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New Study Warns: High-Tech “Eyes on Atrocity” Can Narrow Justice—and Sideline Local Truths

Researchers introduce “juriscopic” framework to explain how law, science, and visual technologies reshape what counts as evidence—and what gets left unseen

TORONTO, Ontario — February 28, 2026 — A new socio-legal study, “*New Terrains of Evidence: Rethinking Techno-humanitarianism and its limits*,” argues that the rapid growth of satellite imagery, geospatial analytics, open-source digital evidence, and AI in human rights and international criminal law is producing a powerful—but constraining—regime of “seeing” that can amplify certain truths while obscuring others.

Authored by **Sara Kendall (University of Kent)**, **Jennifer Burrell (University at Albany, SUNY)**, and **Kamari Maxine Clarke (University of Toronto)**, the white paper examines how technologically mediated optics become entangled with legal accountability and scientific claims to neutrality, generating what the authors call a “**juriscopic**” techno-humanitarian regime—one that increasingly determines which harms become legible as “evidence,” and which forms of justice are marginalized.

Key findings

The study reports several recurring patterns across multi-sited research involving the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**, **family-led searches for the disappeared in Mexico**, and **conflict-affected communities in northern Nigeria**:

- **More data does not automatically mean more justice.** The expansion of digital documentation can increase visibility while simultaneously narrowing what counts as actionable truth within legal and scientific standards.
- **Evidence is made—not found.** Specialized technical expertise is often required to translate imagery and digital materials into forms courts will treat as credible, creating new gatekeeping dynamics around credentials and “expertise.”
- **Technological “ways of seeing” can crowd out other forms of justice.** The authors document tensions where communities prioritize recovery, recognition, and closure—goals that may not align with courtroom-centered accountability models.
- **What technologies can capture shapes what the world believes is happening.** In Nigeria, for example, satellite detection tends to privilege visible destruction (e.g., burned settlements) while rendering other harms—such as abductions or many forms of state violence—far less legible.
- **Local knowledge is frequently undervalued even when it is the foundation of truth-finding.** In Mexico, families searching for missing loved ones develop deep forensic and terrain expertise, yet often confront state or professional skepticism that treats their hard-won knowledge as secondary to institutional authority.

The “juriscopic” insight

The authors argue that when scopic (seeing) technologies are routed through juridical institutions, law and science do not simply “use” technology—they **reshape its meaning**, deciding what is relevant, admissible, reliable, and probative. This creates feedback loops that harden dominant frameworks of truth while foreclosing alternative ways of knowing and repairing harm.

Research basis

The white paper draws on **more than three years of fieldwork**, including **over seventy interviews** and extensive observation and collaboration with lawyers, scientists, advocates, and affected communities across **Mexico, Nigeria, and The Hague/ICC-adjacent networks**.

Why it matters now

As courts, governments, and NGOs expand the use of AI-enabled evidence platforms and geospatial analysis in human rights investigations, the authors urge policymakers, legal institutions, and humanitarian actors to resist the assumption that technological visibility is inherently emancipatory—and to design accountability practices that can recognize **structural violence, vernacular expertise, and plural forms of justice** alongside prosecutions.

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White Paper

“New Terrains of Evidence: Rethinking Techno-humanitarianism and its limits”