

HRRC Salon
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**Decolonizing Media Narratives on International Criminal Justice Through a Victim-Driven Approach:
An Analysis of the Syrian Universal Jurisdiction Cases in Germany**

Abstract:

Building on Mutua's work on the savages–victims–saviors (SVS) complex and the Third-World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) contributions to international criminal law (ICL), this study looks at how the SVS complex works in terms of international criminal law (what will be referred to as the 'ICL-SVS complex') and, in particular, inquires whether/how the legal mechanism of universal jurisdiction works as a neocolonial tool that reproduces the savages–victims–saviors dynamics and enhances double standards and selectivity. To do so, the article focuses on the language used in the media on the universal jurisdiction cases against Syrian perpetrators in Germany. Using critical discourse analysis, this study assesses articles published by the public service broadcaster Deutsche Welle in English and German, as well as statements by government officials, in contrast to victims' statements and analyses published in alternative media outlets or on the victims' websites. Finally, the study reflects on whether and how the ICL-SVS complex in general, and in the media language in particular, can be disarmed, and proposes a victim-driven approach to ICL as a path to recognizing the actual role of victims as drivers of the accountability efforts made so far.

Bio:

Valeria Vegh Weis, LL.M (NYU), PhD. (UBA), is a Senior Researcher at Universität Konstanz Zukunftskolleg, where she researches on the role of human rights and victims' organizations in the confrontation of state crimes in the Global South. She is also an Associate Professor at Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes and Universidad Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

She has held different fellowships including the Alexander von Humboldt, Fulbright and the Hauser Global Scholarships. Her book *Marxism and Criminology: A History of Criminal Selectivity* (Brill 2017, Haymarket Books 2018) was awarded the Choice Award by the American Library Association and the Outstanding Book Award by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. She is also the co-author of *Bienvenidos al Lawfare* with Raúl Zaffaroni and Cristina Caamaño (in Spanish Capital Intelectual 2020, in Portuguese Tirant Le Blanch 2021, in English Brill 2023) and *Criminalization of Activism* (Routledge 2021). She has fifteen years of experience working in criminal courts and international organizations and is the winner of the ASC Critical Criminology of the Year Award (2021).