

Crime, (In)Justice, Human Rights University of the West Indies and University of Leicester International Summer School, 5–10 June 2023



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Editorial

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Focusing on international interdisciplinary collaborations, this special edition of the LIAS working paper series showcases a series of reflections, articles and poems from participants at the 2023 University of West Indies–University of Leicester International Summer School, held at the University of Leicester and hosted by the School of Criminology. In the first week of June 2023, Dr Sonjah Stanley Niaah (University of West Indies, Mona) and Professor Michael A. Bucknor (University of Alberta) joined Leicester academics Dr Tammy Ayres, Dr Lucy Evans and Professor Martin Halliwell to co-deliver an intensive week-long cross-disciplinary programme, with an emphasis on both interdisciplinary exploration and professional development.

The International Summer School was conceived in the late 2010s as a high-level initiative to anchor and foster research and teaching collaborations between the University of Leicester and the University of the West Indies. The first summer school was held at Leicester in 2019, and in 2023 we were very pleased to welcome over twenty students from three continents working in a range of disciplines, spanning Criminology, English, History, Politics, Cultural Studies and Sociology. Aimed at postgraduates and early career researchers from (and beyond) the Caribbean and the UK with an interest in global and transcultural studies, and with a background in any discipline across the arts, humanities and social sciences, the 2023 summer school culminated in a researcher-led conference where attendees presented their work-in-progress research to their peers. These presentations have led to this special issue that includes articles, reflections and poems from the mini-conference.

The focus of the 2023 summer school on ‘Crime, (In)justice, and Human rights’ explored three concepts that are deeply interconnected and influenced by a range of factors, including colonial histories, economic conditions, social inequalities, political contexts, and cultural intersectionalities. This special issue demonstrates how addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening legal frameworks, promoting social equity, enhancing law enforcement practices, developing transcultural expressions of positionality, and supporting civil society initiatives by providing valuable insights into understanding and addressing these complex issues in a holistic and context-sensitive manner.

This holistic, yet contextual, approach is reflected in the methodologies deployed by the contributions to this special issue. This ranges from the use of literary concepts, the creative voice and visual culture to historical approaches, ethnographic peace research and interview techniques that capture the lived experiences of those being researched. These diverse methods are necessary when exploring complex and nuanced topics like those covered in the special edition. While not used in any of these essays – yet capturing the spirit of the 2023 summer school – Carinya Sharples’ reflection discusses ‘liming’ as a methodology to conduct interviews, which is not only culturally sensitive but is a natural conversation rather than a formal question-and-answer format, allowing participants to feel more relaxed and willing to share personal experiences or opinions, and often leading to better data quality. More broadly, the array of methods represented here not only reflects the interdisciplinarity of the participants and their own lived experiences, but also their geographical journeys, arriving at the summer school from the Caribbean, North America, Europe and Africa.

The special issue begins with a poem by Kay Tracey called ‘Black Me’ from a series titled ‘Poetry of Soul and Poetic Justice’. In this poem, Tracey introduces the issue of antiblack racism as evidence of ‘the afterlife of slavery’ (Hartman 2007: 6) that still imposes limits on Black subjects in the contemporary moment. To tackle this injustice, the poet proposes afro-futurist dreams of freedom as crucial to Black survival. The following article on the Syrian War by Raad Khair Allah explores the intersection of feminism and

the Syrian War, to shed light on the experiences of women and children. Beginning with the image of a child and a doll, this article urges all readers to recognise and address the unique challenges faced by women and children in conflict zones and it advocates for their rights, empowerment, and meaningful participation in shaping post-war societies. Kay Tracey's second poem, 'Resilience', which follows this article, imagines strategies of resilience, especially for Black female subjects, who, of necessity, must refuse the limiting ontologies associated with Black lives. In the various scenarios of 'living-while-Black', Tracey suggests the importance of seizing control over self-representation to counter the narratives of criminalization, dehumanization and 'thingification' (Césaire) of Black subjects.

Situating her Black female persona within the Black Canadian context, Tracey alludes to two prominent Black Caribbean Canadian freedom fighters (women writers), Lillian Allen and Dionne Brand, through the metaphor of the door. In her 1969 poem, 'I Fight Back', Allen interrogates the Canadian national anthem as not promoting inclusiveness, through the line, 'we stand on guard for thee', by showing that when Jamaican domestic workers arrived in Canada (starting in the 1950s), they 'found the doors of opportunity / well guarded' (Allen 1993: 139). Tracey also invokes Brand's metaphoric use of the 'door of no return' to represent the ongoing sense of dispossession, unbelonging, precarity and dispersal of Black subjects. Consequently, Black resilience 'in the wake' (Sharpe) of transatlantic slavery, forces us to counter the systemic 'dark matters' (Browne) of surveillance and circumscription by employing strategies such as 'sousveillance', as a 'freedom practice' of resilience (Browne 2015: 21).

Tracey's poetic intervention then leads to a reflection by Carinya Sharples on their attendance at the summer school entitled 'Truths and Reconciliation', which illustrates the difficulties and discomforts associated with dealing with the emotive and sensitive issues covered in the sessions. This is followed by another poem, 'Distortion', by Kay Tracey, that confronts the legacy of racial harm, both epistemological and psychological. Using the tropes of the mirror and the mask, Tracy explores psychological harm to Black subjects via the fairy tale conceptions of beauty ('Mirror Mirror on the Wall') and humanity ('Othered here and there'). Determined by frames of racist reflections, Black subjects are required to conform to these dominant mirror distortions of the self. In order to be safe and to remain sane, Black subjects must play the game of 'hide and seek' with racialized conformity, by donning Du Boisian double-consciousness or by wearing Fanonian masks. The poem ends by addressing and calling to account the beneficiaries of systemic racism: 'you refuse to see the harm that you have caused'.

The next two articles in this special issue focus on African contexts. The first looks at men and boys as victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, while the second examines health workers in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) care for refugees. In the first of these articles on masculinity and wars, focusing on male violence during times of political conflict and unrest, Linda Nelimah Wakhungu highlights the gap in our understanding of how sexual violence targets and affects men and how culture

and stereotypes shape men's silence about sexual and gender-based violence, particularly in Africa. Recognizing the ways in which sexual violence affects men is vital for creating an inclusive, supportive and effective response to sexual and gender-based violence. The specific Kenyan context is important in this article, but it also raises transcultural issues about the need to challenge harmful stereotypes, improve support services, inform policy, promote mental health, foster gender equality, and encourage comprehensive research and awareness. The following article by Roman Gnaegi, draws on narratives, lived experiences and demographic data to offer insight into the roles and challenges faced by frontline health and humanitarian professionals at the Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in northwest Uganda as the first point of contact by survivors, to illustrate how SGBV is approached today within an East African context and what frontline professionals see as priorities for improvement.

The next contribution is a poem titled 'Consciousness' by Kay Tracey, a reflection by Coya Halley on her experiences of the summer school, 'What Happens when Academics Self-Organise', followed by the final poem in Kay Tracey's series, 'Transitions'. In these two poems, Tracey continues the exploration of racial capitalism as central to the colonialist project, as introduced in her previous poems. She tackles the unjust, racist practices as vital to the intention of the guardians of systemic racism to impose limits, instil fear, initiate dispossession, and to create the conditions for Black death. Against such perils, Tracey invites hope through Black vitality, an awakening consciousness, and Black imaginings of new epistemologies. Exploring these systemic limits and the theme of dispossession, the special issue closes with an article by Shareed Mohammed illustrating how migrants are treated in Trinidad and Tobago, specifically Venezuelan migrants. Mohammed uses the theoretical and creative insights of Guyanese writer Wilson Harris to demonstrate how complex and multifaceted the migrancy situation is and to identify the contemporary legal, social, economic, and humanitarian challenges arising from it.

Together, these critical and creative contributions show that only by linking context-specific and transcultural insights is it possible to expand our contemporary awareness of the socio-cultural factors and lived experiences faced by communities experiencing infringements of their human rights. At times, injustices are perpetrated by a failing or unresponsive system at local, regional or state levels. However, in some instances, those systems of governmentality are directly implicated in crimes that go unnoticed or unpunished, or by perpetuating structural inequalities and forms of racism, sexism and homophobia that jeopardise lives and livelihoods.

This special issue focuses specifically on the intertwined themes of 'Crime, (In)justice, Human Rights', but it also brings to the fore questions of inequality on both structural and interpersonal levels that align with Kay Tracey's expression in 'Resilience' of 'segregation, institutionalization, disengagement, and other forms of barriers that threaten my existence'. This poetic expression is not just a leitmotif for the themes explored here, but for the topics discussed by postgraduates and early career

researchers participating in other meetings of the International Summer School, addressing themes of ‘Global Health and Environments’ (University of Leicester, 2019), ‘Cultures and Politics of Protest’ (University of West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 2022), and ‘Gender, Violence and Conflict’ (University of West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, 2024). As we look forward to the next meeting of the summer school to be held at Leicester in June 2025, in which we will be exploring questions of migration and diaspora, we are pleased to edit this special issue as a living document of the debates, reflections and creativity that animated the 2023 International Summer School.

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