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Coercive Control in Conflict: Implications for Syria

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> Today the phone threats start up again in the most awful way. I am terrified to be so closely monitored … a single nod makes me shut my Facebook account … less than fifteen minutes after posting a comment I get a phone call from him … all these thoughts make me an even more nervous creature. So they will not come into contact with my extreme anxiety, I steer clear of my friends …[1]

This quote is from Samar Yazbek and it describes her experience of living and working in Syria as a journalist in 2011. The actor exercising this form of coercive control is not an intimate partner, but an agency of the state. Yet this quote could be just as easily attributable to many of the descriptions given by survivors of domestic abuse of their relationships; where the abusive partners exerts power and control over the other, dictating how they might live their life, and ensuring subservience through fear. In many cases this abuse is psychological, and many victims do not see themselves as such. They either normalise this behaviour or simply do not recognise it. The violence they experience is intertwined with physical violence: isola-

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tion, degradation, mind-games, micro–regulation, monitoring and checking against an unpredictable and ever changing 'rule book.'[2] Yazbek's description fits the scenario of someone in a controlling relationship with an abusive intimate partner, where the abuse takes the form of psychological bullying, which, is recognised as within the continuum of violence of domestic abuse. In fact, it is about life in Syria.

This paper will explore how the concept of coercive control, which has been recognised in UK legislation as a criminal offence since 2015 and is currently used exclusively to describe a form of abuse within intimate partner relations, can be extended to help us understand the continuum of violence experienced by men and women in the Syrian conflict. The use of physical violence by the state in this conflict is well documented, as well as the state's systematic use of torture, imprisonment and rape. However, for post 2015 Syria, there is also a need to understand the way that the state and other actors have employed a strategy of creating an atmosphere of fear alongside the physical acts of violence. This fear has formed part of the authoritarian regime's mechanism of rule for decades and has been reinforced by the violent suppression of any dissent, but since the Syrian conflict erupted it has been used by the regime as a strategy of war. This paper therefore argues that the international can learn from the local in this particular context.

The term 'coercive control' was developed by Evan Stark in his work *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women*, first published in 2007. In December 2015, it became a criminal offence in UK law. Coercive control is currently, first and foremost, a 'domestic' crime in 'domestic' legislation. But while Stark developed this concept to describe dynamics in intimate partner relationships and he himself is skeptical about its wider utility, in his own work, he talks about the concept being one of 'entrapment' and deprivation of liberty. He also compares the experience of coercive control to the experience of 'capture crimes' or of being held hostage and draws parallels with the experience of prisoners of war (POWs), both in terms of the behaviour itself and the impact it has on the victim. So, within the existing concept as framed by its creator there are indications of synergies between the 'domestic' in a non-conflict situation and the

behaviours of actors in war and the potential to stretch the definition beyond intimate partner violence. I want to explore the ways in which this can be applied to the experiences of those in the current Syrian conflict and how this concept can be used to help academics and policy makers to improve our understanding of the impact of conflict on people who are currently displaced or resettled, but also on those seeking to return to Syria in the future to rebuild the country.

I will begin by setting out my own positionality and placing this paper in the context of my ongoing research. This is followed by a discussion of Stark's definition of coercive control and the process by which it became a criminal offence in the UK. The rational for employing this concept in the discipline of International Relations is emphasized, particularly as a way of improving our understanding of the experience of war. The discussion subsequently moves to an examination of what international law says regarding 'controlling behaviour' and the sorts of psychological violence that Stark describes and the difficulties of interpretation and enforcement. Finally, I apply this conceptual framework on the Syrian conflict to illustrate how the definition can be stretched, before bringing us back to the domestic environment to make a link between the two through the 'Reclaim the Night' movement.

My primary concern is to explore the impact of the 'fear' of sexual violence in the Syrian conflict. Here, I share the view of Stark, that by focusing on other forms of violence, we are not seeking to diminish the importance or deny the fact of physical violence. Instead, I intend to make the case that, in both the domestic and international arenas of conflict, the fear of violence is a specific psychological weapon that is being deployed by agents and alongside a range of other physical tactics. The fear thus generated in this continuum of violence is so extreme that it prevents the individual from escaping from the relationship they have with their perpetrator and therefore they are trapped. This makes the behaviour they experience a crime of entrapment or liberty. A question asked of many survivors of domestic abuse, and of those claiming asylum, is 'why did you not leave'? The point at which a person can flee from this violence, or the reason why they do not, can be entirely understood by the psy-

chological grip they are trapped in, often unknowingly, and the culmination of years of controlling behaviour which is normalised. The point where this becomes intolerable is the point when the survivor chooses to leave; often harm against children or other parties provides the tipping point. The murder of children who had put anti Bashar slogans on the city walls of Daara in March 2011 is widely regarded as having acted as a similar catalyst for protest in Syria.

The importance of understanding this element of the continuum of violence, is around the impact on liberty and freedom. The generation of the fear of an act of physical violence may have the same impact on a victim as if the physical act did occur. The effect of this on human behaviour, movement and decisions to flee or fight, is important in understanding what has happened to people in Syria. The sociologist Liz Kelly has studied the impact of sexual violence on survivors and concluded that a victim's level of fear derives as much from her perception of what could happen based on past experience as from the immediate threat of the perpetrator.[3] Stark similarly states that in coercive control, the idea of physical harm planted in the victims' mind can have more devastating effect than actual violence.'[4]

It also helps to explain what people would need to see happen before Syria can be reconstructed and peace built. Miriam Cooke in her 2017 book *Dancing in Damascus* describes meeting a leading Syrian intellectual:

> Like all Syrians I have met….[he]…is committed to imagining a new political system that will give each individual freedom, dignity and a clear understanding of what it means to be a real citizen.[5]

Compare this to what a domestic abuse survivor says when questioned about what she wanted from her future: "A future free from fear, not having to look over my shoulder all the time, to be mentally and financially independent but most of all to stop feeling ashamed of who I am."[6] In understanding what is needed to support this ambition, there is scope to put in place the structures and strategies that allow this to be realised. What can be learnt from the domestic experience to help us to do this in a future Syria?

The objective here is to demonstrate how coercive control is used to achieve the same outcomes as physical violence in conflict: sectarian violence, displacement of certain peoples and the restoration of authoritarianism in the face of uprising. And therefore, show how the psychological violence in conflict is like coercive control in that it is part of the weaponry at the disposal of the perpetrator, whether that is a husband or a boyfriend or an agent of the state or non-state actor, the outcome is the same. They achieve domination and control. The victim does what the perpetrator intends.

My academic pursuits are only part of my 'position'. In addition to being a PhD student, I am a Senior Civil Servant in the Home Office in the UK and I have 17 years' experience of work in Immigration, Crime and Policing. Of relevance to this work, I was responsible for the UK Government's 2010 strategy to end violence against women and girls and have recently supporting the work to resettle Syrian families in the UK as well as broader priorities around asylum support and integration. I am now Director of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Hub in Wales looking at how we support organisations to understand the impact of trauma in childhood and increase awareness of how to prevent it.

A better understanding of the different experiences of violence in war will support the development of academic research and provide some challenge to existing literature about how 'psychological' violence and the provocation of an emotional response has a place in International Relations (IR). This work will also contribute to a new developing strand of research in feminist IR that considers emotion and war. By including the voices of artists, authors and poets, I hope to demonstrate the importance of their work in helping us to understand what it feels like to experience conflict, and to push against the perception that fiction, for example, can be a source for IR theorists to examine. I hope that my research will also support those of us working on UK government policies to better support the integration of Refugees from conflict zones, in this case Syria. It will help us to ensure the right 'domestic' services are available to those who want or need them, but also build on our improved understanding of how coercive control impacts on people in the domestic sphere to support

those we seek to help be part of our society. Drawing out the parallels of what the victims and survivors experience, may help us to do so.

So, what exactly is 'Coercive Control'? According to Stark, it may be defined as follows:

> … an ongoing pattern of domination by which male abusive partners primarily interweave repeated physical and sexual violence with intimidation, sexual degradation, isolation and control. The primary outcome of coercive control is a condition of *entrapment* that can be hostage-like in the harms it inflicts on dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood as well as to physical and psychological integrity.[7]

An important aspect of coercive control is its gendered nature. Stark is clear that coercive control is gendered because:

> … it is used to secure male privilege, and its regime of domination/subordination is constructed around the enforcement of stereotypes. 'Domination' here refers to both the power/privilege exerted through coercive control in individual relations and to the political power created when men as a group use their oppressive tactics to reinforce persistent sexual inequalities in the larger society.[8]

In 2015, eight years after his work on coercive control was published, Stark was appointed as an expert advisor to the UK Government as it decided to make coercive control a criminal offence. This represented a fundamental shift in UK policy. In 2010, the publication of the strategy to end violence against women and girls in the UK was celebrated by the leading organisations which campaign for the rights of women, victims and survivors of domestic abuse, for bringing together all forms of gender-based violence in a single strategy; something they had been demanding for 30 years. Significantly, this strategy barely mentions coercive control. This situation has changed over the preceding years, and changes of government. And

as the focus changed to become more criminal justice orientated, there was a move by the sector to push for a specific offence to recognise coercive control as a form of violence within the continuum of violence in the domestic space. It recognises the harm caused by coercion or control, and that the cumulative impact on the victim and a repeated pattern of abuse can be more injurious and harmful than a single incident of violence.[9] This is an important context to understand for this paper, as although the UK government has recognised domestic violence and all forms of violence against women and girls for many years, the criminal offence of coercive control is relatively new and somewhat controversial. The difficulty prosecutors and the police face in getting convictions for this form of violence even where there is physical evidence has brought into question whether convictions could be secured for something that is even more difficult to 'prove'. Despite this concern, however, what the offence has done is helped highlight the fact that abuse is not just a physical attack, and the impact of these other forms of violence are part of the whole picture of abuse. If we understand this, we can provide the right support. This is a similar situation to the international setting, where it is clearly difficult to get justice at the state level for physical acts of violence let alone psychological. Nevertheless, it can and should be done.

In December 2015, the new offence came into force in the UK. The accompanying statutory guidance provides the UK cross-government definition on which the offence is based as:

> Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

> Coercive behaviour is: a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.[10]

Taken on its own, without an accompanying explanation around this being in the context of 'intimate partner' violence or what we understand as the domestic setting, it seems as though that this definition could also describe the experience of those living in the shadow of the *shabbiha* or secret police in Syria, as described by Yazbek at the start of this paper (further explored below). The statutory guidance also sets out a set of 'behaviours' that one might expect to see demonstrated in a case of coercive control.

Types of Behaviour

The types of behaviour associated with coercion or control may or may not constitute a criminal offence in their own right. It is important to remember that the presence of controlling or coercive behaviour does not mean that no other offence has been committed or cannot be charged. However, the perpetrator may limit space for action and exhibit a story of ownership and entitlement over the victim. Such behaviours might include:

- isolating a person from their friends and family;
- depriving them of their basic needs;
- monitoring their time;
- monitoring a person via online communication tools or using spyware;
- taking control over aspects of their everyday life, such as where they can go, who they can see, what to wear and when they can sleep;
- depriving them of access to support services, such as specialist support or medical services;
- repeatedly putting them down such as telling them they are worthless;
- enforcing rules and activity which humiliate, degrade or dehumanise the victim;
- forcing the victim to take part in criminal activity such as shoplifting, neglect or abuse of children to encourage self-blame and prevent disclosure to authorities;
- financial abuse including control of finances, such as only allowing a person a punitive allowance;
- threats to hurt or kill;
- threats to a child;
- threats to reveal or publish private information (e.g. threatening to 'out' someone).
- assault;
- criminal damage (such as destruction of household goods);
- rape;
- preventing a person from having access to transport or from working

This is not an exhaustive list.

Figure 1.

Coercive Control and 'capture crimes' – there is already a link
One of the central positions of the concept of coercive control is its clearly articulated link to other capture or 'liberty crimes' where a person experiences a deprivation of his/her liberty, such as those detained as hostages, prisoners of war and torture victims. Stark argues that coercive control resembles the violence used in capture crimes in three main ways: it is designed to punish, hurt or control a victim; its effects are cumulative rather than incident specific; and it frequently results in severe injury or death.[11] From the perspective of a victim of coercive control, Linda Gordon describes her 'capture' as being a 'battered woman's socially constructed inability to escape.'[12] Or that it is the 'victim's agency that is the principal target.'[13] The whole idea of coercive control is to create an environment similar to that experienced by prisoners of war, but instead of a generic conformity to authority as might be expected from a hostage, prisoners or those detained under the mental health act, it is destined to enforce a person's obedience, where an individual exerts power that forces another to conform to what they want them to do.[14]

The World Organisation Against Torture draws a parallel between the context of a victim of torture by a state official, and a domestic victim of coercive control. The torture by a state official typically takes place when the victim is in incommunicado detention, at the unsupervised mercy of his interrogators or captors and without access to the outside world. Battered women, because of their domestic situation live isolated of family and friends and others who might support them. [15]Victims of coercive control are effectively 'hostages at home' suggesting abuse is a political crime like terrorism.[16] In his work, Stark also considers the terms used by other sociologists to try to categorise this sort of violence. They are an interesting mix of words that bring together the 'domestic' and what we might term more 'international' phraseology, particularly in the current uses of the word. Stark describes how we have moved, in the domestic sphere, from an emphasis on 'repeated assault' to an understanding that abuse is a continuous process that includes structural elements and has cumulative effects. He gives an example of this work in the shift made by sociologist Michael Johnson, who in recognition of this relationship, renamed his categories of violence to 'situational violence' and 'intimate terrorism.'[17]

This signals not only a shift to the structural understanding, but also an example of how definitional stretching can be achieved; and a clear link to what we are seeing in modern conflicts such as Syria where there are many actors ranging from the state, to individual military leaders, opposition fighters and actors such as Daesh (whom we would term commonly as terrorists). The distinction between 'situational violence' i.e. conflict where violence is used, and intimate terrorism is helpful as it brings into scope the possibility of discussing the coercive and controlling tactics used that are not covered by 'fighting' for example.

I had the privilege to spend some time with Stark during his recent visit to the UK and took the opportunity to ask him directly what he thought about the concept of definitional stretching to include the behaviour of actors in conflict, particularly around the threat of sexual violence. His response was cautious, but he did offer, in a similar way to the shift that is mentioned by Michael Johnson, that perhaps what I was describing was 'sexual terrorism.' Where he thought there was a difference, however, was in the impact on and coping strategies employed by victims. In his view, refugees are more resilient, and their main concern is not whether they themselves will be assaulted but rather with keeping their children safe from the 'situational' violence and finding a way to make new lives for them.

This is not a mistaken conclusion; but Stark admits to not having interviewed asylum seekers or refugees; I would suggest that this assumption is based on what others have related to him. Having interviewed many people in this situation, I have observed that they will say to officials that the safety and education of their children is the most important aspect for them; but they are often hiding the impact their experience has had on their own health or their own needs. It is often further down the line, when safety and education is secured, that the wider impact of their experience is realised. And even then, through reasons of fear, or from the normalising of their experience, they are unable to articulate what has happened to them. For example, the inherent fear and distrust of authority, is a barrier to discussing anything that may appear critical of their political experience for fear of informants. So much so that often refugees prefer to

use Arabic speaking, rather than Syrian, translators. Also, it may only be after living outside of the geographical region and having an experience of different societal or cultural norms that refugees from Syria realise that behaviour that they have taken for granted is not 'normal'. The impact of this realisation may manifest in mental health or behavioural problems which carry a stigma in all societies; the challenges of asking for this help already exists and to link cause and effect perhaps years later.

I asked the same question about the potential for definitional stretch relating to coercive control of Gill Hague, at Bristol University, who set up the Violence Against Women Research Group. She saw scope in looking at definitional stretching, but urged caution, stating that we should be looking at this in 'baby-steps'. The time it has taken to get an understanding of coercive control, and what it means in a very limited number of Western schools of thought will mean that the challenge of broadening it may be a step too far too quickly. She felt that there was much more to do to improve understanding of Violence Against Women and also felt that it may not be the right time to introduce something else into the conversation. Although her concern was more from an activist point of view rather than whether this is something that should be looked at academically, which she supported. Nazand Begikhani, who is an expert of violence against women in Kurdish Iraq, signaled that she thought that this type of violence (psychological, mental) was already in international law, and that it had been recognised at an international level. She was unsure what more was required.

There has been some work in recent years that does already make the connection between 'negative experiences' and the impact on children, that does explore the impact of psychological violence. In Wales and Scotland, there has been more of a public health focus on 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACES). By framing the issue of the impact of negative experience, whether that be of conflict and living in a war zone and all that is witnessed there, as a health issue there is scope to explore the psychological impact of coercively controlling behaviours in conflict as part of the wider understanding of conflict. Public Health Wales recently published 'Preventing Violence, Promoting Peace – A policy tool kit for addressing interper-

sonal, collective and extremist violence'. The report talks about the impact of distinct forms of violence but also introduces the concept of 'life course' violence:

'Acute impacts of violence (i.e. in the immediate aftermath of victimisation) include significant physical injury, disability and death. Globally, interpersonal and collective violence are estimated to have caused around 580,000 deaths and more than 33 million years of healthy life lost in 2015. From a life course perspective, violence and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can impair social and emotional development, limit individuals' life opportunities and result in early death …'[18]

There is clearly an interest and scope to include coercive control in conflict as a form of violence, and ACE, that could fall into further research in the public health space. This is also supported by the report by Save the Children in its 2017 report 'Invisible Wounds' where the impact of the experience of war manifests itself as 'toxic stress. These experiences include the daily fear of death in conflict but also the impact of witnessing and experiencing a combination of things such as loss of education or feelings of grief. At six years old, this is the only life many of these children have experienced,

I will now turn to the question posed by Dr Begikhani; what is there in International Law and international statutes and conventions that supports the assertion that coercive control, or at least recognised elements of it, are already 'offences'?

What does International Law state?
In seeking to understand the extent to which the ideas contained within coercive control are already incorporated within international law, it is useful to start with the Geneva Convention, particularly the fourth Convention (1949) which includes:

> *(a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;*
> *(b) taking of hostages*
> *(c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment*

Although the Convention references torture and degrading treatment, it is not explicit that this should include coercive control. In many cases the victim does not see themselves as such, until it is too late and other forms of physical violence have caused physical harm or even death. If a behaviour is not yet recognised for the harm it causes, then it is unlikely to be picked up in such a broad definition. For example, in domestic legislation the reason it is an explicit offence is to ensure that we understand that this behaviour is not acceptable. Without it, it is unclear whether it would be considered and what threshold would need to be reached.

For more recent developments, I have looked in detail at the 'International Protocol on the Documentation and investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict', which came out of the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Protocol itself includes reference to the psychological repercussions of sexual violence for survivors and witnesses, and a reference to the gender-based nature of it and the prevalence against children. Similar to the argument that Stark makes about the structural nature of coercive control, the protocol makes clear that "historical and structural inequalities that exist between men and women, and the different forms of gender-based discrimination that women are subjected to all over the world, contribute to the women and girls being disproportionately affected by sexual violence in conflict setting."[19] The protocol helpfully goes on to recognise that sexual violence as a crime under international law is often committed as part of a broad pattern of violations against individuals and communities, that includes sexual and non-sexual crimes.[20] So here we have a recognition, in addition to what we know is a crime under international law, that there is a broader set of 'behaviours' that seem to reflect at least in part the definition of coercive control as an 'ongoing pattern'. What needs to be explored further, however, is what is included in this list of 'violations', and how does it compare to the language used in the coercive control descriptions and types of behaviour.

The protocol is cautious when discussing what may already be in statute and states that in certain circumstances, sexual violence constitutes a crime under international law; a war crime, a crime

against humanity and /or an act of genocide and can be investigated and prosecuted at both the national and international levels. Therefore, we need to look at the interpretation of international law and how it is enforced to see where these circumstances are, and where in these 'crimes' there is scope to include the 'broader pattern.' First there is the context of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and ad hoc tribunals. This was then codified and advanced in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and then advanced again by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL).

The protocol makes clear that although it has a focus on the provisions set out in the Rome Statute, many of them have not yet been litigated or resolved. It points out that jurisprudence of the ad hoc and hybrid tribunals, such as the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia and the SCSL may provide the only available guidance.[21] However, what is of interest here is whether there is anything in existing international law that reflects the coercive control concept, so the Rome statute seems a sensible place to start. If we consider what is contained under the heading of War Crimes (article 8.2), Crimes Against Humanity (Article 7) and Genocide (article 6) there are some elements that may be useful. Under Article 8.2 (B and c), there is specific reference to 'Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment' in 8.2 (c-e) there is also 'Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, and intentional starvation and deprivation of objects indispensable to survival.' Crimes against humanity (Article 7) lists four areas of specific interest: Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law, torture, and enforced disappearance of persons and 'other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.'[22]

A thorough examination of the details of the Rome Statute and its interpretation are outside the scope of this study. An examination of interpretation of guidelines, however, is needed to determine where there may be opportunities to use this legislation to include

psychological violence. At a high level, it appears that there is reference to the sorts of behaviours that are synonymous with some of those identified in domestic legislation. What is important about the Rome Statute is that it covers individuals acting within the state, not just the state itself. And, crimes against humanity can apply in the absence of a formal conflict. But initial work of the ICC, established by the Rome Statute has shown that it is easier to prosecute under some categories than it is others, for example, in terms of the evidence that might be available and whether the acts committed were behind closed doors or a mass publicly witnessed atrocity classified as genocide. In the case of the more public events it is still difficult, but perhaps less difficult to prosecute them for the activity that takes place out of the public space. The evidence point is helpful; and one faced in the enforcement of the domestic legislation on coercive control. But there are instances where victims of this form of abuse have been able to provide evidence, most famously on one of Stark's cases, keeping a notebook of daily tasks, which was compelling evidence of the domination and control that the victim was being subjected to. But leaving the difficulty of evidencing the crime to one side for the moment, it is instructive to return to the argument put forward by the World Organisation Against Torture. Because in our attempt to find something applicable in international law, it is important to consider what the Rome statute gives us in terms of torture, even if trying to prosecute for this may be a more difficult route.

The United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) defines torture as:

> For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquies-

cence of a public official or other person acting in an of-
ficial capacity. It does not include pain or suffering aris-
ing only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful
sanctions.[23]

What is interesting about this definition is that it clearly identifies
that perpetrators of torture are either a public official or conducting
their activity with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or
someone acting in that capacity. That would not necessarily cover the
range of actors in conflict who may be perpetrators of behaviour that
an international definition of coercive control might apply to. For
example, in the Syrian conflict it would cover the state actors and
secret police and the tactics they employ; it would not pick up those
labelled 'rebels' or actors such as Daesh, or indeed groups or gangs
who do not wear any identifying insignia. Turning again to the Rome
Statute, the definition of torture in Article 7.2(e) says:

"Torture" means the intentional infliction of severe pain
or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person
in the custody or under the control of the accused; ex-
cept that torture shall not include pain or suffering aris-
ing only from, inherent in or incidental to, lawful
sanctions;[24]

This seems to provide a more encompassing definition that may be
helpful to try to make a comparison on the behaviours listed in do-
mestic legislation. However, to be able to take any action under Arti-
cle 7 or where torture is listed as a war crime of genocide, the
perpetrator must be a national of a state party to the Rome Statute,
the alleged crime took place on the territory of a state party, or a situ-
ation is referred to the court by the United Nations Security Council.
In the case of Syria, it seems very unlikely that this would happen
under any route.

International law at the moment does recognise, at a high level,
the impact of psychological torture and whilst this is helpful, what it
does not do is recognise the cumulative effect of controlling or coer-
cive behaviour or provide clarity to those who enforce it, as to what
behaviours constitute an offence. The testing of the existing law is

essential to understanding what is needed, and it is still easier to do this through publicly witnessed acts of physical violence.

Coercive Control in the Syrian Conflict
The conflict in Syria provides a very current example of an international application for the concept of coercive control. Stark describes coercive control as being so extensive and penetrating that there is a sense of 'omnipresence.'[25] He also refers to the 'injection of high levels of fear into the ordinary round of everyday life'[26] and the devastating psychological effects of isolation; the incapacity to 'not know what you know' or what he terms as 'perspecticide'[27] where the perspective of what is right or wrong is taken away. All this is recognisable in the documented experiences of Syrians as the Arab Spring took place in 2011, and the country descended into war. But elements of it can also be found prior to that.

Three examples of literature that illustrate these very aspects in relation to Syria are examined here. The first example is the work of Nihad Sirees who describes in his 'semi fictional' book 'The Silence and the Roar' the sense of an 'all seeing' omnipresent government, which forces all citizens to carry identification and does spot checks, and coerces the people (described as masses) to take part in marches to celebrate their leader. He describes in detail the sense of fear and his isolation as a journalist. His experience at the hands of the secret police, whom he describes as 'military security goons', and the time he spends dodging them, demonstrates the power that they wield. Power in this case is created by the threat of physical violence if he failed to comply with their demands to work for them in the propaganda machine. He does not experience any physical violence until later in the book, but his understanding that physical violence will be a consequence of an arrest is clear. He describes the actions of the secret police towards a man in charge of the photocopying of posters of the leader, which became spoiled and resulted in six months torture. And lastly the marriage of his mother, under duress to a prominent minister, to force him to comply with the request to work in the communications department rather than continue as a journalist.[28] But most interesting of all is the author's description of the society in which he lives, which echoes the language in Stark's description of the domestic perpetrator of coercive control:

> … People must not think about the leader and how he
> runs the country; they must simply adore him, want to
> die for him in their adoration of him, Therefore the
> leader creates a roar all around him, forcing people to
> celebrate him, to roar … people are coerced into the
> streets in order to chant … the leader seeking to cove
> himself with a roaring halo….as a means of covering up
> and suppressing any other sound. With this roar, he aims
> to cover up violent crimes he unleashed against his ri-
> vals in the underground dungeons of the security appa-
> ratus, those places located far out of sight but which
> everyone knows about.[29]

The other two examples can be found is the works of two fe-
male journalists in Syria, both now resident in France: Janine Di
Giovanni and Samar Yazbek. Notwithstanding the risks associated
with journalism in a conflict zone anyway, both describe life in Syria
as one as predicated on fear, dominance and control. Janine Di Gio-
vanni describes instances of psychological pressure, where there is a
fear of a family member being raped. This concurs with a recognition
in the statement ahead of the 2014 Global Summit on Sexual Vio-
lence which called for recognition for such acts as psychological tor-
ture, stating, '…we must also recognise that men and boys are
victims of this crime, as are those who are forced to witness or perpe-
trate this violence against their family or community members.'[30] In
Dispatches From Syria: the Morning they Came For Us, Di Giovan-
ni provides a voice for Syrian women in particular. One describes the
specific tactics of the *Shabbiha,* or secret police acting for the regime
(which translates as ghosts).

> Their tactics were largely to incite fear within communi-
> ties; to enter towns and villages after the government
> troops had been fighting nearby, and spread the word
> that that they would rape the women… daughters,
> mothers, cousin, nieces. It's a convenient way to ethni-
> cally cleanse an entire region. Fear can be generated so
> easily.[31]

In 'A woman in the Cross Fire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution', Samar Yazbek describes, in similar terms again to Stark's description of how a perpetrator creates 'the injection of fear into everyday life', and how it has become normalised. She describes how "…without realising it people subsist on fear, which has become as automatic as breathing."[32] She describes the omnipresence of the security forces who are described as "sprouted out of the ground" and how the 'earth split open with [them].'[33] Stark also talks about surveillance and monitoring as being a key part of the continuum of violence and likens it to tactics used to intimidate Prisoners of War or hostages, but in Yazbek's work we can similarly see a comparison to her situation as a journalist being controlled by the secret police. In the same way, the intention is to ensure omnipresence and enforcing behaviours; as Stark describes it, letting the victim know she is being watched or overheard, which cause isolation both of the victim and by the victim. Yazbek endures cycles of violence, detention, intimidation, threats both physical and sexual, and threats against her daughter. She turns to Xanax to cope.

Conclusions

My objective was to demonstrate a need to better understand the impact of coercive control in the international space, not only as a weapon or war, but also as a means to govern a nation, or to incite violence or behaviours that are desired to further the aims of those in, or exercising power over others. If we understand that connection between acts of violence associated with the domestic space, and how those same behaviours form part of a continuum of violence in conflict that is more than the 'situational violence' that Johnson describes.

Syrian writers often talk about the fabric of Syrian society, and how that has been destroyed; I do not think that Stark's offer of 'sexual terrorism' as a descriptor for this is the right terminology; but the use of the word terrorism does describe the impact of this violence. It is intimate; there is a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim that is different to that of a perpetrator of random acts of violence. There is also a continuum, and I would argue a mechanism that held the fabric of society together when required, but also when

a tipping point is reached, provokes an action and reaction that has destroyed a country. In intimate partner violence, the relationship can continue for years, until something happens; sadly, in many cases resulting in extreme violence and death. Having looked at both 'situations', what differentiates the two is less clear to me at this stage than it was when I started.

However, in discussing the 'sexual terrorism' concept, Ann Flitcraft offered another insight which I will conclude this paper with. I talked about women in conflict living in constant fear; she reminded me of the reason behind the formation of the 'Reclaim the Night' movement in the UK. Liz Kelly visited Leeds at the time when the Yorkshire Ripper was committing his crimes against women in the city. She describes how she 'sensed an atmosphere of fear amongst women…83 percent of women restricted their movements'[34]. For her, this increased her awareness of how strong the fear of attack can be and the enormous effect it has on freedom.'[35] The Reclaim the Night marches were a response to that loss of freedom, and anger at the seemingly slow response of the police, and differential treatment of the female student victims over the prostitutes. The result was a series of coordinated marches across the UK in opposition to the police advice of the time that women should stay indoors and not go out at night unless accompanied by a man. Women took to the streets en masse with flaming torches. We see this act of defiance when women are able to leave abusive relationships, or even when they are forced to kill their abuser. We also saw it in the defiance and protest marches against the regime in Syria in the spring of 2011 and the foundation of movements like 'Syrian Women in Support of the Uprising'. Time will tell whether Syrian women will be able to reclaim their lives, not just the night, and whether a specific offence of coercive control will ensure women in the domestic sphere can do the same. If they can, then those principles of freedom, dignity and a sense of identity are the cornerstones of a society, including post conflict Syria, that must be in place for the future.

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Figures
Figure 1. Types of Behaviour as set out in Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship Statutory Guidance Framework (2015) p4

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