SOCIAL THOUGHT AND RESEARCH

Reckoning with Ecologies of Violence in Campus (Counter)Protests

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Abstract

Universities have become a focal point for contestation over the meaning of free speech as well as sites of violent protests connected to white supremacist speakers and anti-racist, anti-fascist activism. This paper investigates incarnations of violence operating during the recent resurgence of white supremacist organizing and counter-protest on college campuses, focusing on the case of the white supremacist attacks at the University of Virginia (U.Va.) and Charlottesville during August 2017 that culminated in the vehicular manslaughter of Heather Heyer. Past research often conceptualizes collective violence through a non/violent binary. In contrast, we argue that a relational and ecological model of violences (pl.) in social movement activity provides a stronger analysis. Using historical methods, we investigate three entangled incarnations of violence that contribute to contemporary moments of social dis/order: the offensive violence of white supremacists, the passive institutional violence of the (white supremacist) University, and active defensive violence on the part of counter-protesters in opposition to white supremacy. In conclusion, we discuss implications for research on violence in movements and contemporary (anti-)racist organizing, arguing that sociologists need to embrace more complex understandings of how violences manifest to address concerns about public safety.

Keywords: *Critical University Studies, Student Protest, Social Movements, Violence, White Supremacy, Counter-movements*

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> "You had a group on one side that was bad, and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent… the other side that came charging in without a permit… were very, very violent."
>
> ~Donald Trump

> "I will never forget the sound of those bodies being hit by that car… Trump might claim that there was violence from 'many sides' in Charlottesville, drawing a parallel between white nationalist terrorism and anti-racist protest. But I was there. And there is no parallel."
>
> ~Austin Gonzalez (2017), Chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, Richmond, VA chapter

After a year of white supremacists organizing at colleges across the country, on August 11, 2017, self-identified members of the alt-right marched through the University of Virginia (U.Va.) campus carrying tiki torches and chanting "white lives matter," "Jews will not replace us," as well as the Nazi slogan "blood and soil." The next day, the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville culminated in a vehicular attack by James Alex Fields Jr. that killed anti-racist activist Heather Heyer and injured more than twenty others. Universities have become a focal point for contestation over the meaning of free speech (Titley 2020) as well as sites of violent protests connected to white supremacist speakers and anti-racist, anti-fascist activism. In this paper, we investigate encounters between white nationalists and counter-protests, focusing our analysis on the 2017 U.Va. march and the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. What incarnations of violence are observed in contemporary (counter)protest, and how do these comprise a broader ecology of violence within University spaces?

As discussed in our review of literature below, prominent research on collective violence often relies on a binary conceptualization, creating challenges for accurate analysis and risking a false equivalency between forms of self- or community-defense and premeditated harm to living beings. In this way, claims of "violence" used by researchers to classify movements or tactics can become what Stuart Hall (1980) calls an "empty signifier," when a phrase takes on nearly any interpretation desired in ways that support structures of power (Hall 2006). Following Foucault's genealogical method (Dean 1994; Gutting 1989), our analysis recognizes the socially constructed nature of violence and acknowledges that violence is contextual and multiple, informed by operations of power. Rather than impose our own definition and assumptions about what counts as violence, data were analyzed with a focus on how claims of "violence" were discussed and assigned by various activists, administrative officials, bystanders, and/or reporters, thereby creating particular structures of meaning which inform how others interact with, understand, and label social actors.

Unearthing the violences present in incidents of counter-/protest at Universities[3] requires acknowledging the inter-relational and geographically situated nature of harm, environments that activists must navigate in their attempts at social (re)organization. We apply an ecological framework of violences to contemporary white supremacist organizing and anti-racist, anti-fascist counter-protest on University campuses, specifically the incident at U.Va./Charlottesville. This approach recognizes that forms of violence exist in relationship, such that they are recursively-affecting and mutually-constituting. Our analysis reveals three incarnations: the *offensive violence of white supremacists,* the *passive institutional violence of the (white supremacist) University,* and *active defensive violence in opposition to white supremacy.* In conclusion, we discuss the implications for sociological research as well as for efforts to combat hate in our communities.

CONCEPTUALIZING VIOLENCE IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

Studies of violence have historically focused on interpersonal conflict and/or war, with research dispersed across disciplines like sociology, criminology, international relations, political science, terrorism studies, and peace studies (Piven 2012; Walby 2012). Within sociology, experts have conceptualized violence in a variety of ways. One typology developed by Galtung (1990:294) presents a "violence triangle" or stratum (layers) with three "super-types." These include direct violence, an event where one or more people impair the basic human needs of others or threaten to do so. The second, structural violence, represents a process wherein certain groups experience discrimination within social institutions, preventing their access to basic human needs. Third, cultural violence refers to aspects of culture that legitimize direct and structural types. Cultural violence is similar to the concept of symbolic violence, “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (Bourdieu 2001:2). Other feminist scholars have sought to extend “definitions of violence to include a range of behaviours including, for example, physical, emotional and psychological abuse” (Morgan and Björkert 2006:442).

Mary Jackman (1999:276) argues that due to the legal and criminological emphasis in much literature and "in the absence of a clear, explicit conceptualization of violence, implicit assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon have shaped the research agenda." This includes overemphasizing physical injuries over psychological, social, and/or material harm as

[3] Our capitalization of “University” throughout is meant to illuminate the inherent power imbalances within academia, reflecting the control that University administrations have over dominant understandings of non/violence.

well as focusing on interpersonal actors rather than institutional agents (Jackman 2002:387). These types of implicit assumptions are visible in research on collective violence in social movement studies, which historically emphasized the deviance or criminality of the disadvantaged, focusing on interpersonal harm, rioting, and/or terrorism on the part of (armed) activists against state targets (Buechler 2004). Contemporary studies often analyze protester tactics (Nassauer 2016), claims-making and framing processes (Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2019), and policing (della Porta and Fillieule 2004; Earl 2011).

Prominent social movement scholarship generally relies on a non/violent binary when analyzing collective behavior (Beck et al. 2022). For example, della Porta's (1995) foundational work acknowledges that determining what acts are "political violence" can be highly subjective yet constructs a dichotomy between non/violence (2-3). Charles Tilly (2004) defines "collective violence" as episodic social interaction that immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects and involves at least two perpetrators who are at least partially coordinated. Both scholars fail to differentiate clearly between violence directed at property and violence directed at living beings, with some activities clouded and categorized as both non/violent.

Many scholars fetishize nonviolence as more moral and/or successful in achieving movement goals. In recent years, the subfield of nonviolent civil resistance studies has developed (Nepstad 2015; Schock 2013), including influential quantitative research by Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), who argue that nonviolent tactics are more effective than violent approaches. However, their methodology and findings have been critiqued by several scholars (Lehoucq 2016; Meckfessel 2016). In a replication and expansion of Chenoweth and Stephan's original analysis, Anisin (2020:2) found nonviolent tactics were less effective than previously assumed, violent insurgency slightly more effective, and campaigns featuring unarmed violence were the most successful. This scholarship has sparked dialogue about the accuracy of nonviolent research (Anisin 2022; Onken, Shemia-Goeke, and Martin 2021).

Why have conceptualizations of collective violence remained so restricted? Scholars often rely on media and government narratives that privilege empowered, often white and middle-class perspectives (Schwartz and Cook 2002; Liu 2018). This relates to ease of access since, as Blee (2017) notes, it is more difficult and riskier to study violent movements. The prominence of binary conceptualizations also reflects broader racial and class biases. Meckfessel (2016:84-85) claims that the dominant conceptualization of non/violence "functions to guarantee a very capitalist equivalence between commodities and bodies." According to Anisin (2020), ideological bias toward nonviolent civil resistance is also tied to U.S. foreign policy and imperialism.

Recently, scholars have called for more relational analyses of collective violence that emphasize the constructed nature of political violence and how conditions are perceived by different actors (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2012; della Porta 2009; della Porta and Gbikpi 2012; Goodwin 2012). According to Sylvia Walby (2012: 96), there has been a “re-emergence of violence” within sociology, largely due to greater inclusion of views from the global South, women, and minorities. Noteworthy studies that recognize the ways nonviolence is always, and already, entangled with violence in movements include Cobb Jr. (2014), Doná (2012), Fanon (1963), Haines (1988), Jackson (2019), Tyson (1998), Umoja (2013), and Wang (2018).

Our research builds on these relational approaches, focusing on how participants and observers give meaning to violent interactions, shaping movement activity. We recognize that violence is socially mediated, context-dependent, and influenced by power since, as Jackman (2001) observes, certain actors have more power to engage in acts of harm while retaining legitimacy. For example, Weber (1958:78) argues that the state is "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force," or consider Bourdieu's (2000:175) claim that the state holds "the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence." Our analysis conceptualizes the relationships between incarnations of harm that social movement actors are embedded within and respond to as a lived ecosystem of violences that constrains and enables certain forms of organizing. Our framework is ecological in the sense that relations between various manifestations can give rise to new forms and/or shape the nature of violent activities among social groups across time.

This study also adds to the literature on movements and counter-movements, mobilizations that arise in response to changes proposed by existing activism, creating a situation in which each movement reacts to the other group. Existing research has focused on theoretical interpretations (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996), claims-making between multiple movements, or in-depth qualitative studies of cases (Andrews 2002; Dixon 2008; Dorf and Tarrow 2014). However, conflicts between counter/movements remain understudied (Banaszak and Odercin 2010).

DATA & METHODS

We use historical content analysis of primary and secondary sources to better understand contemporary counter/protests on college campuses. Data gathered included the formal U.Va. archive on the U.Va./Charlottesville attacks and a variety of informal records. As Carter (2006:233) observes, archives are spaces of power and “the archive is riddled with silences.” Rather than relying solely on official records, we constructed a diverse data set aligned with Brilmeyer’s (2018:15) assemblage approach to archival research, which

"encourages archivists to seek out expansive counternarratives that connect related records, expose the politics of an archive's intervention(s), and challenge seemingly self-evident categories." We collected additional sources using news, Google, and Facebook searches for records of events between January through August 2017. We prioritized sources that did not engage in analysis of the events but rather shared firsthand accounts from activists and/or University actors. We included sources on later events if they pertained to ongoing legal cases related to attacks. Documents included official university reports and email records from U.Va. as well as several other Universities that experienced counter/protests in the months leading up to August; a variety of mainstream, alternative, and citizen journalism; records of related legal actions; first person accounts from blogs and social media (especially from populations underrepresented in administrative and mainstream media sources); and various documentation of student activism, ranging from petitions to video recordings of actions such as rallies.

Given our inductive approach, we purposely did not begin the project with our own definition of violence that we then applied to the events being analyzed. Rather, utilizing a genealogical method, we explored how violence is socially constructed, context-dependent, and, as such, takes on multiple forms and interpretations shaped by power. During data analysis, we focused on tracking various uses of the term "violence" by social actors, including when they may have used implied language or wording that framed actions or people as dangerous, or wording that was synonymous with violence (e.g., attack, assault, threatening others, etc.). Our approach meant a variety of actions were incorporated in our analysis, such as hate speech, property violence, and physical assault; however, these were not coded as either nonviolent or violent. Instead, we analyzed how different social groups interpreted and assigned meanings of violence in different ways to actions, people, and/or events based on their positionality and how such labels shaped consequent activity.

Because we were especially interested in the relationships between manifestations of violence, we also engaged in process tracing, a qualitative data analysis technique that focuses on the unfolding of events over time as well as generating intensive descriptive “snapshots” that serve as the basis for causal inference (Collier 2011:824). This method is especially suited to within-case analysis characterized by thick description and close attention to sequences of action. We created a detailed timeline of the events leading up to and including the attacks at U.Va./Charlottesville to help us identify manifestations of violence and patterns of escalation in counter/protest encounters.

For the sake of length, we focus only on non-state actors in our analysis, including event organizers, other activists who attended actions, and university administrators' involvement and

responses. This means we have largely ignored state actors, including local government and police forces, who have complex ties to Universities and unique histories of violence that we are unable to adequately address in this study.

CONTEMPORARY COUNTER/PROTEST ON CAMPUSES

Since 2008, the U.S. has experienced a re-emergence of visible white supremacy (Perliger 2012) and a mainstreaming of white supremacist ideology.[4] White supremacist activism, or what Blee (2017:1-2) calls organized racism, is a network of intertwined groups that "promote virulent racism and anti-Semitism and are often xenophobic and nationalistic." Tactics vary but include efforts to segregate white people as well as violent assaults. Between July 2005 and June 2015, out of the 279 murders in the U.S. with some sort of extremist connection, 93 percent were related to right-wing extremism with 77 percent tied to white supremacists (ADL 2018a). The ADL notes that "white supremacists can kill for many reasons, not just… their cause," that they are likely to engage in other crimes, and that they are responsible for 52 percent of extremist police shootouts. White supremacists are more likely to come from middle-class or wealthy backgrounds and have higher than average education levels (Parsons 2015; Petrella 2017).

Since January 2016, white power activists have been increasingly targeting college campuses (ADL 2018b). Organizers like Richard Spencer, head of the National Policy Institute, and Nathan Damigo, founder of Identity Evropa, have sought to rebrand white supremacy as “alt-right” ideology, targeting students through efforts like #ProjectSiege (ADL 2018b; SPLC 2017; SPLC 2018). Damigo has featured prominently in multiple clashes between white supremacists and counter-protesters. He attended the Milo Yiannopoulos event at the University of California Davis (UCD) in January 2017 and later, in April, gained notoriety at the University of California Berkeley (UCB) after being filmed assaulting a female anti-fascist counter-protester. Damigo was one of the main organizers of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, where Spencer was supposed to be a key speaker.

In response to the threat posed by white supremacy on campuses, marginalized student activists have drawn on various traditions to resist these incursions and make their everyday

[4] Throughout we use the term white supremacist to refer to active participants and/or organizers involved in white supremacist activism. Sometimes, we may refer to the ideology of white supremacy or to white supremacy as a movement; in such instances, we have tried to make the intended meaning clear.

lives safer. Today, many of these efforts are popularly referred to as “antifa.”[5] According to Bray (2017:xvi), antifa is "an ideology, an identity, a tendency or milieu, or an activity of self-defense." It represents a transnational movement incorporating socialist, anarchist, and communist currents into contemporary efforts to contest growing fascism. These forms of counter-protest gained visibility alongside President Trump's election in 2016. Student organizing for Black liberation and against fascism has received criticism from many (including sociologists) for their "violent" tactics (e.g., Chenoweth 2017; Woodson 2017). Whether those tactics are disruption, no-platforming, or destruction of white supremacist symbols like monuments, the framing of counter-protesters as "violent" is often related to their demands, which seek to disrupt everyday forms of violence already present on campuses.

In practice, anti-fascist and other liberatory student movements use a variety of tactics, the majority of which involve no physical violence. Mark Bray notes:

> Anti-fascists conduct research on the Far Right online, in person, and sometimes through infiltration; they dox them, push cultural milieux to disown them, pressure bosses to fire them, and demand that venues cancel their shows, conferences, and meetings; they organize educational events, reading groups, trainings, athletic tournaments, and fundraisers; they write articles, leaflets, and newspapers, drop banners, and make videos… But it is also true that some of them punch Nazis. (Bray 2017:168).

This last tactic is especially contentious, especially when paired with the formation of a black bloc, a type of anonymous, coordinated street action where protesters mask up and wear uniform black clothing in response to growing surveillance technologies and police militarization.

Anti-fascists argue that occasional violence is necessary to counter fascism and white supremacy as well as to protect targeted communities (Bray 2017). They claim that white supremacists leverage University spaces to gain legitimacy while targeting opponents and vulnerable community members. Many counter-protesters feel that University administrations’ responses to white supremacist organizing have been inadequate and that University “free speech” policies facilitate the spread of white supremacist messages. As a result, counter-protesters often engage in escalating tactical innovations.

For example, leading up to the “violent” shutdown of Milo Yiannopoulos at UCD on January 13, 2017, organizers first pursued nonviolent tactics, including holding meetings with

[5] We have maintained lowercase for Antifa throughout to reflect the movement's power disadvantage and in recognition of the term's blurred boundaries, which can also refer to a type of tactic as well as an ideological stance.

the administration to express concerns. A petition urging that the event be canceled pointed out administrative hypocrisy, arguing that the University was "fostering an environment in which hate speech is able to proliferate by providing Milo Yiannopoulos with a formal platform for student outreach and recruitment" (UCD Organizers 2017). The petition expressed concern that the presence of white supremacists not only "interferes with the learning of students," but would encourage further violence locally. Unionized graduate student workers even filed a grievance regarding what they felt were unsafe working conditions.

The fears of counter-protesters are hardly unwarranted. Blee (2017: 6) argues that white power activists' "vile depictions of racial, religious, and sexual minority group members… are intended to be immediately damaging to those who see them, as well as to instill fear." Fights broke out at UCD on the night of the event, and a week later at a similar event at the University of Washington, a supporter of Yiannopoulos shot an anti-fascist protester (Halverson 2019). White supremacist organizing also incites further racist violence in local communities, including hate crimes (ADL 2018a; Blee 2017; DoED Campus Safety and Security 2018; Feinberg, Branton, and Martinez-Ebers 2019).

As this context shows, the violence that unfolded at U.Va./Charlottesville did not arise in a vacuum. Historically, U.Va. and Charlottesville have deep ties to white supremacy. In the 1920s, U.Va. had its own chapter of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which donated an endowment equivalent to $16 million dollars today (Schmidt 2017). On May 13, only months before Heather Heyer's murder by a white supremacist, Richard Spencer—a U.Va. alumnus—led a torch-lit protest through Charlottesville against the removal of a Confederate statue (Toy 2017). Then, in July, the KKK held a rally where around fifty Klan members were escorted by police, who later fired tear gas on thousands of counter-protesters (Toy 2017).

On Friday, August 11th, 2017, white supremacists gathered at U.Va. and marched to the heart of campus. Using their torches as weapons, they attacked a small group of unarmed counter-protesters composed of students, staff, and faculty. Numerous witnesses reported police did not intervene despite their presence (Vasquez 2017). Several days later, one of the counter-protesters suffered a stroke that journalists claimed was related to injuries they sustained during the attack (Stripling and Gluckman 2017).

Emboldened by Friday’s events, Saturday’s “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville quickly turned bloody as white supremacists and counter-protesters clashed for hours in a chaotic street battle while police remained largely on the sidelines. Many came with shields, sticks, and clubs; due to Virginia’s open carry laws, many had guns. Armed contingents included some of the left (e.g., Redneck Revolt), but especially those on the right (e.g., see VICE 2017).

During the melee, Richard Preston, imperial wizard of the Maryland KKK, was filmed shooting a pistol at a Black counter-protester who was attempting to burn a confederate flag (Shapira 2018). White supremacists beat a Black teacher, DeAndre Harris, nearly to death, an assault caught on camera by the press. Harris continued to receive death threats for months (Modiano and McShane 2017). By 11:40 am, the city declared a state of emergency, canceled the rally, and riot police began to clear Emancipation Park. At 1:45 pm, white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters leaving the area, killing Heather Heyer and injuring at least twenty, several of whom were permanently disabled (Wilson, Helmore, and Swaine 2017).

In the aftermath of U.Va./Charlottesville, white supremacists and counter-protests have often been framed as comparably violent. White supremacists are cognizant of this and use the equivocation to justify their actions. For example, after the murder of Heyer, white supremacist organizer Christopher Cantwell claimed:

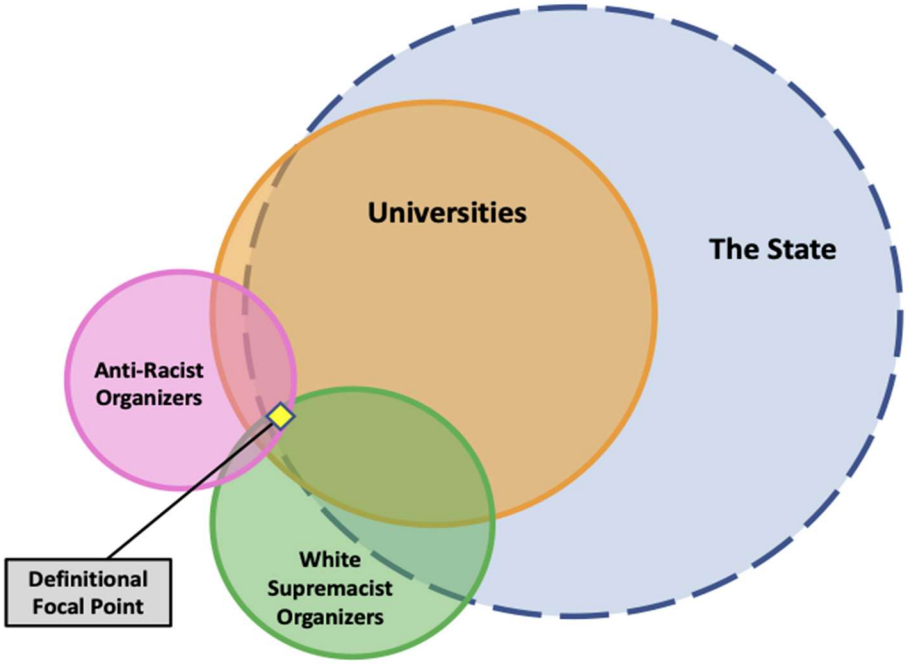
> None of our people killed anybody unjustly…. Someone [struck] that vehicle. When these animals attacked him again, he saw no way to get away from them, except to hit the gas. And sadly, because our rivals are a bunch of stupid animals who don't pay attention, they couldn't just get out of the way…. It was more than justified…. I think a lot more people are going to die (VICE 2017).

In this instance, Cantwell equates an anti-fascist protester striking Fields' car as "violent" justification for the subsequent vehicular attack, framed by Cantwell as an act of self-defense (or at least, defense of property).

ECOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE IN (COUNTER)PROTEST

Our analysis revealed three manifestations of "violence" that exemplify campus counter/protest dynamics. These incarnations can be thought of as a kind of ecosystem or web of activity, relationships, and social meaning that reveal contested understandings of "violence" for social actors and inform their subsequent strategic choices. In this sense, categories like "violent" are unclear but reflect events, actions, and encounters between actors and institutions unfolding across time and in relation to other individuals, cultural environments, and governing bodies. Existing power dynamics contribute to unequal access to authority that delegitimizes alternative understandings of violence, resulting in a disproportionate risk of harm to specific groups (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Illustration of definitional spheres of "violence."
Size indicates power and authority, with overlapping points indicating greater alignment and legitimacy granted to that definition of violence, contributing to a dominant definitional focal point.



The first incarnation of violence is the *offensive collective violence of white supremacists*. Although those participating in this form of violence are presented as interlopers to campus, they are often embedded in University communities (e.g., Spencer's status as a U.Va. alumnus) and supported by local organizations such as right-wing student clubs. They leverage the power of the historically white institution of the University, especially by mimicking the demands of marginalized groups (SPLC 2016) and utilizing claims of "free speech" to gain access to amplified platforms (Delgado and Stefancic 2018). White supremacist organizers often portray themselves as victims of censorship or left-wing attacks. This dual position, at once claiming marginalization while simultaneously accessing tremendous advantages in power, is characteristic of offensive white supremacist violence. This allows them to take advantage of political openings within University spaces to organize and recruit by seeking out and/or inciting controversial and potentially harmful incidents.

This form of violence is offensive in that white supremacists often have premeditated intentions to commit violence. At U.Va./Charlottesville, this was demonstrated by documented assaults, as well as by first-person accounts of psychological violence. Independent journalists have since revealed how, leading up to the weekend, "in private chat channels, [white

supremacists] shared advice on weaponry and tactics, including repeatedly broaching the idea of driving vehicles through opposition crowds" (Morris 2017: par.1). A student at U.Va., Weston Gobar, described how "the neo-Nazis who came to Charlottesville to intimidate minority communities… showed up with assault rifles and guns, wearing camouflage" (NYT 2017: par.4). Another student, Isabella Ciambotti, reported being threatened by several members of the alt-right who told her "I hope you get raped by a n-----" (NYT 2017: par.22). Counter-protester Logan Eliot (2017) recounted how white supremacists:

> ...came with bats, clubs, plywood shields painted with swastikas, brass knuckles, tear gas canisters, and wooden sticks. Not to mention the guns… They liked that they made you feel nervous. It was fun for them. They came to hurt people, and they did.

Temporally and spatially, offensive white supremacist violence is not contained to the moment of on-campus collective action but ripples outward, spurring future violence in surrounding communities. The violence at U.Va. on Friday rippled outward and was magnified on Saturday when Heyer was murdered. Hate crimes often increase in local areas after white supremacist events, such as a Mosque vandalism following Milo's visit to UCD (Magagnini 2017), as well as anti-Black and anti-Semitic vandalism in nearby Sacramento (Fletcher and Lindelof 2017). This violence also spills over into online spaces. Common practices used by white power actors include doxing (gathering personal information and releasing it to the public), swatting (calling the police to someone's home), or swarming (coordinated anonymous online harassment campaigns), all behaviors that can become heightened after in-person events. Reporting by Barnes (2017: par.1) indicates that after Charlottesville, white nationalists attempted "to compile a dossier of private information about Antifa members and plan to leak it to encourage harassment and violence." White supremacists also doxxed Bystander Brennan Gilmore after he filmed the viral video of the vehicular attack (Barnes 2017).

The second incarnation of violence is the *passive institutional violence of the (white supremacist) University*. Our consideration of this form of violence is rooted in an institutional level of analysis and critique that acknowledges that the University has disproportionate power to legitimize its monopoly on violence and impose its own interpretations of violence on others. This incarnation is consequently more complex than that of offensive white supremacist attacks, especially given the diversity of actors within academia. Organizational structures mean that administrators, especially those at the highest level of leadership, such as the Office of the (campus) President, have far more power than other University employees to shape understandings of events and enact policy. Even among administrators, there can be conflicting

interpretations of violence. Staff, faculty, and other workers often have varied alignments with University administrations, and varying levels of power within the University structure depending on their roles on campus. The passive violence of the University is thus best understood as structural and often consists of inaction or tacit support by the administration that enables the offensive violence of white supremacists to unfold. Ultimately, actions like providing platforms and police protection for white supremacists on campus ensures power relations replicate a history of white supremacist, settler colonialism within academia.

Leading up to Friday's attack, the U.Va. administration messaged students about the importance of free speech for white supremacists, suggesting that counter-protesting would only incite "physical confrontation" and endanger their safety given the "credible risk of violence at this event" (Sullivan 2017a). University messages falsely equated white supremacist and anti-racist protests as similarly "violent." The University was aware of the potential dangers posed by "alt-right" protesters, especially the risk of harm perpetrated by white supremacists against students engaging in counter-demonstrations (Sullivan 2017b). Despite these dangers, the University did not cancel the event.

U.Va. administrators faced criticism for failing to take community concerns seriously leading up to Friday's incident, for not being adequately prepared, and for failing to protect students as police largely remained on the sidelines (Goodman 2017). Journalist Michael Vasquez (2017: par.1) has argued that "while the university maintained it was hamstrung from blocking the [Friday] march by free-speech rules, laws are in place that could have interrupted the event, and perhaps the deadly violence of the next day." Mr. Magill, the university worker who experienced a stroke following Friday's attack, blamed "the university's inaction… for fueling the boldness of white supremacists a day later" (Vasquez 2017: par.22). A U.Va. student of color, Nojan Rostami, who lived on campus directly across from where the torchlit march was held, expressed how they were "trying to be sympathetic to what is certainly a delicate situation for the administration. But it's hard to do that when I'm staying up on Saturday night fending off nightmares of armed militiamen dragging me out of my dorm room in the middle of the night" (NYT 2017: par.36).

Following the Unite the Right event, the University strongly condemned "intimidating and abhorrent behavior intended to strike fear and sow division in our community" and reiterated that "acts of violence are not protected by the First Amendment" (Sullivan 2017c). Yet the University's application of policy responded to the offensive violence of white supremacists only after they harmed counter-protesters rather than encouraging proactive, preventative efforts to ensure the protection of students and community members.

The effects of passive institutional violence endure beyond enabling white supremacist organizing. Administrative responses to counter/protests generally call for greater surveillance and administrative control of campus spaces, often further militarizing the University. For example, administrators at U.Va. emphasized stronger relationships with police after the attacks to address community concerns (Sullivan 2017d; Lampkin 2017). The tightening of University relationships with police is often accompanied by greater efforts to surveil the speech and organizing efforts of anti-racist organizers. In the wake of white supremacist organizing across the University of California system, administrators have sought to limit the capacity of anti-racist activists to organize, increasing levels of administrative punishment and surveillance (Fuller 2017; Greenwald 2017). In addition to white supremacist violence creating conditions of danger for targeted communities, the responses of the University to such incidents continue to privilege whiteness within academic spaces and often create structural conditions that further marginalize vulnerable members of campus communities.

The third incarnation of violence observed is *active defensive violence by those opposing white supremacy*. This incarnation is defensive in that this violence (especially when directed against living beings) typically occurs after offensive white supremacist attacks have begun. It is also organized from a historically and structurally marginalized location (having had and continuing to leverage less power and legitimacy in society). Counter-protesters pursue such violence as an alternative solution to what they argue are missing structural protections from offensive white supremacist violence and amid pre-existing antagonistic relationships to institutions like the University.

Counter-protesters express that their efforts to oppose white supremacists are oriented toward the protection of the local community and a commitment to prevent future genocidal fascism. Given the real threat that white supremacists pose, such actions represent legitimate tactical approaches to self-defense, especially when police are absent or may even be sympathetic toward fascist aggressors, and thus more likely to target anti-racist activists than neo-Nazis (Levin 2018; Meckfessel 2016). According to Bray (2017), anti-fascists challenge conventional interpretations of self-defense, embracing certain offensive tactics to forestall the potential for self-defense down the line in the event that fascists gain greater power. Counter-protesters on campuses claim they use defensive violence strategically as one of many tactics that demonstrate their love and support for each other across lines of class, race, gender, and sexuality.

Witnesses at U.Va./Charlottesville emphasize the self-defensive nature of violence from the left. Cornel West claimed the religious group he was counter-protesting with “would have

been crushed like cockroaches if it were not for the anarchists and the anti-fascists... they saved our lives" (Goodman 2017: par.14). Brandy Daniels recounted how:

> The anarchists and antifa milling nearby saw the huge mob of the Nazis approach and stepped in... Based on what was happening all around, the looks on their [Nazi] faces, the sheer number of them, and the weapons they were wielding... had antifa not stepped in, those of us standing on the steps would definitely have been injured, very likely gravely so (Lithwick 2017: par.5).

Another counter-protester, Cleric Logan Eliot (2017), recalled how "I never felt safer than when I was near antifa. They came to defend people, to put their bodies between these armed white supremacists and those of us who could not or would not fight. They protected a lot of people."

Counter-protester defensive violence is also a response to institutional violence operating within the University system. Many counter-protesters initially utilized nonviolent tactics, seeking assistance from institutions to prevent white supremacist organizing in their communities. However, due to passive institutional violence, most felt their concerns went unaddressed, creating a situation where they were faced with potential threats on two fronts. As such, some forms of counter-protester violence directly targeted property, such as Confederate statues or flags, bank windows, police vehicles, and/or barricades erected to protect white supremacists that symbolize passive institutional violence. Counter-protesters, and the violence they sometimes wield, are thus oriented toward addressing long-standing violence within the University as much as it is based on ensuring protection from the offensive violence of white supremacists.

What emerges from this analysis is a complex ecosystem of violences, unfolding in relation to each other. White supremacist organizing utilizes narratives of "free speech" to gain access to legitimate academic platforms, even as such activists often strive to incite violent incidents against living beings on campuses while recruiting new followers. Against an ongoing backdrop of passive institutional violence of the University, concerned students and community members feel they lack administrative protection and counter-protest as a means of opposing white supremacy and protecting those who may be targeted by hate crimes. In the aftermath of clashes between counter/protesters, Universities often equivocate and denounce violence on "both sides." However, as Bray (2017:157) notes, "if we take a look at the track record of anti-fascism... a consistent pattern emerges…: when local fascist organizing declines, so does local anti-fascist organizing."

RECKONING WITH VIOLENCE

The way we lump and split social movements, actors, and institutions into “violent” and “nonviolent” categories has important implications for the preservation and empowerment of white supremacy and fascism. Binary conceptualizations of “violence” (and its presumed foil, “nonviolence”) present an epistemological and methodological problem for research on social movements, reinforcing assumptions that violence is a simple, uniform, and easily measured feature of social life. It is imperative to problematize “violence” as a label that is socially and historically situated within relationships of racialized, classed, and gendered power. Of the many incarnations of violence that exist, only some incarnations are deemed “violent” at particular historical moments while others become legitimized by powerful institutions like Universities. Conceptualizations of a non/violent binary benefit established social orders by presenting "violence" as contradictory to a presumed benevolent, "nonviolent" set of institutions. Nevertheless, spaces like the University are not neutral ground, nor are theories of violence deployed within its bounds. Such institutions are built on unceded Indigenous territories and rely on the continued oppression of people of color (Dolmage 2017; Harney and Moten 2013; Watkins 2001; Wilder 2013). By better understanding the relationships between incarnations of violence, it is our hope that we can identify more effective policies that address the roots of harm and promote community healing.

If we consider violence to be harm-inducing action, it is hardly the case that all manifestations of violence are recognized as such. Our analysis of white supremacist organizing and anti-fascist, anti-racist counter-protest revealed three manifestations. The *offensive violence of white supremacists* is often associated with premeditated acts of harm that are psychologically and physically damaging to living beings, typically people who are underrepresented and marginalized in University spaces. Given the white supremacist roots of academia, the *passive institutional violence of the University* generally operates as a supportive context for white supremacist organizing, providing tacit support for recruitment and adding legitimacy to speakers' racist ideologies. There are also considerable financial costs of heightened police presence on campuses in anticipation and response to such incidents, as administrators often strive to protect University property and white supremacists using campus spaces from counter-protester "violence." This creates a relationship that delegitimizes and also penalizes *active defensive violence in opposition to white supremacy*, even while such actors feel compelled to protect their communities from threats. Thus, within the ecology of violences on campus, symbolic distinctions regarding which harm-inducing actions are labeled "violent" become weaponized by white supremacists as well as administrations seeking to protect,

reproduce, and/or expand existing systems of power. These realities are challenged by counter-protesters on college campuses, who seek to reformulate dominant power structures to create a safer, more socially just, and equitable future.

To understand and respond to contemporary campus counter/protest, we must be wary of solutions that appear to alleviate one incarnation of violence--say, offensive white supremacist violence--by increasing other manifestations that disproportionately harm marginalized populations, particularly passive institutional violence. University administrations have overwhelmingly responded by increasing the power of predominantly white police forces and cracking down on activists in general. This approach lumps offensive and defensive forms of violence together, even though these incarnations of violence are distinct (see Chirumbolo, Mayer, and de Witte 2006). However, research has shown that members of groups historically marginalized in Universities, like people of color, are more likely to be involved in anti-racist organizing (Barroso and Minkin 2020; Jones and Reddick 2017; Linder et al. 2019; Quaye, Linder, Stewart, and Satterwhite 2022). If anti-racist, anti-fascist organizing is framed as equally violent to white power activism by Universities who increasingly criminalize protest, we risk excluding those who are already at the margins of academia into the mass incarceration system. In the case we study, University administrations often try to solve the violence of white supremacy by adding punitive policies to an institutional structure that remains inherently violent. Yet this approach risks tightening the ropes of oppression rather than loosening them (Garces, Ambriz, Johnson, and Bradley 2022). Further research should explore how state actors like local governments and/or police forces play a role in the ecology of violences involved in campus counter/protest.

Shifting from prior conceptualizations to a conceptualization of an ecology of violence allows a different entry point into the study of collective action, helping inform solutions to protect targeted populations from both white supremacist and institutional incarnations of harm. Prioritizing living beings over property necessitates solving both offensive and passive forms of violence. Until structural, social, and cultural forms of oppression are acknowledged and healed by Universities, including reducing administrative support of white supremacist organizing on college campuses, the risk of repeated incidences like those at U.Va./Charlottesville remains.

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