



EMERALDHANDBOOKS

THE EMERALD INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S ACTS OF VIOLENCE

EDITED BY

STACY BANWELL, LYNSEY BLACK,
DAWN K. CECIL, YANYI K. DJAMBA,
SITAWA R. KIMUNA, EMMA MILNE,
LIZZIE SEAL AND ERIC Y. TENKORANG



The Emerald International Handbook of Feminist Perspectives on Women's Acts of Violence

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EDITED BY

STACY BANWELL

University of Greenwich

LYNSEY BLACK

Maynooth University, Ireland

DAWN K. CECIL

University of South Florida, USA

YANYI K. DJAMBA

California State University Sacramento, USA

SITAWA R. KIMUNA

East Carolina University, USA

EMMA MILNE

Durham University, UK

LIZZIE SEAL

University of Sussex, UK

And

ERIC Y. TENKORANG

Memorial University, Canada



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Contributors

Catarina Barata is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (Portugal) carrying out research on obstetric violence (OV), focussing on perceptions, discourses and representations related to experiences of OV, women's reproductive rights activism and the transformative power of the arts.

<https://lisboa.academia.edu/CatarinaBarata>

<https://www.cienciavita.pt/portal/en/AD1E-446D-9816>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6478-8007>

Joanna Bourke is Professor of History at Birkbeck, University of London, and a Fellow of the British Academy. She is the Principal Investigator on a Wellcome Trust-funded project entitled 'SHaME' (Sexual Harms and Medical Encounters). She is the prize-winning author of 15 books, as well as over 120 articles in academic journals. Among others, she is the author of *Rape: A History from the 1860s to the Present* (2007), *What it Means To Be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present* (2011) and *Disgrace: Global Reflections on Sexual Violence* (2022). Her books have been translated into Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, Portuguese, Czech, Turkish and Greek, and *Disgrace* has been published as an audiobook.

Michael Branch is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice in the Department of Sociology, Criminology, and Human Services at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. He received his PhD in Sociology from Syracuse University in 2022. His research focuses on the cultural meanings associated with and attached to policing and the ways in which policing structures the experience of everyday life. His current work is focussed on the impacts of police violence in rural communities in Upstate New York and the locationally specific characteristics that render such violence difficult to notice and contest.

Dr Stephanie Brown is an Economic and Social Research Council Fellow at the Cambridge Institute of Criminology. She is also a member of The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. Stephanie is a historian of crime and criminal justice, with an interest in the intersection between the law and social attitudes. Her research explores the dynamics of prosecution and the constructions, and deconstructions, of homicide. She investigates the ways that prosecution is shaped by cultural ideas about violence, gender, ethnicity and

socio-economic status. Stephanie has published on the role of race and nationality in the press coverage of condemned men in nineteenth-century Wales and on premodern homicide verdicts.

Denise Buiten is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Social Justice at The University of Notre Dame Australia, and a Senior Research Associate of the University of Johannesburg. Her research focusses on understanding gender-based violence and tracing the evolving discourses surrounding gendered violence in media, policy and public debates. She is especially interested in forms of violence not always recognised or addressed as gender-based, such as filicide, familicide, and technology facilitated abuse. Her book, *Familicide, Gender and the Media*, is being published by Springer in 2022/23. In it, she offers a feminist sociological account of familicide, drawing together a sociological feminist lens on both mental illness/distress and theories of patriarchy, power and control to understand familicide. The book also analyses the ways familicide-suicide is constructed in the Australian news media. In particular, it highlights the contours of the mental illness/distress lens in news reporting, the false binary constructed between mental illness and gender and the ways children and people with disabilities are subject to representational violence in journalism on familicide.

Carmen Hein de Campos Collaborating Professor at the Autonomous University Center of Brazil (UniBrasil). Her research interests are feminist criminology, feminist theory and violence against women, and she has authored *Criminologia Feminista: Teoria Feminista e Crítica às Criminologias (Feminist Criminology: feminist theory and critique of criminologies)* Lumen Juris, 2017, 2020, *Criminologias Feministas: Perspectivas Latino-Americanas*, Lumen Juris, 2020 (*Feminist criminologies: Latin American perspectives*), Contact: charmcampos@gmail.com.

Meda Chesney-Lind, PhD, teaches Women's Studies at the University of Hawaii. Nationally recognized for her work on women and crime, her testimony before Congress resulted in national support of gender responsive programming for girls in the juvenile justice system. In 2013, the Western Society of Criminology named an award after her honoring "significant contributions to the fields of gender, crime and justice" and made her the inaugural recipient. In 2017, she was elected President of the American Society of Criminology; she is currently serving as past President of the Society.

Marta Codina, MSc, is a Criminologist, Psychologist and PhD candidate and research fellow at the University of Barcelona. Her research interests focus on violence, victimisation, intellectual disabilities and mental health.

Leticia Couto, from the University of Hull in the United Kingdom, is a Criminology PhD student working on a project to improve police response to domestic abuse, for which she was awarded a scholarship. Her focus has been directed towards an in-depth analysis of why victims choose to withdraw their support from investigations as well as the improvement of victim satisfaction surveys being applied by the police, in order to better understand what victims want from

service, and how their voices can be heard whilst also keeping them safe. In her free time, she also teaches criminology-related subjects at the University of Hull.

Diego A. Díaz-Faes, MSc, is a Criminologist, PhD candidate and research fellow at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Barcelona. His research interests focus on victim–offender overlap, development, mental health and bias violence.

Elaine Farrell is Reader in History at Queen’s University Belfast. She is a social historian with particular interests in women’s history, crime and deviance in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ireland. Her prize-winning monographs include *Women, Crime and Punishment in Ireland: Life in the Nineteenth-Century Convict Prison* (Cambridge, 2020) and *‘A Most Diabolical Deed’: Infanticide and Irish Society, 1850–1900* (Manchester, 2013). With Leanne McCormick, she leads the AHRC-funded Bad Bridget project, which examines criminal and deviant Irish women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century North America.

Katherine Farrimond is Senior Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, UK. Her research explores gender and genre in contemporary popular culture. Her monograph *The Contemporary Femme Fatale* was published with Routledge in 2017, and she has published numerous articles and book chapters on gender and sexuality in relation to the Gothic, horror, teen cinema and noir.

Dr Keshab Giri (he/him/his) is a Lecturer in International Relations at The University of Sydney. Dr Giri’s research has been published in journals like *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Studies Review*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Global Studies Quarterly*. His PhD thesis, ‘Experiences of Female Ex-Combatants in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Endless Battles and Resistance.’ received the 2022 Thelma Hunter Gender and Politics Ph.D. Prize from the Australian Political Science Studies Association (APSA). His research interests include women combatants, intersectionality, gender and war, violent extremism, leftist insurgencies, critical security studies, rebel governance, governance of intimacy in the rebel group, the geopolitics of South Asia, and digital sovereignty. His book, ‘Intersectionality and Experiences of Female Combatants’ is coming out in 2024.

Daniel J. R. Grey is Head of the Department of Social Sciences and Education and Principal Lecturer in History, University of Hertfordshire, UK. His research focuses on the intersections between gender, law and medicine in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and India, particularly relating to the history of infanticide.

Rebecca Gulowski is a sociologist, conflict and violence researcher and systemic (trauma) therapist. She works as an anti-violence and skills trainer and psycho-social counsellor with women who perpetrate violence. Her research focuses on the sociology of conflict and violence, sexualised violence, intimate partner violence, (female) perpetration, victimhood and bystander, as well as qualitative methods of social research.

Kenzie Hanson, MA, is research assistant in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. Her research focuses on victims and perpetrators of intimate partner abuse, homicide and homicide-suicide.

Josphine Hapazari is a sociology lecturer at the National University of Lesotho. She is a Zimbabwean female based in Lesotho. Her PhD thesis in Sociology, examined the drivers, dynamics and mitigation strategies of sexual violence against women in rural and urban areas. Her research interests include African masculinities, gender-based violence, vulnerable groups such as older persons, rural women and girls, as well as research on migration and higher education studies. Dr Josphine Hapazari has published numerous articles in international peer-reviewed journals and has presented papers at local and international conferences. She is a member of the South African Sociological Association.

Alexis Henshaw is an Associate Professor at Troy University. She is the author of *Why Women Rebel* (Routledge 2017) and co-author of *Insurgent Women* (Georgetown University Press 2019). Her work on female combatants in armed conflict has been published in journals including *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* and *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

Itoiz Rodrigo Jusué, Loughborough University, UK, has a PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of Roehampton. Her doctoral thesis examines the imaginaries of terrorism and radicalisation in the British ‘war on terror’. She holds a master’s degree in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths, University of London, and in Feminist and Gender Studies from the University of the Basque Country. Currently, she is an ESRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at Loughborough University.

Emmaleena Käkälä (PhD, MSc, MA Hons) is a researcher at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde and at the Institute for Global Health and Development at Queen Margaret University, UK. Her participatory PhD research examined refugee women’s changing vulnerabilities to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and other forms of gender-based violence from a migration perspective. Her related publications include *Strategies of denial: women’s experiences of culture of disbelief and discretion in the treatment of asylum claims on the grounds of female genital cutting* (JEMS, 2022), *Rethinking female genital cutting: from culturalist to structuralist framework for challenging violence against women* (Malmö University, 2020) and *Narratives of power and powerlessness: cultural competence in social work with asylum seekers and refugees* (European Journal of Social Work, 2020). Her research interests are in the areas of migration and citizenship, refugee integration, gendered inequalities and gender-based violence.

Premalatha Karupiah is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia. She teaches Research Methodology and Statistics. Her research interests are in the areas of beauty culture, femininity, Tamil movies and issues related to the Indian diaspora. In 2022 she co-edited a book entitled *A Kaleidoscope of Malaysian Indian Women’s Lived Experiences*. Email: prema@usm.my

Sitawa Kimuna is a Professor of Sociology at East Carolina University. Her research interests include gender-based violence, sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS,

immigration and labour force participation, race and ethnic relations, and ageing in sub-Saharan Africa.

Tammy Kovich is currently a PhD candidate in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University. Her research interests include women's participation in revolt, rebellion and revolution; politics of the riot; gender and political violence; revolutionary feminism; anarchist history, theory, and practice; and social movements.

Gabrielle Pannetier Leboeuf is a PhD candidate in Hispanic Studies at the Université de Montréal and Sorbonne Université, where she works under the supervision of James Cisneros and Nancy Berthier. She is a member of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Contemporary Iberian Worlds (CRIMIC). In her dissertation, she works on the representations of women in Mexican B movies and videoclips about narcotrafficking (*narcocorridos*). Her main research interests are Mexican audiovisual products, female empowerment, gendered necropolitics, feminist film theory, cultural studies, and decolonial studies. She codirected the dossier 'Iberian and Latin American Views on the Transnational' (2019) in the journal *Iberic@l*.

Alexandra Lysova, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. She has studied domestic violence, including violence against women and children, for over 15 years in Russia and currently in Canada. Recently, she has focussed on men's experiences of partner abuse.

José Miguel Rojo Martínez, University of Murcia, Spain, is a predoctoral researcher. His field of study is related to affective polarisation, identities and emotions. He has an MA in Applied Political Analysis. He has been a post-graduate fellow at the Sociological Research Center (CIS) of the Government of Spain. He currently holds a predoctoral contract from the Spanish Ministry of Universities (FPU). He is a member of the Political Communication Laboratory (LABCOM) of the University of Murcia.

Dr Ashleigh McFeeters (FHEA, PhD, MA, BA [Hons]) is a Senior Researcher at the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, UK. At Queen's University Belfast she was the Module Convenor for: The Politics of Deeply Divided Societies and The Legacy of Conflict; and the Postdoctoral Research Fellow on the ESRC project Apologies, Abuses and Dealing with the Past which explored apologies' roles in dealing with the Troubles, institutional child sex abuse and the economic crisis across the island of Ireland. Her PhD in Sociology investigated female ex-combatants' roles in conflict transformation in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka. Her research interests include the victim-perpetrator paradigm, victimology, gender and criminology, women and violence, female ex-combatants and the media.

Salvador Moreno Moreno, University of Murcia, Spain, is a predoctoral researcher. His field of study is related to the radical right, political communication and discourse studies. He has an MA in Applied Political Analysis. He has been a postgraduate fellow at the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) of

the Government of Spain. He is a member of the Political Communication Laboratory (LABCOM) of the University of Murcia.

Belinda Morrissey is the author of *When Women Kill: Questions of Agency and Subjectivity* (2003). She has written many journal articles and chapters on representations of women who kill, in particular, focussing on portrayals of agency. She works at Federation University, Australia, as a Lecturer in Literature.

Ediomo-Ubong Nelson is an associate researcher with the Centre for Research and Information on Substance Abuse in Nigeria. His research focuses on the intersections of criminal justice and public health in relation to structurally vulnerable populations (e.g. sex workers, people who use drugs). He has published many papers in peer-reviewed journals.

Cristina Rego de Oliveira Professor of Law. Her research interests are violence against women, criminology and restorative justice. She has authored *Justiça Restaurativa Aplicada: um estudo de caso de experiências de Brasil e de Portugal*, Blimunda, 2021 (*Restorative Justice in practice: a study case of Brazilian and Portuguese experiences*). Contact: cris.regodeoliveira@usp.br

Noemí Pereda, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Victimology at the University of Barcelona and heads the Research Group on Child and Adolescent Victimization (GREVIA). Her major areas of research interest are developmental victimology, and psychological trauma in children and adolescents.

Anais Ornelas Ramirez is a PhD candidate in Hispanic Studies at the Sorbonne Université, under the supervision of Nancy Berthier. She is a member of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Contemporary Iberian Worlds (CRIMIC). Her thesis explores gender constructs in *narcotelenovelas* and independent film about drug trafficking. Her main research interests are cultural studies, feminist film theory, decolonial studies and melodrama. She is the recipient of the 2022 COMEXUS-Fulbright-García Robles scholarship for Mexican Film Studies.

Tasha Ramirez is a PhD student at Georgia State University. Her research primarily examines the convergence of cognition and physiology on the trajectory of drug use with a specific focus on the process of recovery and desistance maintenance. As a peacemaking criminologist, she also conducts research that evaluates criminal justice drug treatment interventions, drug scheduling and drug-related sentencing practices.

Becky Ratero Greenberg is an educator and creative, with roots in Spain and the United States and semi-nomadic. She completed the GEMMA master's in Women's and Gender Studies at Utrecht University (Netherlands) and the University of Granada (Spain) in 2021, and has a BA from Rutgers University (USA) in History and Women's and Gender Studies. Her interests include queerness, affect theory, decolonial studies, Marxism and friendship.

Shampa Roy is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Miranda House, at University of Delhi, India. She has co-edited and contributed to *Towards Freedom: Critical Essays on Rabindranath Tagore's Home and the World*

(Orient Longman, 2007) and *'Bad' Women of Bombay Films* (Palgrave, 2019). She is the author of *Gender and Criminality in Bangla Crime Narratives: Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Palgrave, 2017) and *True Crime Writings in Colonial India* (Routledge, 2020). Her chapter 'Coloniality and Decoloniality' is part of the *Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Routledge, 2020).

Alice Pearl Sedziafa, Western University, Canada, is a Registered Nurse and PhD candidate specialising in Nursing Leadership in Health Promotion and Advanced Nursing Practice at Western University and a project coordinator for 'overcoming epidemics' Research Cluster at York University.

Melanie Sheehan holds an MA in Psychosocial Studies, a BSc in Criminal Justice and is a trained, qualified and accredited cognitive behavioural coach. Her background is in the probation service, where she supervised men and women convicted of high-risk sexual and violent offences before specialising in working with women. This specialism led to work in women's charities, where she drew on her experience in probation to develop and lead services to support women involved in the criminal justice system. She continues this work as a consultant to charities and as a personal development coach for women.

Stevie Simkin (MA, PhD) is Reader in Drama and Film at the University of Winchester where he has been teaching since 1995. He has published widely in the areas of early modern theatre, gender and violence, film regulation and censorship, and popular music. His books include several studies of Renaissance theatre including *Early Modern Tragedy and the Cinema of Violence* (Palgrave, 2005); *Straw Dogs* (2011) and *Basic Instinct* (2012) in the Palgrave *Controversies* series; *Cultural Constructions of the Femme Fatale: from Pandora's Box to Amanda Knox* (Palgrave, 2014) and most recently *What Makes the Monkey Dance: The Life and Music of Chuck Prophet and Green on Red* (Jawbone Press, 2020). He is currently working on another monograph, *The Ethics of Screen Violence*.

Vânia Simões is a lawyer, guest lecturer and PhD candidate in Law at the Nova School of Law of the Nova University Lisbon, Portugal. She conducts research on obstetric violence focussed on the legal concept of OV, its criminalisation and issues related to access to justice in situations of medical responsibility.

<https://www.cienciavita.pt/portal/en/3410-BBDC-DC6E>

Francisca Soromenho is a jurist, guest lecturer and PhD candidate in Law at the Lisbon Law School, University of Lisbon (Portugal), and is an associate research fellow of IURIS – Instituto de Investigação Interdisciplinar. She conducts research in critical legal theory, intersectionality and gender equality.

<https://www.cienciavita.pt/portal/en/3A15-837E-0332>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/francisca-s-98918996/>

Rian Sutton is an Online Course Facilitator in the Bachelor of Criminal Justice at the University of South Australia Online. She completed her PhD in the School of History, Classics & Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh. Her research

interests are in the areas of gender and crime, historical criminology, agency and comparative history.

Eric Y. Tenkorang is Professor of Sociology, cross-appointed to the Division of Community Health and Humanities. He is a Harry Frank Guggenheim Distinguished Scholar and a Member of the Royal Society of Canada (The College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists). Dr Tenkorang has served as a member of the Institute Advisory Board for Gender and Health of the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR). He is currently a member of the National Taskforce for Women's Economic Justice of the Canadian Centre for Women's Economic Empowerment (CCFWE), dedicated to dealing with economic abuse among Canadian women. He has broad research interests in population health, especially in limited-resource settings. This includes investigating the sexual and reproductive health of vulnerable and marginalised populations in sub-Saharan Africa. His most recent research has explored links between gender-based violence and health outcomes.

Maéva Thibeault is a Quebec Research Funds and Erasmus Mundus Scholar with a joint interdisciplinary master's degree in Women's and Gender Studies from Utrecht University (Netherlands) and the University of Granada (Spain). She holds a BA in Sociology and a BFA in Film Production from Concordia University (Canada). Her research interests include sex work, gender-based violence, sexual violence, abolition feminism and alternative forms of justice.

Satu Venäläinen currently works as a postdoctoral researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She defended her doctoral thesis in 2017, which focussed on media portrayals of women's violence and narratives of women imprisoned for violent crimes. After her PhD she has studied meaning-making around violence and intersectional distinctions in both online contexts and among welfare state professionals, with a specific focus on anti-feminist rhetoric and understandings of intimate partner violence, gender and men's victimisation.

Rosie White is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Literature, Theory and Popular Culture at Northumbria University. She has published widely on gender and popular culture, including two monographs: *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture* (Routledge 2007) and *Television Comedy and Femininity: Queering Gender* (I B Tauris 2018).

Claudia Mayordomo Zapata, University of Murcia, Spain, is a predoctoral researcher. Her field of study is related to democratic representation and gender. She has an MA in Applied Political Analysis. She has been a postgraduate fellow at the Sociological Research Center (CIS) of the Government of Spain. She currently holds a Predoctoral Contract (FPU) from the Spanish Ministry of Universities. She is a member of the Political Communication Laboratory (LABCOM) of the University of Murcia.

List of Contributors

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|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Stacy Banwell</i> | Greenwich University, UK |
| <i>Catarina Barata</i> | University of Lisbon, Portugal |
| <i>Lynsey Black</i> | Maynooth University, Ireland |
| <i>Joanna Bourke</i> | University of London, UK |
| <i>Michael Branch</i> | Hartwick College, USA |
| <i>Stephanie Emma Brown</i> | University of Cambridge, UK |
| <i>Denise Buiten</i> | University of Notre Dame Australia, Australia |
| <i>Dawn K. Cecil</i> | University of South Florida, USA |
| <i>Meda Chesney-Lind</i> | University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA |
| <i>Marta Codina</i> | Universitat de Barcelona, Spain |
| <i>Leticia Couto</i> | University of Hull, UK |
| <i>Carmen Hein de Campos</i> | Ritter dos Reis University Center, Brazil |
| <i>Cristina Rego de Oliveira</i> | Ritter dos Reis University Center, Brazil |
| <i>Diego A. Diaz-Faes</i> | Universitat de Barcelona, Spain |
| <i>Yanyi K. Djamba</i> | California State University Sacramento, USA |
| <i>Elaine Farrell</i> | Queen's University Belfast, UK |
| <i>Katherine Farrimond</i> | University of Sussex, UK |
| <i>Keshab Giri</i> | The University of Sydney, Australia |
| <i>Daniel J. R. Grey</i> | University of Hertfordshire, UK |
| <i>Rebecca Gulowski</i> | FTZ Muenchen. E.V., Germany |
| <i>Kenzie Hanson</i> | Simon Fraser University, Canada |
| <i>Josphine Hapazari</i> | National University of Lesotho, Lesotho |
| <i>Alexis Henshaw</i> | Troy University, USA |
| <i>Itoiz Rodrigo Jusué</i> | Loughborough University, UK |
| <i>Emmaleena Käkeliä</i> | University of Strathclyde, UK |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Premalatha Karupiah</i> | Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia |
| <i>Sitawa R. Kimuna</i> | East Carolina University, USA |
| <i>Tammy Kovich</i> | York University, Canada |
| <i>Gabrielle Pannetier Leboeuf</i> | Université de Montréal, Canada and Sorbonne Université, France |
| <i>Alexandra Lysova</i> | Simon Fraser University, Canada |
| <i>Ashleigh McFeeters</i> | Director AMF Research and Senior Researcher Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, UK |
| <i>Emma Milne</i> | Durham University, UK |
| <i>Salvador Moreno Moreno</i> | Universidad de Murcia, Spain |
| <i>Belinda Morrissey</i> | Federation University, Australia |
| <i>Ediomo-Ubong Nelson</i> | Centre for Research and Information on Substance Abuse, Nigeria |
| <i>Noemí Pereda</i> | Universitat de Barcelona, Spain |
| <i>Anaïs Ornelas Ramirez</i> | Sorbonne Université, France |
| <i>Tasha Ramirez</i> | Georgia State University, USA |
| <i>Becky Ratero Greenberg</i> | Utrecht University, Netherlands |
| <i>José Miguel Rojo Martínez</i> | Universidad de Murcia, Spain |
| <i>Shampa Roy</i> | University of Delhi, India |
| <i>Lizzie Seal</i> | University of Sussex, UK |
| <i>Alice Pearl Sedziafa</i> | Western University, Canada |
| <i>Melanie Sheehan</i> | MJS Consultancy & Coaching, UK |
| <i>Vânia Simões</i> | Nova School of Law, Portugal |
| <i>Stevie Simkin</i> | University of Winchester, UK |
| <i>Francisca Soromenho</i> | University of Lisbon, Portugal |
| <i>Rian Sutton</i> | University of South Australia, Australia |
| <i>Eric Y. Tenkorang</i> | Memorial University, Canada |
| <i>Maéva Thibeault</i> | Utrecht University, Netherlands |
| <i>Satu Venäläinen</i> | University of Helsinki, Finland |
| <i>Rosie White</i> | Northumbria University, UK |
| <i>Claudia Mayordomo Zapata</i> | Universidad de Murcia, Spain |

Introduction

Stacy Banwell, Lynsey Black, Dawn K. Cecil, Yanyi K. Djamba, Sitawa R. Kimuna, Emma Milne, Lizzie Seal and Eric Y. Tenkorang

Over the past 20 years, interest in women's violence has grown as an area of academic research and teaching across disciplines such as criminology, sociology, history, international relations, public health and film and literary studies. This handbook makes a timely contribution by acting as a comprehensive introduction to a wide range of international, interdisciplinary scholarship which applies feminist perspectives to the phenomenon of women's violence.

Violence is enabled and enacted by individuals, organisations and states with interconnections between these different levels (Collins, 1998, 2017). We adopt this multilevel understanding of violence in the handbook, bringing together contributions on interpersonal and intimate violence by women, women's violence as agents of institutions, and women's political violence as state and non-state actors. The handbook is international in scope with contributions from scholars across countries in the Global South and North.

Women's acts of violence are rarer than men's and frequently perceived as more shocking. Violence by women is regularly sensationalised and stigmatised, especially in media discourses. This sensationalisation and stigmatisation relies on and reproduces misogynistic tropes about violent women as 'evil', 'unnatural' and masculinised. The chapters in this handbook are written from a feminist perspective and eschew or deconstruct stereotypical portrayals in favour of more considered and complex analyses of the violence women enact and the relevance of their social and political positioning, as well as cultural understandings of womanhood and how these inform understandings of and responses to this violence.

Previous literature has emphasised that women's violence is frequently understood as deviant and transgressive, violating norms of ideal femininity. Such ideas are explored throughout the handbook in contributions which consider, for instance, the vilification and monsterisation of women who kill. These chapters tease out the ways in which violent women are profiled as unnatural and abject. The handbook therefore retains a focus on scholarship which considers the 'abnormality' of violent women while also including contributions which

demonstrate that women's violent acts can be normalised and made invisible, for example, when perpetrated during a professional role. Adding further nuance, various chapters address how, due to marginalisation across axes of race and class, certain women are not always presumed to be non-violent or perceived through norms of ideal femininity. The handbook explores how these assumptions can lead to over-criminalisation and harsh treatment within the criminal justice system. The significance of women's intersectional identities is a consistent theme throughout the handbook.

Running through the chapters too is the seemingly intractable problem of agency – including the obstacles to fully assigning agency to violent women as well as the frequently unwanted consequences when they *are* considered to have acted with agency and are punished more harshly. Throughout the handbook, authors grapple with questions of women's volitional capacity, considering difficult questions of how far we should consider the contexts in which women commit violence, which include structural oppression, domestic- and gender-based violence, and cultural norms. The contributions reveal the necessity of abandoning a binary view of victim–perpetrator, agency/non-agency and evolving a more complex framework in which to gauge questions of intention and deliberation.

The handbook is divided into eight sections: historical perspectives; understanding women's acts of violence; women as perpetrators of interpersonal and intimate violence; power and women's violence; women and non-state political violence; cultural interpretations of violent women; fictional representations of violent women; and violent women and girls in the criminal justice system. The rest of this introductory chapter outlines the handbook's structure and summarises each contribution.

Structure

Historical Perspectives

No Explanation Needed: Gendered Narratives of Violent Crime

Stephanie Emma Brown

This chapter examines the historical persistence of the 'mad, bad or sad' categorisation of violent women. While violence is an accepted aspect of masculinity, women's violence does not fit gendered scripts of appropriate feminine behaviour. Consequently, women's violence has been viewed as more in need of explanation. The 'mad, bad or sad' framework refers to three recurrent narratives mobilised to explain women's violence, which rely on stereotypes of femininity. For crime historians, this framework enables analysis of how women's violence was interpreted and how such interpretations influenced the legal process. However, women's own narratives are either absent from or distorted by this framework, creating gaps in historical knowledge of women's violence.

‘A Hard-Working and Nice Person?’ Respectability, Femininity and Infanticide in England and Wales, 1800–2000

Daniel J. R. Grey

Perceptions of infanticidal women in England and Wales over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were influenced by concerns about gender, motherhood and respectability – emphasising that the infanticidal woman stands apart from ‘other’ female criminals and is deserving of special treatment. Particularly remarkable about this long-standing discourse is its routine emphasis that the guilty mother is also a victim of tragic circumstances that led to the crime and deserving of sympathetic treatment. This framing of women who commit infanticide stresses not only their ‘normality’ prior to the offence but also their ‘respectability’, a sharp contrast to the sometimes overtly misogynistic representation of other types of women offenders.

The Voices of Violent Women in Nineteenth-Century Ireland

Elaine Farrell

This chapter draws on the case files of 79 women convicted of committing violent crimes and imprisoned or sentenced to death in nineteenth-century Ireland. Taking the women’s petitions as her focus, Farrell considers the women’s own understandings of their violent acts or certainly how they wished those acts to be understood. The analysis looks to how women described their crimes and how they sought to explain and rationalise these acts. The documents reveal women’s attempts to plead for some amelioration of sentence by emphasising the circumstances they hoped would secure them leniency or mitigation, in turn revealing much about broader societal attitudes to gender. The centrality women placed on their passivity saw them aligning with notions of ideal femininity. The women typically claimed innocence, provocation, manipulation and self-defence in their strategies. Women therefore tended to play down their agency, recognising the individual benefits this held for them. The chapter draws from archival research to reveal the voices of working-class women as they sought to redefine their pasts and reposition themselves in the eyes of the criminal justice system.

The Many Defences of Maria Barberi: Challenges to a Victim-Based Agency

Rian Sutton

The common tropes of ‘mad, bad, sad’ pressed into service when women commit violent acts work to deny women’s agency by stripping them of their humanity, their rationality and their intentionality. Feminist scholars have identified this as a fundamental barrier in conceptualising women’s violence. Sutton takes an historical case-study approach to explore this question, analysing narratives of victimhood and agency in the trial of Maria Barberi, who appeared before the court in New York in 1895 for the murder of Domenico Cataldo. Barberi’s case demonstrates the vagaries of gender and criminal culpability, through analysis of her initial trial, subsequent appeal and campaign for clemency, and retrial. Sutton outlines the failure of Barberi’s initial defence argument, which sought to rely on an ‘unwritten law’ that presented Barberi as possessed of a victim-based agency, a rational woman provoked to violence to defend her sexual honour in light of her victim’s sexual predation and abuse. In the first trial, this argument led to Barberi’s conviction and death sentencing; she only

succeeded when she was instead presented as child-like and teetering on insanity. Sutton uses the case to demonstrate that agency-based narratives in cases of women's violence are notoriously difficult to successfully deploy but are nonetheless desperately needed if we are to see violent women as fully human volitional subjects.

Understanding Women's Acts of Violence

An Investigation of Forms and Drivers of Violence Perpetrated by Women in Lesotho: The Case of Female Correctional Institution in Lesotho

Josphine Hapazari

Recognising that men constitute most of the perpetrators of violence, Hapazari shows in this chapter that some acts of violence are perpetrated by women. Within the framework of the interpretive research model, grounded in the approach of socialist feminism, the author discusses the importance of class and gender in explaining the acts of violence perpetrated by women. The analysis is based on desk review notes and empirical data from a study conducted in the Maseru Female Correctional Facility in Lesotho. The results show that incarcerated women committed various forms of violence, and most of these acts of violence were driven by poverty, gender inequalities, lack of social capital and self-defence. The author argues that future theoretical engagements and policy responses to women's violence could benefit from empirical evidence, which critically engages feminist approaches.

Bargaining With Patriarchy, Resisting Sisterarchy: Contextualising Women's Participation in Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)

Emmaleena Käkelä

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons and is widely practised in Africa, the Middle East and some parts of Asia. Radical feminists associate FGM/C with gender oppression and subjugation, one that reduces women to sexual slavery and servitude with many health and psychosocial consequences. The author argued that this interpretation of FGM/C limits the practice to gender binaries where women are the objects and men the subjects. It reinforces racial and ethnic stereotyping that serves the interest of Western hegemonic discourses. Using Black Feminist epistemologies, this chapter challenges the radical feminist framing of FGM/C by arguing that it limits our ability to fully conceptualise the interconnected nature of women's vulnerability and participation in these practices. Black feminists have called for a nuanced analysis of FGM/C by acknowledging its cultural, historical, generational and situational contexts. Situated within Black feminist thought and employing an intersectional framework, this chapter highlights how African women bargain with patriarchy to maximise their own security in the face of intersecting age and gender inequalities. To support these arguments, the author collected qualitative data from male and female African migrants living in Scottish cities. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across the data. Findings suggest women do not

necessarily participate in FGM/C to perpetrate violence, but to improve girls' social standing in their families and communities.

Women With Intellectual Disabilities: Unravelling Their Victim–Offender Status

Marta Codina, Diego A. Díaz-Faes and Noemí Pereda

This chapter documents the experiences of women with intellectual disabilities (ID) as victims and perpetrators of abuse. The authors argue that in spite of the over-representation and diversity of women with ID in the criminal justice system, existing research has been colonial and paternalistic, often essentialising their voices and experiences. Using an intersectional framework as a conceptual lens, the authors argued for moving away from theorising and analysing women with ID as a homogenous group to identifying and acknowledging their multiple intersecting identities. This intersectional approach has become relevant for understanding the complexity of violence committed by women living with ID. It identifies them as both victims and perpetrators of abuse and highlights their victim–perpetrator status as mutually inclusive. This means women living with ID are at a higher risk of experiencing severe forms of physical and sexual abuse, but have been found to be perpetrators of violent offences, including murder, sexual assault, robbery etc. The authors conclude by highlighting the importance of embracing the victim–perpetrator overlap and studying it further.

Negotiating Vulnerability: Contextualising Nigerian Female Sex Workers' Violence Against Male Clients

Ediomo-Ubong Nelson and Tasha Ramirez

In this chapter, the authors draw from feminist scholarship on women's violence, including violence by female sex workers (FSWs), and qualitative data to examine different forms of FSWs' violence against their male clients and the contexts that shape their use of violence. Twenty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted with FSWs recruited through snowball sampling in Uyo, Nigeria. Thematic analysis revealed three forms of violence: 'situational violence', 'collective violence' and 'symbolic violence'. The authors suggest that FSWs' violence is contextualised by daily violent experiences at the hands of male clients. Thus, within this context, FSWs' violence is not only a form of self-defence but also a means of exercising agency and relative control.

Women as Perpetrators of Interpersonal and Intimate Violence

Domestic Abuse: Analysing Women's Use of Violence

Leticia Couto

This chapter discusses historical and contemporary depictions of women's use of violence in domestic abuse incidents in the literature proffered by two groups, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and family conflict researchers. The author suggests that these two groups use differing theoretical frameworks and methods, hence the conflicting findings and arguments on women's use of violence. She notes that domestic abuse is complex and may vary given the conceptual definitions and the context in which abuse occurs.

Typology of Female Offenders in Intimate Partnerships – A Feminist Approach

Rebecca Gulowski

This chapter problematises the extant literature on gender-based violence as reductionist given its dominant focus on women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence. It argues that this simplistic interpretation limits our understanding of the complexity characterising the dynamics of violence in intimate relationships. It critiques the one-size-fits-all approach to explaining women's acts of violence as reactive violence and offers other typologies based on four dimensions, including the structure of violence (asymmetrical vs. symmetrical), the patterns of violence (systematic vs. situational), agency (unilateral vs. bilateral) and the attribution of meaning (intimidating, resistant, affect-accentuated, collusive). The authors created these types of violence using qualitative data collected from 58 women who perpetrated intimate partner violence (IPV) against their male partners and had attended a specialised counselling service in Germany called *violenTia* between 2018 and 2021. Data were collected face-to-face and analysed using Kluge's (1999) empirically grounded type construction. The empirical data supported the various classifications/typologies.

Men's Self-Reported Experiences of Women's Controlling Behaviours and Intimate Partner Violence in Kenya

Eric Y. Tenkorang, Alice Pearl Sedziafa and Sitawa R. Kimuna

IPV is a global phenomenon although the focus has been mostly on women as victims and men as offenders. This chapter reversed the course by exploring the motivations and socio-cultural underpinnings of violence against men in Kenya. Using the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey and employing logit models, the authors examine the associations between women's controlling behaviours and IPV among 3,262 Kenyan men aged 15–54 years. The results show that more than 60% of the Kenyan men surveyed reported their female partners were controlling, and many of these men were also victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuses from their female partners. Educated Kenyan men had higher odds of experiencing physical and emotional violence than the uneducated, and they reported higher levels of control by their female partners. The authors argue that IPV against men may be goal-oriented, but there is also evidence that it may be a reaction to male-perpetrated abuse.

'She Ended Up Controlling Every Aspect of My Life': Male Victims' Narratives of Intimate Partner Abuse Perpetrated by Women

Alexandra Lysova and Kenzie Hanson

The authors use thematic analysis to identify types of intimate partner abuse (IPA) experienced by 41 men from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States who participated in focus groups. Four types of abuse experienced by participants in their intimate relationships emerged: Psychological abuse, coercive control, physical violence and sexual violence. The authors suggest that researchers and practitioners should be cognisant of female-perpetrated abuse, which can lead to severe health outcomes for male victims and call for a more gender-inclusive approach to IPA that focuses on prevention of abuse for all victims: men and women.

Power and Women's Violence

Obstetric Violence: A Form of Gender-Based Violence

Catarina Barata, Vânia Simões and Francisca Soromenho

In this critical review of the history of obstetrics, the authors show how this medical practice was 'stolen' from midwives by male doctors and transformed into a gendered and often abusive process. As such, that obstetric violence is now an extension of the devaluation and subjugation of women in patriarchal societies, where socio-cultural conceptions contribute to a view of the female body as faulty and deviating from the male prototype. Since the field of medicine was dominated by men, male doctors created the perception that female reproductive processes require technological corrections. Even with the entrance of women into the workforce and the specialised fields, feminising care professions, failed to shift this paradigm. Female health workers are taught the procedures instituted by dominant patriarchal structures, expressing values encoded in the professional culture and the institutions where they work. As women conform to the models they are exposed to during their training, perpetuating corporate hierarchies and practices, they act as agents and perpetrators of obstetric violence. Thus, obstetric violence also constitutes a specific type of violence against women at the hands of other women.

By Any Other Name: The Difficulties of Recognising Female Police Violence

Michael Branch

This chapter assesses whether increasing the number of women police officers reduces the amount of violence perpetrated by the police. Disproportionate use of force and violence by the police has been attributed to the norms of masculinised police cultures. Recruiting more women is argued to be the one way to change these cultures as women are perceived to bring more compassion and care to their roles. However, this argument rests on stereotypical understandings of femininity and women's behaviour. Branch discusses evidence from the United States, Slovenia and Nigeria, which indicates recruiting more women police officers by itself does not change violent police cultures. Rather, women officers are likely to adopt the dominant culture of policing, according to which use of violence is an occupational norm.

Women's Violence in Armed Conflict: Towards Feminist Analysis and Response

Alexis Henshaw

This chapter provides a review of the literature on women's involvement in political violence, while expanding the discussion towards new and emerging questions relating to post-conflict processes. This includes concerns about gender issues in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes and the treatment of women as war criminals. In particular, the chapter seeks to engage a growing literature on the legal and social aspects of women's involvement in armed conflict. It analyses women's roles as perpetrators of atrocity and war crimes, as agents of torture, genocide and sexual violence. The author identifies two questions that underpin scholarship on women and political violence: the

question of women's agency (did they choose to take part in the action) and the question of women's role(s) during the conflict (how they participated). Two emerging themes are outlined in the chapter: Women and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration process, and transitional justice and women as war criminals. Case studies are used to demonstrate how women are underrepresented in post-conflict processes. The chapter highlights how gender intersects with race/ethnicity, religion and even class in shaping perceptions about women's involvement in political violence.

Women and Non-state Political Violence

Strategic Silences and Epistemic Resistance: Agency of Women Ex-Combatants in 'Post-war' Space

Keshab Giri

This chapter draws on empirical research conducted in Nepal between 2017–2018 involving Maoist female ex-combatants, their leaders (male and female) and experts. A review of the literature – which precedes the analysis of the empirical research – identifies the following key themes: post-war as regression; structural forces shaping post-war regression; situated agency of women ex-combatants and micro-politics of post-war. Two theoretical frameworks are drawn upon: strategic silence and epistemic resistance. Reflections from the interviews highlight the power of silence and how it was used strategically by Maoist female ex-combatants during interviews. Here, the women were conveying a political message through their silence. The latter involved women resisting narratives of social transformation by the Maoists in Nepal. This chapter makes an important intervention in feminist security studies and feminist international relations through a specific focus on gender in post-war reconstruction and peace-building.

The Representation of Women's Involvement in (Non-State) Political Violence: Dominant Myths and Narratives Surrounding 'Radicalised' Women in the UK

Itoiz Rodrigo Jusué

This chapter analyses how women's involvement in non-state violence is portrayed in the media. Explanations for women's participation in terrorism draw on conservative gendered explanations that stress women's irrationality and susceptibility to male influence. The media perpetuates dichotomised portrayals of women terrorists as either monsters or victims. Since the early 2000s, the radicalisation discourse of terrorism has become dominant in counterterrorism approaches and the media. Jusué analyses how portrayals of 'radicalised' women in the British news media mobilise long-standing myths and stereotypes about women's participation in political violence. Three case studies demonstrate how the news media engage in highly sexualised depictions, which reinforce old stereotypes of women as lacking political agency.