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The Megaphone in Genocidal Times: On the Sonic Silencing and Illegalization of (Amplified) Political Dissent and Resistance

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Abstract: This article examines the use of noise ordinance by-laws to illegalize and issue costly fines against demonstrators who have used megaphones to amplify their dissent and resistance to the continued bombardment, occupation, and apartheid in Palestine during protests in Ottawa – Canada's capital city. It also explores the possibilities and limits of extra-academic engagement through an analysis of a campaign and zine calling for the abolition of noise ordinance by-laws involving the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project – an action research group – in support of these efforts. In interrogating the process involved in and narratives produced through the campaign and zine project, this paper highlights the amplified words subject to by-law fines, the impact these sanctions had on megaphone users and within the activist community, as well as what targeted demonstrators would like to see happen both in Ottawa in response to the attempted sonic silencing of political dissent and in Palestine where genocidal violence continues. In so doing, the paper highlights the value of abolitionist criminological interventions that entail collective struggle and advocacy with the oppressed and antagonism against rather than complicity with the carceral state.

Introduction

In the wake of the 7 October 2023 attacks led by Hamas on targets situated on Palestinian lands claimed by the Israeli state that resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 people (UNHR, 2024), Israel has waged its latest military campaign in Gaza. By 7 October 2024, more than 42,000 Palestinians had been killed and nearly all 2.1 million people living in Gaza had been displaced from their homes (ibid). Entire households, neighbourhoods and even universities have been wiped off the map or left in rubble by bombs, most of which have been supplied by the United States (Gritten, 2024). The International Court of Justice (2024, p. 6) has stated that Palestinians face "a real and imminent risk of irreparable prejudice to the plausible rights" enshrined under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, while the International Criminal Court (2024) has issued warrants of arrest for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Israeli Minister of Defence Yoav Gallant "for crimes against humanity and war crimes". Prior to this, the unfolding genocidal violence occurring in Palestine – which is just the latest volley in an ethnic cleansing campaign Palestinians have endured since the Nakba and founding of Israel in 1948 (El-Kurd, 2025) – prompted and continues to prompt massive demonstrations across the world calling for the liberation of Palestine. In turn, many of these protests have been subject to criminalization and other forms of illegalization.

Ottawa – the capital of Canada – which is located on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory, is one such place where Palestinian solidarity protesters have been subject to state repression. This pacification of political dissent by law enforcement officers in support of genocidal land theft in Palestine by the Israeli state is not accidental, but rather a structural feature of and necessity for the Canadian state – situated on stolen Indigenous lands. To not do so would put into question the legitimacy of Canada, along with its institutions, laws, policies, and practices that have sustained and further entrenched the Canadian settler-colonial nation building project before and after the country's Confederation in 1867 (see Chartrand & Savarese, 2023). The same is true for those living in other settler colonial states that remain steadfast supporters of Israel even amid the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians, including children, in Gaza that have been indiscriminately murdered by the so-called Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the name of self-defence.

This article examines the use of noise ordinance by-laws to illegalize and issue costly fines against demonstrators who use megaphones and other means to amplify their dissent and resistance to the continued bombardment, occupation, and apartheid in Palestine during protests in Ottawa. It also explores the possibilities and limits of extra-academic engagement through an analysis of a campaign and zine calling for the abolition of noise ordinance by-laws involving the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project – an action research group. In interrogating the process involved in and narratives produced through the campaign and zine project, this paper highlights the amplified words subject to by-law fines, the impact these sanctions had on megaphone users and within the activist community, as well as what targeted demonstrators would like to see happen both in Ottawa in response to the attempted sonic silencing of political dissent and in Palestine where genocidal violence continues. In so doing, we highlight the need for abolitionist criminological interventions that entail collective struggle and advocacy with the oppressed and antagonism against rather than complicity with the carceral state.

Sound Amplification and Megaphones: A Short History

Before examining the struggle over sound amplification generally and the use of megaphones specifically in the context of Palestine solidarity protests in Ottawa, we trace the latter's social, cultural and political uses, both historically and in contemporary times. We do so by locating the megaphone within the history of sound techniques primarily through the writings of François Baskevitch (2009a, 2009b),[1] a French historian of science and an acoustician, as well as Canadian historian Bret Edwards (2011).

The megaphone is first and foremost linked to sound, voice, and its transmission, but has also evolved with time to other uses. Indeed, through the amplification of the sound level of speaking voices, megaphones today allow for the dissemination of sounds and communication of discourse across an extended space, reaching distant individuals. Based on its historiography, it appears this instrument originated from numerous scientific developments in the field of acoustics. Basketvich (2009b, p. 7) explains that the

1 All quotes attributed to Baskevitch (2009a, 2009b) are our translations from the original texts in French to English.

invention of the ancestor of the megaphone, namely "speaking trumpets", derived from specific needs of the time – appearing in 1670, it was primarily designed to enable communication at sea. Other devices were also developed, such as "acoustic horns, tubes or pipes that propagate sound" on the one hand and "architectural techniques allowing discreet conversations" (Baskevitch, 2009a, p. 6) on the other.

By the 19th century and the Victorian era, the original, non-electronic megaphone played a "prominent role in the patriarchal power structure and leisure culture of the Victorian era" since it was then "an exclusive and gendered communication device that imparted knowledge and stature to its users" (Edwards, 2011, p. 9). Specifically, while the Victorian cultural context was marked by veneration of industrialization, progress, and the development of the market economy, men used the megaphone in the late 19th and early 20th centuries "to entertain, instruct and profit from primarily middle- and upper-class audiences interested in experiencing activities thought to be appropriate for status [e.g. sporting events] and, in the process, perpetuate their own position of privilege" (Edwards, 2011, p. 10).

Minority groups also occasionally made use of the megaphone in this patriarchal context, such as suffragettes that organized and took to the streets of New York City in the early 1900's, distributing "Votes for Women" badges from a taxi from which they proclaimed slogans in favour of women's suffrage via a non-electronic megaphone. However, it is only after World War II that the megaphone – now a transistorized, inexpensive and highly mobile electro-acoustic device, "largely effective in addressing large crowds, numbering hundreds or even thousands of people" (Edwards, 2011, p. 16) – "became synonymous with opportunity and liberation" (Edwards, 2011, p. 9), namely among African Americans and women during the civil rights era. Put differently, through "the escalation of post-war political and social tensions and design improvements" (Edwards, 2011, p. 8), the megaphone allowed the voices of people pushed to the margins "to be amplified and, no less importantly, recognized and respected" (Edwards, 2011, p. 9).

Yet, in keeping with its historical uses, when in the hands of men and institutions like police forces who were also armed with the tool, the megaphone also remained a political symbol of security, capitalism, masculinity, and conservatism. According to Edwards (2011), the use of the megaphone thus took on a polarized significance throughout the 20th century, between maintaining and contesting social order, whereas its use in the Victorian era consistently preserved the *status quo*.

At the turn of the 21st century, sound amplification devices continue to be used to advance liberation, including in the context of abolitionist protests outside prison walls challenging "the exclusionary spatial ordering" of the institution that attempts to naturalize a carceral order by working to restrict what imprisoned people can hear and from whom (Russell and Carlton, 2020, p. 308). Increasingly, however, sound amplification devices are also deployed in the context of protests by reactionary groups (see Young and Popovski, 2024), including white nationalist interventions that "assert ownership over space" (Gillespie, 2025, p. 149) and displace "racialized others" (ibid, p. 150) that are said to not belong to the nation.

Like other reactionary forces, sound amplification is also increasingly used as acoustic repression by police and military forces towards the contemporary dangerous classes, whether they be entire populations or specific groups of people pushed to the margins held in sites of confinement. Juliette Volcler, a French independent researcher, traces such uses in her 2011 book *Le son comme arme : Les usages policiers et militaires du son*. According to her genealogy of sound repression, the sound domain increasingly emerged as a military strategic tool during armed conflicts, as well as in the security management of public spaces in the early 2000s. For instance, in September 2005, Israeli army planes deliberately broke the sound barrier at low altitude in the skies of Gaza to emit sensory controls on the Palestinian population. During a four-day nocturnal period following these abusive interventions, twenty-nine supersonic detonations were recorded. These caused "windows [to] break by the thousands, walls [to] crack", while leaving "victims of these bangs [to] suffer, among other things, from anxiety attacks, muscle spasms, difficulty breathing" (Volcler, 2011, p. 150).[2]

Regarding public spaces, Volcler revisits the usefulness of sound for state authorities, allowing them to harass, immobilize or disperse crowds – mainly comprised of young people. As an illustration, she mentions France, which uses disencirclement grenades, but also incapacitating multi-sensory grenades, popularized among law enforcement for allegedly being non-lethal interventions. These, however, have

2 Our translation from the original text in French to English.

resulted in permanent sensory losses and the loss of limbs among some protesters (Célérier, 2012, p. 9). Such uses of sound in demonstrations as weapons "are part of a behavioralist conception of maintaining order: it has the advantage of modifying behavior without killing" (Célérier, 2012, p. 10).[3]

If sound is a weapon, that is "a way of amplifying and extending the jurisdiction of the state" (Parker, 2015, p. 15), and its instruments used to propagate it can render people docile and break resistance, Volcler (2011) asserts that it is by mastering the use of these same tools that it becomes possible to appropriate them to build resistance and counterattacks. It is observed that it is through "the multiple modes of emission of the human voice" – with "each sender using different stratagems to distinguish themselves from others" in the form of "screams, words and formulas uttered with intensity to dominate the ambient noise, onomatopoeias, whispers, chatter, formulas expressed in a spoken-sung mode" (Leclair, 2020, p. 279)[4] and the like – that megaphones took up more space within contemporary demonstrations.

The megaphone, when used by the police in demonstrations, expresses the power dynamics of that institution, but when it is wielded by protesters, it embodies the imagery of resistance through an appropriation of this instrument that historically did not initially bestow state power, but reinforced the status quo nonetheless. Thus, the use of megaphones by activists represents an underlying wave heralding a countermovement for the so-called other, not only bringing together people fighting for common cause, but also a unifying voice for the comrades present. Indeed, Laurent Beauguitte (2019, p. 13),[5] a geographer who observed assemblies at Place des Fêtes during the summer and fall of 2016 in Sorbier (France), asserts that "the role of sound amplification devices cannot be underestimated: speaking through a megaphone or microphone can be intimidating. Using such a device when the number of people is very limited may seem superfluous. However, in the Parisian public space, not using such devices renders the demonstration inaudible". He thus identifies two inherent characteristics of the current electric megaphone: those of group cohesion and communication both within and outside the crowd. Similar observations are also made by Étienne Pingaud (2014, p. 225),[6] a sociologist who by examining the temporalities of struggle in a local mobilization for Palestine in France recounts:

> …the conflict with the local power quickly intensified. The town hall decided to organize a nighttime demonstration parade through the city streets, scheduled for the following Friday evening (January 16th). The main organizer of *Free Palestine*, who does not want to leave the initiative to an authority deemed compromised, therefore, once again enacts the principle of diversion, by participating in the procession, but on their terms. The association's activists take care of practical organization details, particularly the preparation of visible banners: "Support for popular resistance", "Right to return", "Boycott", "Israel get out, Palestine is not yours". To quickly spread the word to residents, she decides to resort to an unusual "homemade" method: a militant, who is involved in many activities of the local parish, rides his bike the day before through the city's alleys shouting the meeting time and the planned slogans using a megaphone.

Seen in this light, the transgressive communicative nature stemming from the megaphone serves not only to warn, but also to amplify dissent (Traïni, 2008).

In keeping with Edwards' (2011) arguments, the voices amplified by megaphones do not all seem to possess the same weight or (il)legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the state. According to our observations made during protest events in Ottawa, some voices are immediately heard, yet do not face repression from police and by-law officers, while others denouncing genocide in Palestine are subject to what we call sonic silencing for using megaphones and other noise amplification technologies, notably through fines. Through such instances, we can observe how attempts by protesters to take over space via "acoustic territorialisation" (LaBelle, 2010), that sonically disrupts a status quo in which colonialism – whether in Canada or in Israel – is taken for granted, are met with carceral state repression aimed at reasserting the dominant "sonic order" (Atkinson, 2007) in which colonial spatial hierarchies of settler being and belonging are maintained.

3 Our translation from the original text in French to English.
4 All quotes attributed to Leclair (2020) are our translations from the original text in French to English.
5 Our translation from the original text in French to English.
6 Our translation from the original text in French to English.

Sonic Silencing

As detailed in the section above, while sound is a weapon and an expression of dominant power relations (Vocler, 2011), it is also an instrument of resistance, counter-power and an expression of struggle within movements to disrupt the status quo (Russell and Carlton, 2020). In this context, we have seen protests involving the deployment of sound, namely in the form of discourse broadcast using noise amplification devices like megaphones that criticizes and demands alternatives to occupation, apartheid, and genocide in Palestine. At present, we can also observe what Thomas Mathiesen (2004, p. 9) calls "silent silencing", which fosters "acquiescence… through a process which is quiet rather than noisy, hidden rather than open, unnoticed rather than noticeable, unseen rather than seen, non-physical rather than physical" such as labelling critics of the state of Israel as antisemitic so as to dissuade others from speaking out about atrocities in Palestine. However, for the purposes of this paper, which documents the deployment of fines by policing authorities in Ottawa to silence and attempt what Mathiesen (2015) has called 'defining-in' and 'defining-out' who and what can be heard in given struggles, below we document "ways of silencing" Palestinian solidarity activists who use megaphones and others means of sound amplification that are "loud and noisy" (Mathiesen, 2004, p. vi), namely costly fines. As we show, this approach to illegalization is meant to sonically silence dissent – that is to disperse, disappear and delete it from public space.

Megaphone Use and By-Law Fines

As the capital of Canada, Ottawa is frequently the site of demonstrations spanning the political spectrum, from the annual "National March for Life" protest calling for the recriminalization of abortion (McDonald, 2011) and the yearly "Canadian Police and Peace Officers' Memorial" ceremony commemorating law enforcement officer deaths where demands for more punitive laws are frequently uttered (Ferguson, 2023) to Indigenous sovereignty rallies (Barker, 2015), migrant justice demonstrations (Rivas-Sánchez, 2024), and other social justice events that converge in and around Parliament Hill where the country's House of Commons and Senate are located. The area and its many protests are currently policed by the Parliamentary Protective Services, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Ottawa Police Service (Ferguson, 2023).

Events of the kind outlined above are also subject to the current iteration of City of Ottawa's (2017) "Noise" by-law, which aims "to reduce the noise level, so as to preserve, protect and promote health, safety, welfare, and peace for the inhabitants of the City" – a measure described as being "in the public interest". The by-law includes provisions on "Sound reproduction or amplification devices", which explicitly prohibits the operation of such devices on highways or public spaces except under specified exemptions, such as possessing a permit for a special event (City of Ottawa, 2017).

In the experience of the second author – who has served as a police liaison at previous small protests (e.g. the 1 March 2021 "Disability Day of Mourning" rally organized by the Disability Justice Network of Ontario – see Calugay-Casuga, 2021) and large demonstrations (e.g. the 25 July 2021 "Status for All March Into Ottawa" rally organized by the Migrant Rights Network – see Ramlakhan, 2021) near and on Parliament Hill that included speakers sharing their insights and demands using megaphones and public address systems – Ottawa's noise by-law had rarely, if ever, been used in the context of protest policing until recently. For instance, even during the protracted "Freedom Convoy" occupation of early 2022, when transport truck horns blared incessantly across Parliament Hill and the surrounding Centretown neighborhood, the City of Ottawa initially refrained from enforcing this by-law. It was only after Ottawa resident Zexi Lee, alongside her lawyer Paul Champ, filed a multi-million-dollar lawsuit and obtained a court injunction against convoy organizers that any decisive action was taken, and fines started to be issued (CBC News, 2022).

When juxtaposed against the actions taken during weekly Palestinian solidarity protests that began in October 2023, it is evident that a stark contrast in noise by-law enforcement has emerged. As these demonstrations, echoing global solidarity, grew and continued through November and December 2023 amidst Israel's relentless assault on Gaza, by-law officers and Ottawa Police Service members began issuing fines. The fines, which local activists deemed to be a "clear attempt to suppress pro-Palestinian organizing and support" (Glass, 2023), began with penalties for megaphone use at Palestine solidarity demonstrations and subsequently extended to participants of other social justice causes such as Trans rights rallies, labour strikes, and climate protests (Horizon Ottawa, 2024a).

While the fines themselves could be understood as a form of silent silencing in so far as they are mere pieces of paper delivered in an "unbounded" fashion as those "confronted by them" are unsure when they will be applied (Mathiesen, 2004, p. 11), the ways in which a number of them were meted-out highlights the degree to which this repression was enacted in a loud manner causing significant emotional distress. For instance, Hakima Mokarty – an Ottawa resident fined for using a megaphone at a Palestine solidarity protest – shared a personal account that underscores the anguish associated with such enforcement: "The officer came at about 5:30 pm [to give me a ticket for using a megaphone]. My 12-year-old daughter saw him and came to tell me that a police officer was at our doorstep. She was scared and asked me 'are they going to take you to jail?'" (Horizon Ottawa, 2024). As has long been documented in the context of imprisonment (e.g. Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2003), this example highlights the degree to which state repression not only impacts the intended target of criminalization and other forms of illegalization, but also extends to their loved ones and communities.

Sarah Abdul-Karim, a member of Palestinian Youth Movement Ottawa, described the noise by-law and its enforcement as "a threat to our rights as Canadians and a threat to Ottawa's longstanding tradition of social movements and protest" (Glass, 2023). Illustrating that where there are attempts by authorities to silence those challenging dominant relations there is steadfast resistance, Ammar Afaneh of the Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians emphasized, "We need our voices to be heard". He added, "I was deeply disappointed to see this happening", but affirmed that there were no plans to cease the weekly demonstrations despite the looming threat of fines (Williams, 2023).

As the Palestine solidarity events continued demanding an immediate and permanent ceasefire, a Canadian arms embargo preventing the delivery of weapons to the Israeli military, the cessation of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine, and the release of all political prisoners, the fines continued. By the end of March 2024, 48 fines averaging roughly $480 each and totalling approximately $23,000 had been levied against activists (Horizon Ottawa, 2024a). It is important to again underscore that, historically, such demonstrations had not been penalized for employing sound amplification devices, further underscoring the selective enforcement of this by-law. If one ever questioned the allegiances of law enforcement in terms of whose side they are on, these actions provide a definitive answer, which ought not to surprise given that policing and by-law officers are often preoccupied with the activities of people pushed to the margins of society who are targeted for exclusion and punishment (Hermer and Mosher, 2002).

Defending the Right to Dissent

Amid the Palestinian solidarity protests, the weight of the by-law fines was being felt among participants. For instance, during a December 2023 rally, Sarah Abdul-Karim highlighted the disruptive nature of these penalties, stating: "we want our protests to be focused on our people back home, who are suffering and dying, we want it to be focused on our government's inaction and not so much on these bylaw tickets" (Tunney, 2024). Underscoring the significant loss of time and energy caused by what she described as authoritarian measures that aim to suppress dissent and distract from the primary objective of advocating for Palestinian liberation, it was clear that like "political resistance against… softened fascism, in the form of silent silencing" (Mathiesen, 2004, p. 13) was needed, so too was the need for organized pushback against sonic silencing of the kind observed in Ottawa.

In response to the illegalization of amplified speeches at Palestine solidarity events and other social justice demonstrations in Ottawa, organizers representing over 50 groups convened a press conference and rally on 26 March 2024 in front of the City Hall to launch the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign (Horizon Ottawa, 2024a). The initiative articulated two central demands at the time. First, the protesters called for an amendment to by-law 2017-255 to exempt demonstrations and pickets from penalties related to megaphone usage and other sound amplification devices. Second, they urged the immediate rescission of these fines to uphold fundamental constitutional rights, specifically freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

The call to cancel these penalties garnered widespread support from a coalition of advocacy groups, including the Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians, Palestinian Youth Movement Ottawa, Independent Jewish Voices Ottawa, Labour for Palestine, INSAF uOttawa, O4P (Ottawa 4 Palestine), and other allied local organizations. As part of their organizing, the groups enrolled legal experts and allies to contest what they describe as an undemocratic, discriminatory, and politically motivated policy enforced by the

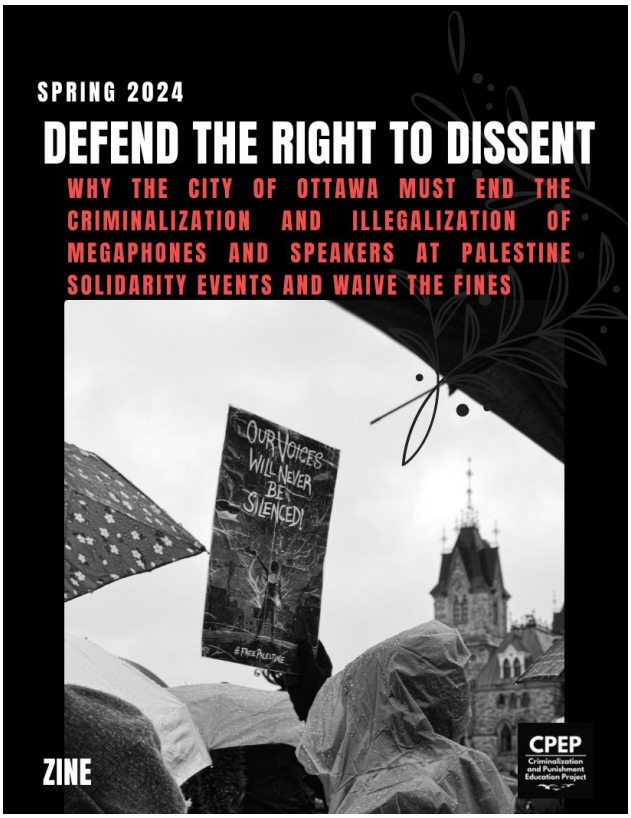
City of Ottawa under Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's administration, who has consistently expressed his support for Israel even amid the on-going atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians, including defending the raising of the Israeli flag at City Hall to mark the settler colonial nation's independence (Raymond, 2024). When the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign was launched, organizers encouraged residents to join their campaign by contacting city councillors and the mayor to protest the unjust fines issued, including through an email zap that called on political representatives to adopt their demands (Horizon Ottawa, 2024b).

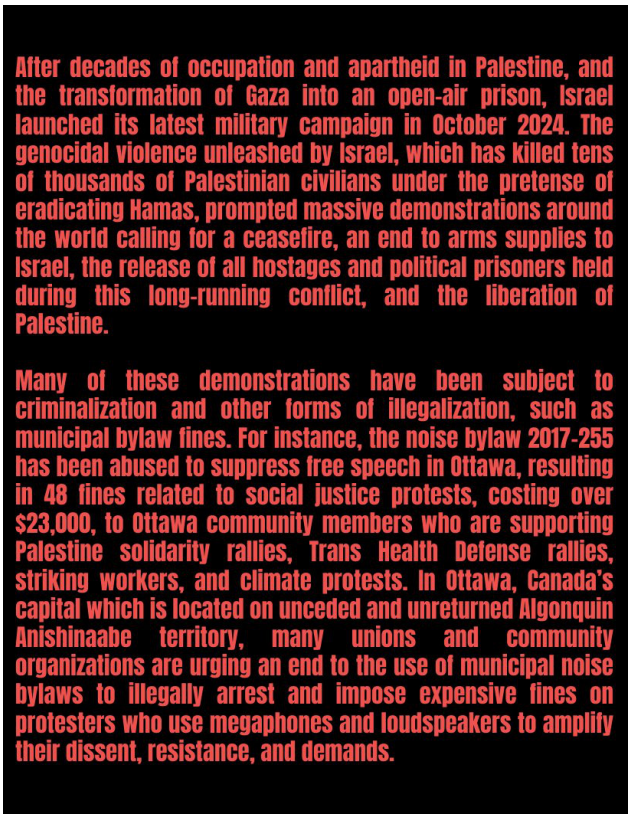
Action Research in Support of Resistance to the Illegalization of Palestine Solidarity Protests

In the face of state repression, what is the role of criminology in times of war and genocide? For Vincenzo Ruggiero (2023), there is a need to engage by documenting atrocities and contributing to resistance to end violence on all fronts. For the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP), the answer was to endorse and contribute to the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign. Founded in 2012, CPEP bas brought together criminology, sociology, and socio-legal studies students and professors from Carleton University and the University of Ottawa to organize with criminalized people and their loved ones, and other community members to reduce the use and harms of policing and imprisonment, while working towards decarceral futures (Doyle et al., 2021). Much of this organizing has involved research, public awareness initiatives (e.g. documentaries) and events (e.g. vigils), social and news media interventions, and mutual aid initiatives (e.g. the COVID-19 Prisoner Emergency Support Fund with the Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project) and campaigns (e.g. the #NOPE | No Ottawa Prison Expansion).

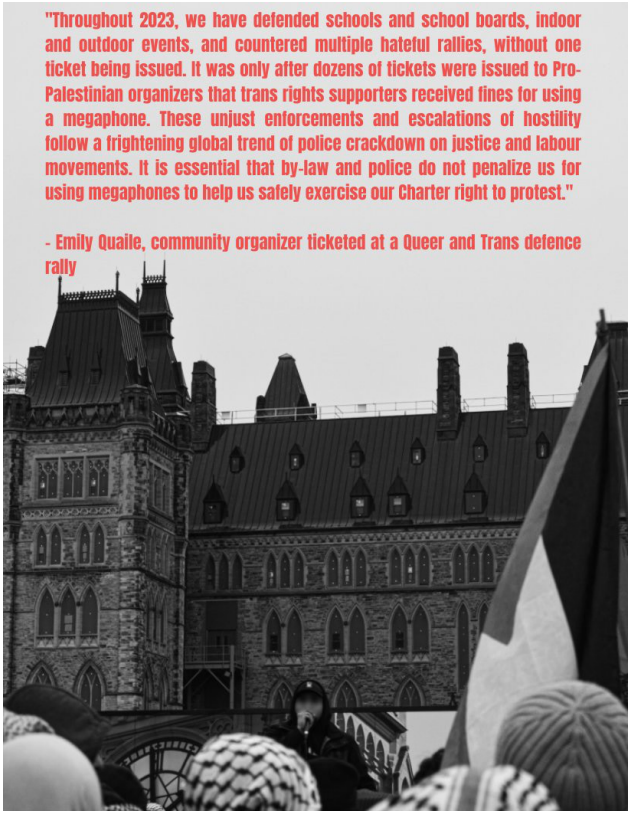
Part of our involvement in the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign has been to research the history and uses of the megaphone and sound amplification, including in the context of social movements and state repression, along with the origins and subsequent shifts and continuities in noise ordinances. We do this to highlight how the present fight around the sonic silencing of Palestine solidarity protests in Ottawa matters for those fighting against domination and for a better world as it is part of a longer struggle over power in which sound is a weapon. This work also entails contributing to the liberation of Palestinians and our own in terms of defending our free speech and assembly rights through the creation of "Defend the Right to Dissent" zines. The first instalment, released in April 2024 (CPEP, 2024), provides an overview of the initial struggle, testimonials from Palestine solidarity rally participants who have been fined, key campaign demands and information about participating organizations (see below). The zine, developed in concert with key campaign organizers, was put together to drive traffic to the email zap and help generate turnout for the rally that took place in May 2024.

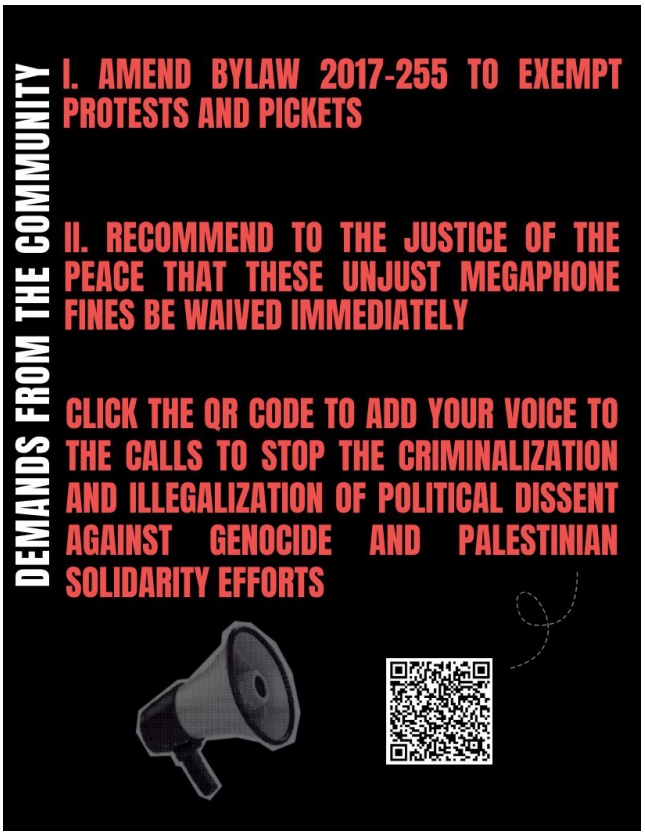
While a modest contribution to the campaign, the inaugural zine is an example of a critical criminological intervention that challenges what Ruggiero (2012, p. 159) calls "mainstream criminology", which encompasses research and public interventions undertaken as part of "a conflict against the powerless, for the perpetuation of the status quo and the exacerbation of social injustice". It is also an example of what Victoria Canning and colleagues (2023, pp. 8-9) describe as "activist criminology" that involves working "with counter-hegemonic groups of all shapes and sizes" to enable "communities to build the bonds of solidarity and safety that facilitate their survival during increasingly perilous times". Although the noise ordinance by-law remains in place, the campaign did nonetheless pause the issuing of fines for several months. However, following the one-year anniversary of the atrocities on 7 October 2023 by Hamas and those that have been perpetrated by the state of Israel since, the temporary depenalization of noise by-laws ceased and the fines resumed coupled with criminalization of dissent in the form of arrests, charges and detention, including in the context of jail support rallies to free Palestine solidarity protestors (Greco, 2024). In the process, the relationship between the military industrial and prison industrial complexes (Davis & Mendieta, 2005) have again been brought into clear view, highlighting the need to eradicate both to achieve liberation for all.


SPRING 2024
DEFEND THE RIGHT TO DISSENT
WHY THE CITY OF OTTAWA MUST END THE CRIMINALIZATION AND ILLEGALIZATION OF MEGAPHONES AND SPEAKERS AT PALESTINE SOLIDARITY EVENTS AND WAIVE THE FINES
OUR VOICES WILL NEVER BE SILENCED!
ZINE
CPEP
Criminalization and Punishment Education Project


After decades of occupation and apartheid in Palestine, and the transformation of Gaza into an open-air prison, Israel launched its latest military campaign in October 2024. The genocidal violence unleashed by Israel, which has killed tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians under the pretense of eradicating Hamas, prompted massive demonstrations around the world calling for a ceasefire, an end to arms supplies to Israel, the release of all hostages and political prisoners held during this long-running conflict, and the liberation of Palestine.
Many of these demonstrations have been subject to criminalization and other forms of illegalization, such as municipal bylaw fines. For instance, the noise bylaw 2017-255 has been abused to suppress free speech in Ottawa, resulting in 48 fines related to social justice protests, costing over $23,000, to Ottawa community members who are supporting Palestine solidarity rallies, Trans Health Defense rallies, striking workers, and climate protests. In Ottawa, Canada's capital which is located on unceded and unreturned Algonquin Anishinaabe territory, many unions and community organizations are urging an end to the use of municipal noise bylaws to illegally arrest and impose expensive fines on protesters who use megaphones and loudspeakers to amplify their dissent, resistance, and demands.

"The officer came at about 5:30 pm [to give me a ticket for using a megaphone]. My 12-year-old daughter saw him and came to tell me that a police officer was at our doorstep. She was scared and asked me 'are they going to take you to jail'?"
- Hakima Mokarty, an Ottawa resident ticketed for using a megaphone at a Palestine solidarity protest


"Throughout 2023, we have defended schools and school boards, indoor and outdoor events, and countered multiple hateful rallies, without one ticket being issued. It was only after dozens of tickets were issued to Pro-Palestinian organizers that trans rights supporters received fines for using a megaphone. These unjust enforcements and escalations of hostility follow a frightening global trend of police crackdown on justice and labour movements. It is essential that by-law and police do not penalize us for using megaphones to help us safely exercise our Charter right to protest."
- Emily Quaile, community organizer ticketed at a Queer and Trans defence rally



It is important to note that the resumption of noise ordinance by-law fines to sonically silence and define-out Palestinian solidarity protesters from public spaces has also taken place in a context where a number of municipal, provincial and federal politicians have called for the creation of "bubble zones" to prohibit demonstrations near government infrastructure such as hospitals and places of worship like synagogues (CJPME, 2025) that have occasionally been the site of anti-genocide events when hosting real estate events promoting the sale of stolen Palestinian lands (see, for example, Balintec, 2024). For instance, the City of Ottawa is currently in the process of drafting a "bubble by-law" with the goal of defining-out certain areas for protests of any kind (MacDiarmid & Quenneville, 2025). Thus, the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign has expanded the focus of its organizing to not only advocate for changes to the noise by-law, but also to prevent a "bubble zone" by-law that would illegalize political dissent in and around government infrastructure and other spaces from taking hold. Led by organizers with Horizon Ottawa (2025), this phase of the campaign has involved phone bank and lobbying training, calls to and meetings with city councillors, delegations as part of municipal consultation hearings, and a public forum. For our part, CPEP is in the process of developing a new zine on the role of sound in political struggles, as well as conducting research to inform another zine on the development and impacts of "bubble zone" ordinances elsewhere to help generate participation in support of the campaign's new wave of activities.

Conclusion: On the Need for Academic Engagement and Resistance in Genocidal Times

As the above makes evident, these are dark and troubling times where there are efforts to define-out (Mathiesen, 2015) Palestinian solidarity protesters and their voices from public spaces, including in Ottawa where noise ordinance by-laws have been used to punish and deter political dissent challenging settler colonialism and the genocidal violence that entrenches its continuation, both in Palestine and in Canada. There are also efforts now underway by hegemonic forces to define-out such anti-genocide protesters from having the ability to organize demonstrations in public spaces of material and/or symbolic value to their movement work altogether.

So, to conclude, what ought to be the role of scholars in criminology and adjacent disciplines right now? Shall we practice criminologies of liberation or oppression? Shall we practice criminologies that work with or against the oppressed? Shall we practice criminologies committed to organizing and building the people power necessary to win the better world that is possible or commit ourselves to insular criminologies from the imagined safe perches of our offices and seminar room lecterns?

While the answers to the questions above may appear to be obvious, the number of criminologists who have allowed themselves to be "silently silenced" (Mathiesen, 2004) amid the on-going genocide in Palestine and/or whose work informs state repression, requires those of us engaged in social justice struggles through research and organizing to state that which ought to be taken for granted. If what has and continues to transpire at our university – where the liberal façade has often shown itself to be intolerant to dissent on the question of Palestine and where the idea of the university as a refuge (Hogeveen & Woolford, 2006) is being shattered as proponents of the status quo inside and outside 'ivory tower' gates attempt to silence those denouncing occupation, apartheid and genocide – we critical criminologists and scholars have no choice but to engage in collective struggle and advocacy with the oppressed and antagonism against rather than complicity with the carceral state. Our ideas and our ability to share them are again under attack.

One on-going site of struggle has been the classroom where some professors at the University of Ottawa have faced backlash from students who are ardent supporters of the state of Israel for discussing the genocidal violence Palestinians have faced for decades from imperialist and colonial forces. For instance, professors have faced complaints and have been denounced in national newspaper columns (e.g. Gerson & Waller, 2023) for including course material critical of the state of Israel, such as screening a Human Rights Watch (2022) video describing Gaza as an "open-air prison".

Another on-going site of struggle has been university campuses, where encampments in support of Palestinians emerged across the world during the spring of 2024, including in Canada (see Liddle, 2024). In response to the organization of an encampment on the lawn of Tabaret Hall demanding that the University of Ottawa disclose its investments in the military-industrial complex and divest from war profiteering tied to the on-going genocide in Palestine, the administration threatened "serious consequences" for those involved in staging this peaceful action before it even began (uOttawa, 2024a). As the encampment persisted and grew from its 1 May 2024 launch to its conclusion on 9 July 2024, the struggle was defined by solidarity among hundreds of students, professors, and allies who shared space, knowledge, and food for several weeks and a university administration who refused to meet the demands of the organizers. The latter even appointed a Senior Advisor on Antisemitism on 25 June 2025 (uOttawa, 2024b) who posted vitriolic social media posts conflating encampment support with antisemitism prior to and after his appointment, all while the university administration claimed it was negotiating with organizers in good faith. As the Senior Advisor on Antisemitism continued his bombastic social media interventions, which even included calling his fellow colleague and professor in our department – a racialized woman with expertise on racism and Islamophobia – a "liar" for her comments critical of Israeli apartheid, occupation, and genocide endured by Palestinians, the university alongside other powerful entities in Ottawa withdrew from Capital Pride (2024) – who issued a "Statement in Solidarity with Palestine" – without explanation other than to comment in news coverage that the statement did not align with the academic institution's "mandate and values" (Eltherington, 2024). Weeks later, the Senior Advisor ultimately resigned when he faced backlash for having called a September 2024 Israeli attack that injured thousands of Lebanese civilians, which involved the explosion of pagers said to belong to members of Hezbollah (Reuters, 2024), "brilliant" (CBC News, 2024). While the university's administration has not commented on whether reprisals against encampment organizers and participants are indeed forthcoming, it established protocols in anticipation of classroom and campus disruptions as the fall semester began in September 2024, while its investments in death making continue. It also hired more private security who were readily present across campus during the fall 2024 semester.

The whole episode has contributed to a significant chill on campus around the on-going genocide in Palestine. However, colleagues who are members of Faculty for Palestine Ottawa (F4P Ottawa), including the second author, have resisted this chill. One such effort involved introducing a motion at the 30 April 2025 annual general meeting of the Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa (APUO) to divest its strike fund "from institutions, corporations and other entities enabling human rights violations, war crimes, and any other breaches of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", "unequivocally" support and defend "the academic freedom of its members to teach and pursue inquiry about Palestine that is free from institutional and political censorship", as well as support "students', professors', librarians' and staff members' rights to assemble and protest peacefully on campus without disruption, surveillance, reprisal or violence from police, security, or other quarters", among other measures (APUO, 2025, pp. 2-3). The initiative passed during the online meeting despite a failed effort by motion opponents to have the item removed from the agenda for approximately the first half of the scheduled two-hour meeting (that

was extended by an hour following a strongly supported procedural motion by an F4P Ottawa organizer to add more time to the meeting to allow for more debate among the membership, both for motion proponents and opponents alike), along with subsequent failed attempts by opposing colleagues to push the vote to a future APUO meeting. Also of note is that this motion was introduced, debated, and passed after an unprecedented rescheduling of the annual general meeting that was originally supposed to be bimodal and take place on 17 April 2025 with less than 72 hours' notice, which the association's executive committee attributed to "a combination of factors" in a 15 April 2025 email. The whole episode highlights how academics who engage in Palestine solidarity within their faculty associations face attempts to silence and define them out of legitimate forums.

The wider academy also remains a site of struggle, particularly for scholars seeking to expose violence perpetrated by states. A particularly concerning episode involved a colleague who co-authored a paper documenting legal violations committed by Israeli charitable organizations engaged in the expansion of settlements in Palestine. Despite being published in a reputable peer-reviewed academic journal, the article was met with a complaint from some of the organizations examined in the study, alleging that it promoted antisemitic ideas. As a result, the journal's editors launched an investigation to determine whether the paper should be retracted based on these accusations. In addition to meticulously refuting the unfounded claims leveled against their work, one of the co-authors was compelled to invoke his Jewish identity in defense of the paper's legitimacy – an argument that ultimately helped prevent its retraction, despite attempts to discredit its findings on political grounds.

We conclude this piece by raising these examples to highlight that the classroom, the university, the faculty union boardroom, and the academy are not spaces of refuge. Rather, these are spaces – like the streets where Ottawa by-law and police officers are now once again busy issuing fines to Palestine solidarity protesters engaged in amplified dissent – that are all sites of struggle. And it is our responsibility to persist, to organize, and to resist authoritarianism and institutional complicity in genocide at work on and off our campuses. Contributing to community-led initiatives through research and activism, of the kind CPEP has engaged in as part of the "Defend the Right to Dissent" campaign, as well as supporting student-led organizing such as encampments and divestment campaigns are small ways to do just that.

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