

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP



SYSTEMIC HARM AND COLLECTIVE
(UN)AWARENESS.

Forms of Agency and the Diffusion of Responsibility in Structural Violence.
Insights from Phenomenology, Violence
Studies, and Liberation Philosophy

January 29-30, 2026

COLLEGE OF FELLOWS



THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

9:00-9:15 am | Opening Remarks

9:15-10:15 am | Esteban Marín-Ávila

Violence as a Challenge to Acting Meaningfully.
Phenomenological Remarks on Violence, Trust,
and Domination

10:15-10:30 am | Coffee Break

10:30-11:30 am | Tarun Jose Kattumana

Structural Oppression and Inhibited
Intentionality: The Case of Indian Community
Health Workers

11:30 am - 12:30 pm | Ana María Miranda Mora

Embodied Affective Resistance Against Sexualized
Violence

12:30-2:30 pm | Lunch

2:30-3:30 pm | Thomas Szanto

The Affective Politics of (Non-)Belonging

3:30-4:30 pm | Lisa Guenther

Land Turned Sideways: A Critical Phenomenology
of the Carceral-Colonial Lifeworld

7 pm | Dinner

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

9:00-10:00 am | Ernst Wolff

Violent Responses to Injustice: Symbol, Strategy
and Self-Injury

10:00-11:00 am | Melanie Altanian

Assessing Responsibilities for Epistemic
Oppression in Cultures of Denial and Impunity

11:00-11:15 | Coffee Break

11:15 am - 12:15 pm | Sergio Pérez-Gatica

By Design, by Accident, or by Chance? Structural
Violence and the Limits of Deliberate Agency

12:15 pm | Final Discussion

Systemic harm often transcends the boundaries of deliberate action, unfolding instead through bureaucratic and structural dynamics that elude traditional notions of responsibility and individual accountability. From social injustice (e.g. housing discrimination, gender inequality, racialized policing, etc.) to predatory economics to environmental devastation, structural harm often arises without clearly identifiable agents directly causing it (or directly seeing themselves as the cause of it)—and yet it remains deeply entangled with social practices, group habits, and institutions whose preservation, transformation, or abolition presupposes multiple forms of agency: free and forced, habitual and deliberative, individual and collective.

Ever since the Norwegian sociologist and peace researcher Johan Galtung coined the term “structural violence” in the late 1960s, it has been common to assume that such violence is characterized by an absence of intentionality. Recent sociological and philosophical studies have challenged this assumption, sometimes suggesting that the concept of structural violence has been poorly theorized, is essentially flawed, and should be dismissed. From a phenomenological perspective, however, while the idea of violence ‘without subject’ must be questioned, the need for conceptual tools to describe forms of systemic harm caused by collective human agency remains essential.

This workshop invites critical reflection on the ambiguous spaces between shared responsibility, individual accountability, and different forms of collective agency in cases of harm caused in systemic ways. How can we make sense of accountability and complicity when violence is embedded in the very structures that shape social life? Can resistance and liberation emerge from within these same structures? And what resources do phenomenology, liberation philosophy, and violence studies offer for rethinking ethical response in contexts where agency is obscured or indirect? Can subjects be complicit of their own (or others’) oppression without being accountable—or accountable without full-blooded agency? In what ways does interdisciplinary violence research provide conceptual resources for rethinking these tensions?

