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Editorial

Introduction to 'Gender, Sexuality, and State Violence: International Perspectives on Institutional and Intersectional Justice'

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The term 'state violence' has been used to refer to a wide range of actions across many disciplines, from the interrogation of prisoners and torture to institutional discrimination against specific groups and the denial of access to equal rights and resources. Similarly, in the social sciences, state violence has been defined rather broadly, ranging from political violence and genocide to surveillance technologies and the (non)provision of social services [1] (p. 381). Furthermore, there is a dense body of international conventions and national laws and norms defining what forms of state violence are considered 'legitimate' by different actors, from state officials to activists and residents, both under or beyond their jurisdiction. Among acts of state violence internationally considered legitimate are individually oriented punishments, bureaucratic due processes, and acts against combatants as distinguished from civilians [2] (p. 279). However, states' approaches to these 'legitimate' forms of coercive control and punishment differ widely, and many states use their disciplinary power and "monopoly on violence" beyond what could be considered ethically or even legally permissible.

One area where state violence is dominantly present is gender- and sexuality-based rights and justice. State violence against gendered and sexually minoritized groups has a long history. From witch hunts that bloodied Europe from the 15th to the 18th century [3,4], enslaving racialized women for their labor and bodily/sexual services organized by states across the globe [5,6], to the persecution and execution of gay and lesbian individuals [7,8], the forced sterilization of indigenous women and communities of color [9], or the unequal access to health care for transgender communities [10], state violence against 'unruly' genders and sexualities at the intersection of age, race, ability, class, and other social factors has been a painfully consistent concern throughout history.

Notably, state violence against minoritized gender and sexual groups such as women, gay and lesbian, queer, and transgender people is documented globally, knows no geographic boundaries, and functions through different mechanisms: harmful policies and discourses, direct forms of (sometimes institutionalized) brutality such as (sexual) torture [11], or juridical harm are sources of violence inflicted on women and LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities [12]. Homophobia has long caused people to be subject to 'legal' violence made up of discriminatory laws and practices by state agencies, 'semi-legal' violence of killing, torture, and harassment by police forces, and extra-judicial violence by individuals and groups in society [13].

Given the compounded and complex nature of different forms of state violence, in this Special Issue, we thus approach the definition of violence in broad terms also, including

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Received: 19 March 2025
Accepted: 24 March 2025
Published: 28 March 2025

Citation: Rahbari, L.; Roggeband, C.; Kolbe, K. Introduction to 'Gender, Sexuality, and State Violence: International Perspectives on Institutional and Intersectional Justice'. *Societies* **2025**, *15*, 86. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15040086

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all forms of physical, psychological, sexual, and symbolic violence—among others—as forms of violence induced or perpetuated by states [14]. Crucially, we furthermore adopt a transnational, historicized, and intersectional perspective by foregrounding paper contributions that offer analyses of gender- and sexuality-based state violence entangled with and committed in relation to age, race, color, migration, (dis)ability, and class, among others.

In the following sections of this introductory article, we will first highlight the significance of adopting such a historicized and intersectional approach to understanding state violence around gender and sexuality. In particular, we aim to call critical attention to the diversity of contexts and circumstances in which state violence takes place on the one hand, as well as to the risks of generalizing theoretical approaches and potential political remedies to address these issues on the other. Following on from this discussion, we will then specifically reflect on the importance of avoiding a colonial and Western-centric lens, especially within a volume like this one, which is produced in higher education settings at the center of academic power in the Global North. Finally, we will present the composition of the Special Issue and introduce the different contributions comprised in it.

To come to terms with the depth and scope of gender- and sexuality-based violence exerted or condoned by state institutions, we consider it crucial to understand this issue within its historical contexts and acknowledge the role of other factors intersecting with gender and sexuality, such as race, class, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, and citizenship. Throughout history, wars and conflicts have exacerbated violence against women, often with state actors as the key perpetrators. From using rape as a weapon of war to the forced displacement of women to further oppress and destroy marginalized communities, state violence reaches particularly horrifying heights during times of large-scale social unrest, such as revolutions and armed conflicts. Currently, we are witnessing a rise in state violence in the context of democratic backsliding and autocratization targeting civil society actors, politicians, and journalists defending liberal democracy, human rights, or gender equality [15].

The perpetuation of state violence against women is intrinsically tied to patriarchal power structures. Unraveling the complex web of patriarchy and its interactions with state institutions is essential to identify the roots of violence and devise strategies for dismantling these systems of oppression. Gender- and sexuality-based state violence, even when ubiquitously applied to a group of people—through policies and legal mandates or adopted discriminatory attitudes—disproportionately impacts people of intersectionally marginalized backgrounds. As Kimberle Crenshaw [16] (p. 1242), feminist scholar and critical race theorist, states,

'The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class'.

Understanding the multidimensional nature of state violence, therefore, inevitably necessitates the application of an intersectional lens. Intersectionality acknowledges that experiences of violence are shaped not only by gender or sexuality but also by other interconnected identities, such as race, class, ethnicity, class, age, and ability, among others [16,17]. Through this framework, we can uncover the complexities of oppression faced by those who live at the intersections of multiple marginalized social locations.

Women of color and ethnic minority women often experience state violence in distinct ways due to racial profiling, institutional racism, and systemic discrimination, both explicitly legalized or implicitly tolerated by state actors. Their experiences are influenced by gender-based oppression and racial biases ingrained within state institutions [16]. Lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals face intersecting layers of discrimination, enduring state violence compounded by their gender identity and sexual orientation [18]. Their struggles underscore the need for an inclusive approach to recognizing their unique challenges. Women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by state violence, further exacerbating disparities [19]. People with disabilities often encounter state violence through neglect, abuse, and lack of access to essential services [20]. Ableism intersects with other social factors, such as gender, sexuality, and race, making disabled people with other marginalized backgrounds even more susceptible to harm while facing barriers to justice and support. Low-income and working-class women in need of welfare support or safety nets, are disproportionality affected by state surveillance, which puts them at risk of being placed under state custody [21].

By examining state violence against minoritized gender and sexual categories through an intersectional lens, we hope to construct a more comprehensive, analytically sharpened, and politically nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by diverse communities. Here, a historical-intersectional approach could help reveal the intricate ways in which gender- and sexuality-based violence have been perpetuated not only by contemporary state institutions and social dynamics but also by local histories of past social change, historical shifts in legislation, wars, and revolutions that shift cultural, social, and legal repertoires, which form the state and society's attitudes to gender and sexuality.

The legacies of colonialism and Western imperialism, in particular, bear deep imprints on various state formations and institutions and cast an enduring shadow over gender-based state violence in many regions. Colonial powers propagated patriarchal norms that subjugated women, enforcing rigid gender roles and justifying their marginalization. Today, these entrenched structures continue to persist, underpinning violence against women to maintain patriarchal hegemony. While it is absolutely pivotal to take critical note of these specific developments and to challenge any form of Eurocentric conceptualization of gender, sexuality, or the state as such, it is equally important to recognize the risk of cultural relativism being invoked to justify practices that have harmed women, or gender and sexual minorities, making it arduous to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems for all. Such a perspective, for instance, risks perpetuating the notion that women's rights are subordinate to cultural traditions, thereby silencing the voices of those who suffer under the burden of state-inflicted violence [22,23].

As much as it is important to further trace, locate, understand, and assess the extent to which (neo)colonialism has led and continues to lead to widespread violence, postcolonial and intersectional feminist scholars have voiced their dissent against narratives that depict women and other marginalized groups inhabiting the Global South as a uniformly victimized collective. Within these narratives, women in the Global South tend to be construed as subjects of oppression stemming from unchanging and monolithic cultural traditions, rendering them passive and incapable of resisting and achieving emancipation [24,25]. The application of such a humanitarian paradigm within 'white savior' discourses is fraught with complexities when viewed through the epistemological and analytical lens of postcolonial feminism. This is due to an existing tendency of such humanitarian endeavors to perpetuate the marginalization of non-Western populations and social groups.

Against this complex background, this Special Issue explores different dimensions of intersectional state violence against women as a global challenge while simultaneously appreciating the contextual and historical differences that shape its expression in diverse societies. While recognizing some of the shared aspects of state violence against gendered and sexual groups worldwide, we must also embrace the unique cultural, political, and social landscapes that give rise to distinct forms of violence. In this way, we may be able to avoid some of the biases and existing colonial narratives in the Western academy.

Overview of Contributions

This volume contains articles that address gender- and sexuality-based state violence in Iran, Ireland, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Turkey. As guest editors of this Special Issue, we deliberately aimed to invite contributions from authors and different regions from around the world, and while we are beyond delighted by the wide scope of topics and contexts that our contributors bring to the fore in this Special Issue, we also (self)critically take note of the fact that our volume still exhibits (a) an overrepresentation of Europe as a site of study and (b) an underrepresentation of both authors and case studies from many regions in the Global South, most notably from the African continent.

This Special Issue consists of nine articles, each covering a different aspect of gender- and sexuality-based state violence. Arpita Chakraborty and Virve Repo's paper, 'Carceralities and Approved Gender Violence: The Case of Direct Provision in Ireland', explores the way the system of processing asylum seekers in Ireland (called Direct Provision) and its state-approved carceral practices become sites of violence for populations who already experience high levels of precarity [26]. In this paper, Chakraborty and Repo investigate government and non-governmental policy reports, reports from migrant organizations, the Irish Refugee Council, and the Irish Immigration Council. In their analysis, they show the gendered aspects of carcerality and the way it impacts the lives of women, mothers, and survivors of sexual violence, as well as women's access to reproductive and mental health care services and facilities.

Ladan Rahbari's paper, titled 'Legitimating Misogyny and Femicide: Legal Himpathy and (State) Violence against Women in Iran' explores the intersection of traditional cultural beliefs and legal misogyny [27]. Rahbari uses (media) content analysis and cyberethnography to investigate the state, media, and online users' reactions to a highly mediatized case of uxoricide in Iran. Using the concept of himpathy, coined by philosopher Kate Manne, Rahbari delves into investigating the role of the law and state in the normalization and perpetuation of violence committed by men against women in the name of patriarchal honor, called *gheirat* in the Farsi language, in contemporary Iran. Rahbari argues that interpersonal gendered violence in Iran, especially violence perpetrated by men against women, can only be understood in relation to the Iranian law and the state's attitude to gender.

Chloé Roegiers (Mayeux), Sawitri Saharso, Evelien Tonkens, and Jonathan Darling's co-authored paper titled 'Institutional Solidarity in The Netherlands: Examining the Role of Dutch Policies in Women with Migration Backgrounds' Decisions to Leave a Violent Relationship' uses data from interviews with women using shelter services as well as social workers to show that in the Netherlands, despite existing domestic violence policies, there are institutional barriers that make it difficult to leave a violent partner, notably for women arriving in the Netherlands as marriage migrants [28]. The authors argue that there is a lack of institutional solidarity from the state towards this group of women, which significantly constrains their opportunities to access a safe future. This is of particular concern to the authors, given that the Netherlands presents itself as believing in equality and safe resources for every person in the country, regardless of whether they are citizens or not.

In the article, 'From Theory to Action: A Saudi Arabian Case Study of Feminist Academic Activism against State Oppression', Lana Sirri explores the role of academic activism, in particular the role of Hatoon Ajwad al-Fassi, in fighting gendered inequalities and the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia. She demonstrates how women navigate the realms of academia and activism to reshape gender dynamics and shape their nation's modernization trajectory [29]. Sirri argues that in contexts like Saudi Arabia, academic activism is a

core instrument to unveil and target state-sponsored violence through informed research and frontline advocacy. This academic activism is also instrumental in challenging and deconstructing the persistent neo-Orientalist stereotyping of Saudi women in feminist scholarship.

In 'Contesting State-Led Patriarchy—The Drivers, Demands, and Dynamics of Women's Participation in the Gezi Uprisings in Turkey 2013', Nora Stein, Janet Kursawe, and Denis Köhler investigate Turkish women's motivations to participate in Gezi Park protests in Istanbul (Türkiye) in 2013. They argue that the state's biopolitical interventions in the private lives of its citizens and attempts to reinstate and bolster conservative gender norms have played a role in mobilizing women against the state [30]. Stein, Kursawe, and Köhler interpret Gezi protests as an opportunity for women to reclaim their right to space and their agency within it. They show that the state-enforced change in the public gender discourse, which reinforces the marginalization and discrimination of women in the public sphere, does not only victimize women but also incentivizes them to reclaim their positions in society as dynamic agents.

In "Festival y Protesta": The Integral Role of Protesting State Violence in Celebrating Puerto Rican Women and Feminists', Amaury J. Rijo Sánchez describes how the celebration of International Working Women's Day in Puerto Rico presents not only an opportunity to celebrate and make visible the achievements of Puerto Rican women and people, but also to strategically protest the large-scale and harmful attacks of the United States and Puerto Rico's governing double-bind onto minority Puerto Rican populations [31]. Relying mostly on ethnographic research, Rijo Sanchez's research shows that feminists in Puerto Rico build communities grounded in social and environmental justice and sustain the livelihood of their social movement communities against government-authored repression and erasure.

Vrindavani Avila and Jennifer Elyse James's paper, 'Controlling reproduction and disrupting family formation: California women's prisons and the violent legacy of eugenics', focuses on forced sterilizations in California state prisons in the United States [32]. The authors studied the case over the past two decades, linking reproduction and the nuclear family to racial capitalism and eugenics ideology. They argue that eugenics peaked with the forcible sterilization of 'deviant' bodies, and that its violent ideas persist. Using a reproductive justice lens, this paper argues that prisons perpetuate eugenic legacies and advocates for abolition to end reproductive oppression.

In the article, 'Polish mother and (not) her children: intersectional state-violence against minors in Poland', Aleksandra Sygnowska examines the political responsibility of Polish right-wing female politicians associated with the ruling Law and Justice Party in the context of state-sanctioned violence related to LGBT and immigration issues [33]. The author argues that amid the nationalist surge in Poland, women using anti-LGBT and anti-immigration discourses help legitimize discriminatory state practices, thereby reinforcing a white, Christian, and heteronormative identity. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, the author investigates how female politicians adopt the narrative of a 'Polish mother' on a mission to save a 'child in danger' to advance their agendas. The analysis demonstrates that anti-LGBT and anti-immigration discourses are significant areas of women's political engagement, showing that women exercise their agency in supporting discriminatory state policies.

Conny Roggeband and Andrea Krizsán's paper 'The Violent Implications of Opposition to the Istanbul Convention' examines campaigns against the Istanbul Convention, highlighting their role in obstructing ratification and negatively impacting women's rights activists [34]. These highly gendered and hostile attacks not only hinder activists' work but also threaten their well-being and safety. The paper explores how such campaigns, as part of broader anti-gender movements, constitute gendered political violence.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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