience was visibly moved by the evening's testimonies, their reactions reflecting sorrow and a deep sense of connection. Some attendees expressed fears of similar tragedies occurring in other conflicts, underscoring the universal relevance of the issues raised. The event concluded on a note of solemn reflection, reinforcing the necessity of continued remembrance and advocacy. The stories of Ireland's Disappeared serve as both a reminder of the past and a call to action for justice and reconciliation.

Ahmad Alkuchikmulla is final year student reading for a BSc in Politics & Economics.

# Violence & Time

**Magnus Green**

The panel discussion "Violence and Time" held on at University of Bath on December 4th hosted by Milena Romano and the Centre for the Study of Violence offered an incisive examination of the intricate relationship between temporality and violence. Through a sequence of stimulating interdisciplinary discussions from Prof. Brad Evans, Dr. Sophia Hatzisavvidou, Ms. Chantal Meza, and Prof. David Galbreath unpacked the concept of time as not a passive backdrop to violence but an active participant in its formation, perpetuation, and resistance. The event highlighted critical intersections of political philosophy, ecology, art, and technology, weaving a multifaceted narrative that urged the audience to reconsider dominant temporal paradigms. Ranging perspectives from across the Bath PoLIS department and beyond, the event's multi-disciplinary approach provided critical insight into building new non-violent relationships by interrogating the temporal dimension of violence. Tailored to engaging the post-graduate cohort, the event afforded time to question novel forms of violence obfuscated by the speed of modernity, echoing the concluding message that constructing a new politics of non-violence requires fundamental reconsideration of time as a space for reflection.

**Key Contributions: Speed, Progress and Violence**

Prof. Brad Evans set the tone for the event with a profound critique of the temporality of violence. Prof. Evans argued that our contemporary world is locked into a "tyranny of immediacy," where the relentless demand for instantaneity inhibits the capacity for reflective thought and meaningful political action. By tracing historical patterns, he demonstrated how violence thrives in conditions where time is compressed and foresight is systematically undermined. He contended that modern societies are so consumed by the need to respond to crises in real time that they inadvertently perpetuate the very cycles of violence they seek to disrupt. His emphasis on the politics of deceleration resonated as a call to action, urging both individuals and institutions to resist the seductive pull of immediacy in favour of creating spaces for contemplation and transformative change. Evans' argument illuminated the profound ways in which temporality can either perpetuate or disrupt cycles of violence, positioning time as a critical site of political struggle.

Following this, Dr. Sophia Hatzisavvidou brought an ecological perspective to the discussion. Her presentation delved into the temporal dynamics of ecological violence, critiquing the linear and Eurocentric conception of time that underpins much of Western environmental policy. Dr. Hatzisavvidou argued that the narratives of progress and "net zero" emissions, while appearing forward-thinking, often obscure the immediacy of ecological harm and delay meaningful action by appealing to the futurity of action. She emphasized the need to embrace alternative temporal frameworks that prioritize coexistence and interdependence rather than domination and extraction. Drawing on Indigenous temporalities and concepts of justice, Dr. Hatzisavvidou posited that ecological violence cannot be addressed without challenging the temporal logic that legitimises it. Her presentation was a clarion call to

rethink justice as inherently non-violent and ecologically attuned, providing a vital critique of the temporal disjunctions that allow ecological injustices to persist unnoticed.

Chantal Meza, an artist deeply engaged with phenomenological inquiries on the violence of disappearance, offered a unique perspective by situating art as a medium through which time and violence can be interrogated. Ms. Meza described her artistic process as an act of "freezing time," capturing moments of abstraction and density that disrupt linear narratives. Her work, characterised by its visceral and corporeal qualities, challenges viewers to confront the materiality of violence and the ways in which it is embedded in our temporal experience. Ms. Meza's exploration of abstraction as a form of resistance to the reductive tendencies of linear time resonated deeply with the broader themes of the event. By emphasising the temporal dimensions of artistic creation and interpretation, she underscored the potential of art to reconfigure our understanding of both time and violence. Her presentation highlighted the power of art to serve as a space for reflection and disruption, opening pathways to reimagine time as fluid and transformative rather than rigid and oppressive.

Prof. David Galbreath's contribution brought the discussion into the realm of technology and warfare, focusing on the temporalities of modern conflict. Prof. Galbreath examined the role of computational systems and cybernetics in reshaping temporal and spatial dynamics of warfare. He introduced the concept of the OODA loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act), a framework used in military strategy, to illustrate how technological systems accelerate decision-making processes to such an extent that they fundamentally alter the nature of conflict. Prof. Galbreath argued that this compression of time creates paradoxical effects: while it enhances the speed and precision of military operations, it also deepens the unpredictability and volatility of conflict. By analysing the co-constitutional relationship between computational and social elements, he shed light on how the militarisation of time reflects and exacerbates broader patterns of violence. His presentation challenged the audience to consider the ethical and political implications of these temporal dynamics, urging a critical re-evaluation of how technological acceleration shapes the landscape of modern warfare.

The event culminated in a lively and intellectually rigorous Q&A session, during which the panellists engaged with a range of complex questions from the audience. One recurring theme was the disciplinary nature of time—how dominant temporal frameworks are used to regulate behaviour, justify power structures, and perpetuate systems of violence. The panellists collectively emphasised the importance of resisting these frameworks by fostering alternative temporalities that prioritise justice, reflection, and solidarity. Another key topic was the narrative of progress, which was critiqued as a tool for legitimising violence and obscuring its ongoing effects. The discussion highlighted the need to disentangle progress from linearity, proposing instead a more nuanced understanding of temporal change that accommodates disruption, cyclicality, and coexistence.

The diverse perspectives offered by the panellists underscored the event's central thesis: that time is not merely a neutral backdrop to violence but an active agent that shapes its manifestations and consequences. By examining the temporal dimensions of violence through interdisciplinary lenses, the event provided profound insights into how we might resist and transform these dynamics. For instance, Prof. Evans' call for deceleration, Dr. Hatzisavvidou's critique of ecological temporalities, Ms. Meza's exploration of artistic

disruption, and Prof. Galbreath's analysis of technological acceleration all pointed to the necessity of rethinking our relationship with time as a prerequisite for addressing violence in its myriad forms.

One of the most compelling aspects of "Violence and Time" was its ability to bridge theory and praxis. The discussions were not confined to abstract theorisation but were grounded in real-world implications, from environmental policy to artistic practice to military strategy. This interdisciplinary approach enriched the intellectual depth of the event and demonstrated the practical contingency of drawing together approaches in building non-violent relationships. The panellists' critique, construction and engagement with each other's perspectives further enhanced the event's impact, creating a dynamic atmosphere that encouraged the audience to think critically and expansively about emerging issues.

In conclusion, "Violence and Time" provided with perspicacity the urgent need to bridge disciplines, theories and communities to build a new politics of non-violence, in slowing down time, challenging the audience to reconsider dominant narratives and to imagine alternative temporalities that prioritise justice, reflection, and transformation. By bringing together scholars and practitioners from diverse fields, the event exemplified the power of interdisciplinary dialogue to address complex and urgent issues. The insights generated during the event will undoubtedly serve as a valuable resource for future research and action, inspiring new ways of thinking about the relationship between time and violence in the contemporary world.

Magnus Green is final year student reading for a BSc in Politics & International Relations.

# INTERVIEW

# The Enduring Relevance of Paulo Freire

**Henry A. Giroux in Conversation with Brad Evans**

**Brad Evans (BE):** You once said that Paulo Freire was one of the most important educators of the 20th century, I wondered if you could expand on this claim.

**Henry A. Giroux (HG)**: Paulo shifted the paradigm around the relationship between education and democracy. He provided the possibility of taking seriously students, workers, and those who are considered the oppressed, as individuals able to narrate themselves. He understood education as imminently political rather than a mere method or an a priori script you imposed on people. Freire opened up a lot of doors, theoretically, politically, socially, and culturally, that in many ways spoke to my generation of young people. We were trying to find a language in which education was something more than just tests or standards, that attempted to neatly define how education worked and what it was for. So in that sense, Freire was like a lightning strike, his book changed the paradigm. He went beyond a whole range of liberal educators who were far more concerned about individual mobility than they were about social change. He provided a foundation that was taken up later by a whole range of movements, such as the critical sociology movement in England and the United States, cultural studies, and youth studies. All of these movements were vastly in many ways influenced by Paulo.

**BE:** Can you tell me how you first encountered the work of Paulo Freire and how you became good friends?

**HG:** I was a high school teacher for about seven years. That was basically my first foray into education. I was teaching in the sixties, and I say this because in many ways, public education was a bit more open than it is now. I had more room to employ progressive methods. I taught Wilhelm Reich's book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* in a high school – imagine that now! This was in a seminar form, with a whole range of students. Then one day I was challenged by a vice principal who basically believed that a militarised mind was the only way to understand education and the rest of the world. Quite soon after this, I came across Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and it basically changed my life. It gave me a language, and it helped me to theorise much of what I was already doing in ways that could be articulated to others. I was no longer collapsing the political and the theoretical into the personal, and that was very important.

Soon afterwards, I wrote a review of one of his books, and he actually sent me a letter in which said he loved my review. I was just so overwhelmed; I was an assistant professor in my first year at Boston University, and I get a letter from Paulo Freire!? Following this we began a long and rich conversation. I met Paulo in the eighties, when he was about to go back to Brazil after eighteen years in exile, and we had a long friendship. We developed a book series together on culture and pedagogy, and together we published the work of almost ninety thinkers and theorists, many of whom didn't have tenure and were struggling to get

published. And yet their work was brilliant, but they were ostracised because they were a little too left for the established publishers.

**BE:** Do you think there has been any progress in this regard? It appears as though the struggles you're discussing here are almost the exact same struggles we are facing today.

**HG:** I actually think that they're worse today. I think the regression that has taken place with the collapse of neoliberalism and liberal democracy, and the downfall of civic culture, has acutely militarised this society in the interest of a burgeoning fascism. The attack on education, for example, is unlike anything I have seen before: the banning of books, the claims that historical consciousness doesn't matter, the embrace of a rabid kind of anti-intellectualism, the move towards methods in a post-pandemic world. In many ways, technology has now taken over the educational process. The power has become so much more concentrated in the hands of the right, that I don't think Paulo's work has ever been more important than it is now. This is because he not only understood the school as a site of struggle, he also knew that, in some fundamental way, questions of consciousness and questions of literacy were fundamental to a notion of agency in which young people had to learn something about the conditions that dominated their lives. This was the first step in not only recognising those conditions, but recognising the limitations that their situation imposed on them.

This was the first step in being able to gear a pedagogy that was really a social theory, a project that was concerned with domination and how to recognise it within and, crucially, outside of the educational process. This is very important, he wanted people who were informed and critical, and at the same time *engaged*. He wasn't just talking about literacy as a form of critical thinking. He was talking about literacy as a form of practice, as a form of critical consciousness.

This is why people who have argued that Paulo's work is a mere methodology are completely wrong. It's not a methodology because it's concerned with questions of justice and power and agency. It's concerned with how knowledge is linked in some way to the conditions of labour. It's concerned with what it means to produce people who know how to desire and imagine the future in a particular way. But it's also concerned with the acquisition of agency and the struggle over agency.

**BE:** Is there a particular quote from the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that really stands out for you?

**HG:** There's a particular quote, as a high school teacher, that really moved me. It's one of my favourite quotes from Paulo. He says, "I'm a teacher who stands up for what is right against what is indecent, who is in favour of freedom against authoritarianism, who is a supporter of authority against freedom with no limits, and who is a defender of democracy against the dictatorship of the right. I'm a teacher who favours the permanent struggle over every form of bigotry and against the economic determinism of individuals in social classes. I'm a teacher who rejects the present system of capitalism, responsible for the aberration of misery in the midst of plenty. I'm a teacher who's full of the spirit of hope, in spite of all the signs to the contrary. I'm a teacher who refuses the disillusionment that consumes and immobilises. I'm a teacher proud of the beauty of my teaching practice, a fragile beauty that may disappear if I do not care for the struggle and knowledge that I ought to teach. If I do not struggle for the

material conditions, which my body will suffer from neglect, thus running the risk of becoming frustrated and ineffective, then I will no longer be the witness that I ought to be, no longer the tenacious fighter who may tire, but who never gives up."

The quote is so humble and yet moving. It combines the politics of critique with the politics of hope, with a very expansive notion of freedom. Freedom is not just about political and personal rights, it's about economic rights. If we don't have the material conditions in which we can exercise this sense of agency, then rights disappear. If you're impoverished, as most people are in this neoliberal fascism that dominates the globe, how do you think about voting when you can't even provide food for your children or for your family, or for yourself, or healthcare, or any of the basic social provisions that make life worth living?

**BE:** What does a pedagogy of hope look like in the face of neoliberal capital today? I'm wondering whether you can elaborate a bit more on that kind of connection between capitalism, hope, and the materiality of the lived condition for humans today?

**HG:** I think in many ways, capitalism is wedded not to hope, but to despair and cynicism. It functions through these processes to utterly depoliticise people, operating on the assumption that the only problems that exist are individual problems. At the same time, it concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a financial elite who spread misery all over the globe, who are destroying the planet. I think that Paulo discussed the limits of the situation we currently find ourselves in. History is not determined, it is conditioned. We live in a world that is unfinished, and because of that, we need to think very carefully about our roles in forging a world which isn't marked by despair, inequality, or attacks on those who are not white supremacists. I think here we begin to understand three things. Firstly, hope is an educational process, and we must move people away from a sense of despair that demobilizes it. Secondly, neoliberalism normalizes itself by saying that hope doesn't exist and there are no alternatives. Thirdly, hope is not only an educational practice that has to be employed, it is not only about individual salvation, it is about social change and collective struggle. Hope is fundamentally social.

**BE:** You've mentioned before that one of the things you thought was overlooked in Paulo's work is the importance of consciousness. I'm wondering how this connects to your idea of the radical imagination?

**HG:** Liberation begins with the notion that we live in a world that's social and interconnected, and that you can't separate that notion of the social from matters of economic and communal justice on a global scale. I also think that the question of consciousness is very often downplayed, a lot of the time by the left who are guilty, in some ways, of not making education central to politics, believing that domination is simply about institutional and economic structures and nothing else. There's very little concern with how the individual can learn to understand, maybe through a different language, both the conditions under which they live and also what it might mean to take charge of those conditions. Domination is not just economic, it's also pedagogical. It's also rooted in questions of persuasion and belief and education. I think that you can't attack a problem until you can understand it.

At the same time, this question of consciousness is now part of an educational ecosystem, so to speak, that's not just simply about institutional schooling. Education now is a massive phenomenon: C. Wright Mills, Antonio Gramsci, Zygmunt Bauman, and many others have

been pointing out, that our neoliberal culture is, crucially, about colonizing consciousness. It is not just simply about consumerism and turning the obligations of citizenship into an act of consuming. It's about making people feel as if they don't count. It's about making people feel that they should disappear. It's about expanding the notion of oppression to include far more groups than simply the working class. I think that that's one of the things that Paulo really understood. He understood that agency is central to politics, modes of identification are central to politics. But maybe most importantly, that education was central to politics; we have to be able to understand what we teach, and side by side, organise with people who apply what they learn to the lives that they live. We have to become learners and not just teachers. We have to work with people, not work on them. This opens up a pedagogical space that is protective, fluid, safe, and profoundly radical. For Paulo, hope was a function of radical futurity, a means to imagine something different.

I also want to talk about the civic/public imagination and how it gets undermined, how the question of shared values gets reduced to privatized values, how hope gets reduced to individual salvation. When that happens, civic society begins to collapse. Public imagination is no longer a radical imagination, it's a privatised imagination, it's a gated imagination. At the same time, if you don't have institutions that are public, that open the space for all of us as intellectuals, as artists, as workers in general, to be able to share our vision of a future in which humanity is lifted and expanded, something tragic happens. Despair and death takeover, in the form of fascism.

**BE:** I'm thinking about the attack on critical race theory, and critical pedagogy more generally. I'm wondering how this connects to what's happening in Brazil, which I know you've said is an attack on the legacy of Paulo.

**HG:** I want to begin by pointing to two references here. One is the recent comparison between what happened in Brazil and what happened on January 6th is certainly worthwhile. But also, it is interesting that nobody talks about the fact that Bolsonaro's attack on education, Paulo's thought, and critical pedagogy, is not unlike what is happening in the United States. That whole attack on consciousness and the possibility of people engaging in forms of pedagogy that are empowering, sort of gets written right out of the script of comparisons, right, in some fundamental way. I think that Paulo's pedagogy in many ways, was *for* the global south, and by not understanding that, we lose, in some fundamental way, what it means to talk about education and hope that is rooted in the notion of a global and collective imagination. Neoliberalism, Paulo understood, was a poison, and he knew that democracy and capitalism were not the same.

Paulo was not talking about education in the interest of reform. He was talking about education in the interest of radical transformation, like Martin Luther King was. He also understood that many of these problems that we talk about, these various forms of oppression, they intersected and mutually informed each other. He was looking to link education politically to a larger narrative, namely socialism.

I find it interesting that the attacks on critical pedagogy now are very similar to the attacks that Bolsonaro furthered and the language he used. The idea that critical pedagogy is a form of communism. That this is all Marxist drivel. That it's really about indoctrination. Can you imagine the people who are banning books and forcing teachers to sign loyalty oaths are talking about how education is neutral and how people who are progressives are on the left

are promoting indoctrinating people by trying to make them more critical and make them active, involved citizens who believe that any radical democracy doesn't exist without an informed citizen. The contradiction is so overwhelming that it's really hard to believe.

**BE:** Can you offer a few comments and also maybe some advice for people who are just beginning with critical pedagogy? About the importance of rigor and countering instrumentalising logics?

**HG:** I think the last thing we want to do is confuse what we do, those of us who are engaged in a project of critical pedagogy, with the kind of instrumentalization that reduces pedagogy to questions of method. Methods of sterile pragmatism, utterly barren reductionism. In doing this, we eliminate questions of power, justice, hope, emancipation, or freedom. I share a certain position with Zygmunt Bauman, who wrote about instrumentalization in a way that far exceeds traditional works on the culture of positivism or on the politics of empiricism. This kind of technological rationality leads to the camps. I don't want to be too pessimistic here. But it seems to me that as soon as you divorce educational theories, economic practices, social policies from questions of social cost, then you create a terrain in which questions of the ethical grammar of justice and social responsibility begin to disappear. And all of a sudden, you don't have a language any longer for understanding how deeply repressive and dogmatic this technocratic rationality is. This instrumentalism, it dehumanises, it erases the voices of difference. And it makes justice look like something that's irreparably old and nostalgic because it can't be measured. And so it seems to me this is, once again, a very dangerous moment that has echoes of a past that thinkers like Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse nailed. And we shouldn't have to repeat this.

**BE:** There's one final question I'd like to ask you. If you could have one more conversation with Paulo, what topic would it be with him about today?

**HG:** I would have liked to discuss how power and new technologies have merged to create social formations pedagogically, unlike anything we had ever imagined before. I think this question of the media and its technological advances have really created a generation of young people who are not only tied to an image-based pedagogy but are also tied to a culture of immediacy and privatisation. I recognise that there are all kinds of groups that use technology in fundamental ways to offer modes of resistance and to connect with each other. But I think as a dominant paradigm, none of us could have imagined what would've helped in terms of the dangers we're facing today.

I would also like to have known what it would have meant to be able to talk to each other and to create an international movement for the preservation of public goods and socialist democracy. I think that our generation was too tied in some ways to national boundaries. We still hadn't figured out the importance of the fact that power had become global while politics had become local. The global elite now don't care about nation states, they just care about profits. I don't think we had anticipated the potential of the destruction of the planet and what it means for our politics. And it would've been interesting to all of a sudden sit down and begin to bring people together from a variety of groups and to be able to make education central to the politics. My friend Stanley Aronowitz started to do that before he died. He had enormous number of insights about what that meant. But much of that generation has passed, and it's sad because we don't have a comprehensive politics anymore in the way we had with the Frankfurt school, the way we had with Paulo. I don't believe in fractured politics; I think it's

deadly. And I think that there has to be a way to talk about unity and diversity, something that Angela Davis and others have been talking about for years, that needs to be rethought in light of the most impending dangers that we face today.

Henry A. Giroux is a Professor of English & Cultural Studies at McMaster University. He is an internationally renowned writer and cultural critic, who has authored, or co-authored over 65 books, written several hundred scholarly articles, delivered more than 250 public lectures. Giroux has been a regular contributor to print, television, and radio news media outlets, and is one of the most cited Canadian academics working in any area of Humanities research. He is often referred to as the founder of critical pedagogy in the United States.

# SPOTLIGHT

# Jason Hart: Advocate, Academic and Human(itarian)

**Nadine Guerfi**

*'A socially committed academic who has dedicated his life's work to the important political and social field of humanitarian response... Jason's work not only adheres to the highest academic standards, but is unashamedly human'*

Professor Peter Lambert – Head of the Politics, Languages and International Studies Department

(Quote taken from official introduction to Professor Hart's Inaugural Lecture, 2024)

Last October, Professor Jason Hart presented his inaugural lecture on 'After Gaza: What protection for children in war?' This event brought together colleagues, students, staff and friends of the Palestinian cause. In a rigorous and impassioned talk, his lecture called for change in 1) the thinking and practice of humanitarians, 2) the shaping of donor agendas, and 3) the valuing of children lives. Amid the misinformation and heightened tensions concerning the situation in Israel/Palestine, this research transcends political positionality and the contentious nature of the conflict. It was a selfless call for transformation to change the horrifying reality faced by children.

**Background**

More than bringing research rigour, intellectual clarity and humanitarian advocacy to his work, Professor Hart's fieldwork makes him and his work closer to the cause than many in the field.

Hart's journey into humanitarianism had an unusual start, as an actor, trained at the Bristol Old Vic, performing around the UK and overseas. But his travels to Israel/Palestine made him want to dedicate his life to humanitarianism, development and the plight of refugees. On this journey, Professor Hart undertook a BA Middle Eastern Studies and MA in Social Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies as a mature student, followed by PhD in Anthropology: His doctoral thesis was entitled *Contested Belonging: Children and Childhood in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Jordan* at Goldsmiths, University of London.

**Research**

Professor Hart joined the University of Bath in 2009, after seven years as a researcher and lecturer at the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford. He is also a Visiting Lecturer at the Centre for Children's Rights Studies at the University of Geneva.

In his research, Professor Hart explores the experiences of young people on the margins of society undergoing political violence and forced displacement in the Middle East, particularly in Jordan and Israel/Palestine. His work explores themes that include protection, child rights, peacebuilding, militarisation, and asylum. At the University, he is a member of the Centre for Development Studies, the MENA Social Policy Network, and the Centre for the Study of Violence.

**Teaching**

Jason Hart is a Professor of Humanitarianism & Development within the Department of Social and Policy Sciences. He co-directs and teaches on the MSc Humanitarianism, Conflict and Development for which he received the Innovation in Learning and Teaching Award in 2024 alongside Dr Katharina Lenner. This is the second teaching award Professor Hart received, with the first one being the John Willis Award in 2012. This latest award is in recognition of the MSc's innovative curriculum design with embedded field work in Jordan to provide students with a deeper understanding of humanitarian issues. His advocacy shone through at the award ceremony, where he used his moment on stage to raise awareness on the war on Gaza.

'The war in Gaza provided a powerful reminder that humanitarian action does not happen in a void, but is deeply political and contentious'

Professor Jason Hart and Dr Katharina Lenner

These awards reflect the immense impact Professor Hart has on his students through his teachings, as beautifully captured by alumna and Chevening Scholar Lara Amro, and current student Ahmed Abu Aisha:

'One of the key reasons I chose to study at the University of Bath was to learn from Professor Jason Hart, whose work had a profound impact on me both academically and personally. His extensive research on Palestinian refugees, particularly in Jordan and Gaza resonates deeply with my own experiences as a third-generation Palestinian refugee. His academic approach to humanitarianism inspires me to contribute more effectively to address the challenges faced by displaced communities'.

And as another student adds:

'Reading about Professor Hart's work on humanitarianism in the Middle East and Palestine was a turning point for me, it solidified my decision to apply to the university and pursue my passion for meaningful and impactful engagement in humanitarianism in the region'.

Ahmed Abu Aisha – MSc International Development, Conflict and Humanitarian Action Student

**Advocacy**

Beyond research, Professor Hart uses his expertise for advocacy. His research enabled his roles as consultant author, researcher and trainer at various UN agencies and NGOs such as UNICEF, UNRWA and Save the Children. One can say that he walks the talk and implements the insights from his research to provide transformative change for the most vulnerable.

Indeed, his advocacy and research transcend anthropology and development. In 2017, alongside Professor David Coley in the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University of Bath, Professor Hart led a project seeking transformative change through efforts to enhance shelter for people residing in refugee camps, providing affordable, sustainable, 'Healthy Housing for the Displaced'. This is one example among many of how Professor Hart turns advocacy into impact.

Professor Jason Hart continues to influence students and colleagues by combining research and advocacy, becoming an emblem in the International Development section of the Department of Social and Policy sciences as he embodies the humanity within his research and has become a voice of the voiceless.

Nadine Guerfi is final year student reading for a BSc in Politics & Economics.

Centre for the Study of Violence

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

The Centre for the Study of Violence seeks to expand dialogue on violence within and beyond the University of Bath.

Current members of the Centre come from across the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, bringing diverse disciplinary and methodological insights into the conceptualisation and study of violence.

We pursue dialogue that deepens understanding of the inter-relationships between different forms of violence and share a commitment to the prevention of violence and amelioration of its impact, including through education.

Find out more about us here:
https://www.bath.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-for-the-study-of-violence/

The Centre for the Study of Violence is part of the Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies at the University of Bath