

Call for papers

**Trusting academic concepts, trusting the academic community:
Challenges in the context of escalating violence in Israel-Gaza**

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The recent escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza has not only cost and is still jeopardising thousands of lives. It has also unleashed the [logics of war discourse](#) in societies around the globe (Pfeifer and Weipert-Fenner 2023). Besides mechanisms of collectivisation regarding populations directly involved in the armed conflict and supposed supporters abroad, there is an increased compulsion to profess allegiance for one side or another. Even though there seems to be a lack of and latent demand for a better understanding of what is going on, more complex explanations of the conflict and the recent escalation are sometimes unwelcome in a hastened public discourse, sometimes actively muted, sometimes drawn into the logics of war discourse and read as inescapably political statements. Academic concepts such as genocide, terrorism or war have always had a role in public discourse but are now becoming politicised at a new level.

To be sure, concepts often emerge from, or are used in, non-academic, everyday language and political debate. Conflict actors use terms in specific ways to generate legitimacy for themselves and their actions, or delegitimise enemies. But the recent discourse dynamics regarding Israel and Gaza have carried the political struggles over meaning from formal and street politics to the heart of academic contestations. The politicisation of concepts has travelled back into the academic community and inflicted harm upon, sometimes completely undermined previously existing trust relations. Open letters are being written, and in media comments, public statements or social media contributions, the use of or refusal to use specific terminologies of violence regarding Israel, Gaza and Palestine makes scholars suspicious of a political agenda. Currently, academic statements are always also readable as political statements as it is barely possible to use analytical language without being ascribed a positioning on one of only two available sides. This increases the felt need to actually take a public position – even though such statements rarely reach the level of differentiation that academia usually strives for.

A generalised suspicion regarding these purported political attitudes has yielded manifest conflicts within the academic community. Reductionist attributions of difference between “liberals” and “post-colonialists”, between “old white scholars” and “Global South perspectives”, between the “established” and the “precarious”, between “discursive hegemons” and “speechless subaltern” are being revived, friendships are being questioned and long-standing relations of exchange in an “agree to disagree” mode now seem to have reached their limits and are sometimes foreclosed. Academics are beginning to boycott countries, institutions or universities deemed not to be active and vocal in the right ways; censorship and [self-censorship have reached university campuses](#).

Against this background, the proposed workshop he proposed workshop **aims also to build trust within the transnational academic community** in a situation of conflict. How can epistemic trust be maintained or rebuilt in these times? Can we still trust concepts that have been politicised and are now omnipresent in public discourse? And how can we still trust colleagues who differ regarding their analysis of how academic concepts are being used and misused in the ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza?

We want to bring together international experts on political violence and conflict research from various disciplines. Besides discussing empirical usage of these concepts, the workshop is intended to increase **epistemic trust**, as well as allow an open, trust-based discussion between colleagues that increases our understanding of how hitherto analytical concepts have become politicised. It has become very difficult to enter a controversial academic conversation on the topic without eventually succumbing to the strong forces of war discourse. Nonetheless, we want to try.

We propose to draw on our academic strength and use the trustworthy process of knowledge production which is marked, among others, by the following steps: disciplined debate, respectful discussion, well-founded argumentation, conceptual clarity, empirical evidence, methodological rigor, weighing of reasons, differentiated judgment, willingness to revise in the light of the better argument, openness to criticism. We aim to provide a space in which some of the **now most contested but still core concepts in the study of political violence** can be revisited. Among these are the following forms of structural, state and non-state violence (preliminary, non-exhaustive list and typology):

Structural violence	State violence	Non-state violence
	- Apartheid	- Rebellion
- Antisemitism	- Occupation	- Resistance
- Islamophobia	- Genocide	- Terrorism
- Racism		- War
	- Self-defence	
	- Repression	

We invite contributions from peace and conflict studies, political science, sociology, international relations, international law, but also linguistics, cultural studies, philosophy, anthropology and related disciplines. Papers should address the academic and political use of one or several concepts of violence and we ask authors to answer three **questions**:

1. How is the concept/term studied in your academic field, what are established/contested understandings and approaches?
2. How is the concept used in the context of Israel-Gaza?
3. To what effect?

Our intention is to hold a closed workshop to create a safe space to discuss these matters with a limited number of participants and a selection of scholars. Travel, accommodation and meals can be covered for participants. This workshop aims at an academic debate. Abstracts will be selected according to **the following criteria**:

1. Do they build on thorough knowledge and academic expertise on a concept of political violence?
2. Do they answer the three questions raised above?
3. As a whole, are a variety of scholarly opinions within the state of the art represented and does the composition of the group suffice different dimensions of diversity?

Only those who **circulate papers** (8-12 pages) ahead of the workshop will be able to give a talk at the workshop. We hope that all participants will read the papers in advance. Furthermore, we intend to compose a special issue with expanded versions of the papers by those who are interested in publishing and submit it to a journal in critical studies of political violence and security.

We aim at the following **timeline**:

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| 15 January 2024: | Deadline for abstracts |
| 22 January 2024: | Selection decision communicated |
| 12 April 2024: | Deadline for paper drafts |
| 2-3 May 2024 (full days): | Workshop @ Frankfurt |
| 30 September 2024: | Deadline for revised papers and submission to journal |

Please send 250-word abstracts and a short bio to pfeifer@soz.uni-frankfurt.de and timothy.williams@unibw.de by 15 January 2024.