

# Deception: a critical discourse analysis of undercover policing and intelligence operations in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper takes as its starting point the contention that media representations of crime and policing, and undercover policing in particular, *matter*. Through a multimodal critical discourse analysis this paper explores the representations of undercover policing and intelligence operations in the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. The paper contends that despite its status as science fiction *The Clone Wars* engages with several of the real-life practices and challenges of undercover policing and intelligence operations. The overall analysis indicates that *The Clone Wars* projects an important critique of the morally problematic nature of the militarisation of policing and the routinisation of deceptive undercover policing practices. The paper concludes with a reflection on the consequences of this depiction, arguing that for those practitioners who are willing to engage with representations of their craft in popular culture there are valuable practical lessons to be learned from such fictional accounts.

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## Introduction

In the most recent edition of *The Politics of the Police* (Bowling, Reiner, & Sheptycki, 2019) the point is emphasised that the news media and entertainment industry have for decades projected the *métier* to the general public, with important consequences for police legitimacy. This paper similarly contends that media representations of crime and policing *matter*, and representations of undercover policing in particular. Mass media representations of undercover policing are of importance given their recurrence across multiple media channels, alongside the infrequency with which individuals will ever knowingly encounter an undercover officer or become aware of any covert police operation. This situation is ameliorated slightly by a long-standing academic interest in undercover policing: from the pioneering scholarship of Gary T. Marx (1988) and Jean Paul Brodeur (1992) to more recent research by Raphael Schelmbach (2018) and Nathan Griffin (2021). However, it is important not to over-estimate the import of scholarly accounts into public awareness of this topic. Indeed, John Van Maanen (1988, p. 131) has highlighted how academic disciplines do not have a monopoly on cultural representation

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in society. Beginning here, this article explores the representations of undercover policing and intelligence operations in the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*.

Themes of crime, policing, intelligence, spying, subterfuge and, of course, war permeate the Star Wars universe. In fact, the famous opening text crawl of the original 1977 Star Wars film, subsequently titled *A New Hope* (Episode IV), highlights the ongoing 'civil war' and the role of 'Rebel spies' in successfully stealing the plans for the Empire's weapon of mass destruction, the Death Star. Inspired by Andrew Wilczak's exploration of the Star Wars film franchise using the tools of radical (or critical) criminology (Wilczak, 2021), this paper takes a deeper dive into the Star Wars universe by exploring the Lucasfilm Animation produced *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Beginning with a 2008 theatrical release (*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*) before finding popularity and acclaim as a television series of the same name, this content depicted events in the Star Wars universe between the live action theatrical releases *Attack of the Clones* (Episode II) and *Revenge of the Sith* (Episode III). *The Clone Wars* television series comprised of seven seasons, the first of which was released in 2008 and the last in 2020. There were 133 television episodes in total, each of which was typically around 25 minutes in length. The large number of episodes in each season of *The Clone Wars* provided the animators and writers with space for individual character development, quests, and world-building through ambitious story arcs that would have been impossible to implement in the live action theatrical releases, even in a trilogy format.

This paper conducts a multimodal critical discourse analysis of a specific story arc in season four of *The Clone Wars* that developed across four successive episodes: 'Deception' (episode 15), 'Friends and Enemies' (episode 16), 'The Box' (episode 17), and 'Crisis on Naboo' (episode 18). This focus is justified not only because of the relevance of the specific arc to undercover and covert policing but also because there has been relatively little scholarship focused on Star Wars television shows, despite the increasing importance of this medium to the overall franchise (Nardi & Sweet, 2020).<sup>1</sup> The story arc under examination centres on the Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi as the protagonist in an undercover operation to expose a plot to kidnap the Supreme Chancellor of the Republic Senate. Undercover policing remains a germane site for criminological inquiry, from critical and cultural criminological perspectives. As Loftus and Gould reported a decade ago, despite some long-standing academic attention,

Covert policing is an extremely hidden, concealed and invisible form of social practice. Yet, while the culture and conduct of uniformed police has always been a centrepiece of criminological scholarship, our understanding of the police use of deceptive and covert means remains profoundly undeveloped. (2012, p. 276)

In conducting a multimodal critical discourse analysis of undercover policing and intelligence operations in the realm of animation this paper explores each episode of the 'Kenobi undercover' arc, highlighting and discussing the representations therein of people, places, practices, and ethics. The overall analysis indicates that *The Clone Wars* projects an important critique of the morally problematic nature of the militarisation of policing and the routinisation of deceptive undercover policing practices. The paper concludes with a reflection on the consequences of this depiction, arguing that for those practitioners who are willing to engage with representations of their craft in popular culture there are valuable practical lessons to be learned from such fictional accounts.

## Methodology

This paper draws upon critical discourse analysis to orientate its research questions and to provide a set of methods that can be used to answer these questions. Arguably emerging from critical linguistics (Mayr & Machin, 2012), critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse as it intersects with power and ideology (see Fairclough, 2013). Whilst discourse can have multiple meanings and uses even within applied discussions of critical discourse analysis (see Bloor & Bloor, 2013), it is understood here not simply as text or verbal communication, but instead in a much broader Foucauldian sense as a historically contingent set of *statements* that belong to a particular *discursive formation*. Here, statements are not simply propositions, sentences, or speech acts but are also a 'vertical' relation between them and the signs they contain (Webb, 2013, p. 89). A discursive formation, for Foucault, is the principle of dispersion and redistribution of such statements. Discourse, then, can be understood as the group of statements that belongs to a single discursive formation (Foucault, 1972).

Critical discourse analysis has, in recent years, diversified and developed towards a multimodal approach that moves beyond the traditional focus on language, especially in its written form (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). David Machin highlighted the power and promise of this approach in engaging with a diverse modes and constructions of discourse. Machin's remarks support the analytical focus of this paper on *The Clone Wars*:

Discourses are communicated not only through political speeches and news items but through entertainment media such as computer games and movies, in the social and material culture of everyday life such as fashion, toys, music, architecture, and town planning and in the very ways that we engage our bodies and interact. Discourses are communicated through different kinds of semiotic resources, different modes, and realised through different genres. And it is at this level that many people most frequently experience these discourses as fun, as style, and simply as part of the taken for granted everyday world, even if on other more or less tangible levels they feel their power over them. All these different levels of communicative activity are infused by and shaped by, power relations and ideologies. (Machin, 2013, p. 347)

Multimodal critical discourse analysis seeks not only to broaden the interest of the research programme beyond language but also to both engage and denaturalise visual communication, revealing how images are *constitutive* in being both produced by and in reproducing dominant ideologies and power structures in society. There is synergy here between critical discourse analysis and cultural criminology, particularly given that both are interested in deconstructing the cultural artefacts, signs and symbols of everyday life in an effort to uncover their meaning (see Ilan, 2019), as well as a shared concern to move beyond ocularcentrism and towards a broader and deeper engagement with the senses (Brown & Carrabine, 2019). In its examination of undercover policing and intelligence operations, this research sought to explore how the characters, places, institutions and practices the visually, sonically and linguistically represented in the undercover Kenobi arc of *The Clone Wars*. This allowed the paper to further extend the multimodality of critical discourse analysis by incorporating an exploration of audio, particularly voices and accents, as a semiotic mode. This multimodal analysis sought to understand what these intertextual representations reveal about the underlying ideologies and relations of power in *The Clone Wars*.

On a practical level, the process of critical discourse analysis was undertaken using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software package. The procedure involved a four-stage process. Firstly, to orientate the study and for the purposes of thematic coding, overarching themes were identified from both the literature on undercover policing and from the principles of critical discourse analysis itself. Secondly, each of the four episodes of *The Clone Wars* was imported into NVivo. Once imported, these were manually transcribed in full by the researcher to provide a corresponding script for each episode. This allowed the audio-visual data and the text to be viewed and analysed side-by-side in NVivo. Thirdly, the process of initial thematic coding was then undertaken for each episode. The coding process was conducted on a scene-by-scene basis, with each scene coded across its visual, aural and linguistic dimensions. Each episode was coded four times in this stage: script only; visual only; audio-only; and finally all three elements concurrently. This coding process drew upon the work completed in stage one but was also flexible in allowing additional themes to emerge as the process developed. Fourthly, the coding process was repeated again, once for all elements concurrently, to ensure that all themes, including those that emerged later as the initial coding procedure developed, were applied equitably across the four episodes. This overall process produced a detailed coding of animation, sound, and script across the four episodes. As importantly, it also allowed the researcher to develop an immersive knowledge of the coded dataset across all three (linked) semiotic modes, which deepened the critical analysis of the discourse. The findings of this analysis are presented across four themes: narrating war; people and place; undercover practice; and undercover ethics.

## Narrating war

Each episode of *The Clone Wars* begins with the Star Wars main theme music, followed by the appearance of *The Clone Wars* logo and the transition of this logo to an epigraph unique to that episode. The vocal announcement of a narrator is then heard, and this acts as a prelude to the particular episode. For example, the season 4 episode titled 'Deception' (episode 15), the first in the undercover Kenobi arc, begins with the epigraph 'All warfare is based on deception' (from *The Art of War* by the Chinese military strategist and general Sun Tzu), before proceeding with the following narrator introduction [Episode 15, 00:17–00:40]:

A terrorist threat! Moralo Eval, mastermind of a Separatist plot to kidnap Chancellor Palpatine, has been captured by Republic forces! But even with the criminal behind bars, rumours swirl in the underworld of Coruscant that Moralo's plot has already been set in motion. With precious time running out, the Jedi Council hatches their own plot to keep the Chancellor safe.

At the outset, a multimodal critical discourse analysis of *The Clone Wars* must recognise how the narrator announcement at the beginning of each episode is delivered in the style of a World War II newsreel. In homage to broadcasters such as Graham McNamee and Bob Danvers-Walker, the narrator of *The Clone Wars* is a bombastic but recurrent presence that precedes every episode. The narrator, a man, is an unseen, authoritative figure who reinforces the frame of righteous war. The resonance of *The Clone Wars* narration

with World War II newsreels and propaganda film is signalled by Sumiko Higashi's depiction of the latter,

The Voice-of-God narration in *Paramount News*, for example, continued the rational investigative tradition of the urban reporter, while its moral exhortation, rendering ideology more transparent, expressed a Manichaeian view of the cosmos. (Higashi, 1998, p. 39)

The narrator in *The Clone Wars* serves a similarly symbolic, dichotomising and political purpose: rendering good versus evil, security versus threat, and light versus dark.

Given that the animated series is titled *The Clone Wars*, and that it is a spin-off of the larger Star Wars franchise, it may seem glib to recognise that such wartime newsreel-style narration frames each episode. However, it is important to recognise the politics of this voice. The invocation of war through the narrator shifts the array of acceptable conduct from *jus in pace* to *jus in bello*, that is to say from peacetime to war. This context is particularly important for the most prominent 'heroes' in *The Clone Wars*, the Jedi. Existing for millennia in the Star Wars universe, the Jedi were an ancient order of protectors and peacekeepers who drew their power from an invisible energy field named 'The Force'. Across a thousand generations the role of the Jedi was essentially to undertake diplomatic missions, as well as aspects of policing and law enforcement. The advent of the Clone Wars saw the Jedi recast as military Generals, leading a Grand Army of the Republic against a separatist movement led by Count Dooku, a former Jedi Master.<sup>2</sup> Two of the most prominent young Jedi of this time, Anakin Skywalker and his padawan (apprentice) Ahsoka Tano, both became warriors forged in the crucible of successive battles in the Clone Wars.<sup>3</sup> The narration of *The Clone Wars* assists in reinforcing the frame of war, with important consequences for the characters and events in the undercover Kenobi arc in season four of this animated series.

## People and place

Roughly the first half of the first episode in the undercover Kenobi arc ('Deception', episode 15) acts as a set-up for the larger story arc. The plot centres upon the staged death of Obi-Wan Kenobi, as he ostensibly is shot and killed by a bounty hunter and sniper named Rako Hardeen. Unbeknownst to Hardeen, he was in fact commissioned by members of the Jedi Council itself to 'kill' Kenobi. Suitably forewarned by those Jedi Council members, Kenobi knew of his impending fate and was able to take necessary counter-measures. Nonetheless, as the attempted assassination played out Kenobi successfully convinced those around him, including both Anakin and Ahsoka, that he was dead following Hardeen's blaster shot. With the truth about Kenobi's real fate known to only a handful of Jedi Council insiders, his 'death' provided him with deep cover to assume a fake identity: that of Hardeen himself. Anakin and Ahsoka located and arrested Hardeen for Kenobi's murder, unaware that the man they had apprehended and transported to prison is, in fact, Kenobi. Once deployed in the Republic prison as Hardeen, Kenobi sought to infiltrate the criminal network, comprised in prison of the criminal mastermind Moralo Eval and the renowned bounty hunter Cad Bane. The trio then escaped the prison, linking up with the wider network, led by Count Dooku, as they executed their plot to kidnap the Chancellor.

The initial transformation of Kenobi to become Hardeen – via technologies very much rooted in the realm of science fiction – is notable for both Kenobi's physical conversion as well as his vocal change. Visually, Kenobi presents in his original self as a well-groomed, bearded and religiously-robed Jedi Knight. Hardeen, on the other hand is a bald-headed and muscular figure with a rugged, tattooed face. The comparative physical appearance of both Kenobi and Hardeen, and the transformation of Kenobi to become Hardeen, is of criminological interest given that the origins of criminology are rooted in the study of physical bodies, particularly in the work of the classical criminologist Cesare Lombroso. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Lombroso published a series of works, drawing upon his interests in areas such as physiognomy and phrenology. Lombroso's work, as a positivist criminology, advanced an approach that posited that criminality was inherited, 'criminals' being 'born not made', and that such 'criminals' could be distinguished from others by their particular physical characteristics. The very first chapter of Lombroso's *Criminal Man*, for example, begins with a study of 66 'criminal craniums' that asks if those with 'cranial anomalies' can have the same level of intelligence or social responsibility as those with 'perfectly normal skulls' (Lombroso, 2006, p. 49).<sup>4</sup> Tattoos, which Hardeen has on his face and forehead, also featured in Lombroso's work. Lombroso (2006, p. 58) considered tattoos to be indicative of 'primitive men' and of 'special anatomico-legal significance' because of the frequency of tattooing amongst criminals. Lombroso's atavistic approach to understanding crime and behaviour has long been discredited and largely rejected in the broad interdisciplinary field of criminology (see Knepper, 2018; Thrasher, 1949); although research continues to indicate how the stigma attached to tattoos persists across cultures (see Larsen, Patterson, & Markham, 2014).<sup>5</sup>

*The Clone Wars* has the potential, as animated science fiction, to usurp the Lombrosian perspective that lazily links crime to physical features. Yet the aesthetic of Hardeen, especially when juxtaposed with Kenobi, presents the viewer with a fairly stereotypical 'criminal' that appears to draw upon outdated tropes and prejudices. Perhaps this is unsurprising. Phillips and Strobl (2013, pp. 87–91), for example, have located Lombrosian tendencies in representations of the 'villainous other' in comic books, with such characters marked as such through physical anomalies similar to those depicted in *Criminal Man*. Furthermore, in his historically rooted account of supervillainy in the comic book medium, particularly the American superhero comic form, Jack Fennell (2012) noted how the disfigured or deformed supervillain serves as a conduit for superheroism and the righteous dispensation of justice. In the undercover Kenobi arc, however, Hardeen is not elevated through aesthetic or narrative to the realm of the supervillain, but is instead characterised by a level of everyday banality. Beyond his physical traits that would distinguish him as 'criminal' Hardeen is otherwise mundane; in both his relative 'ordinariness' and that he frequents the Coruscant underworld alongside the regular citizens of the ecumenopolis. This depiction of Hardeen as 'a criminal but not supervillain' resonates with Fennell's account in that Hardeen is also *punished* as an ordinary citizen through the criminal justice process of the Galactic Republic, and not through the direct and righteous vengeance of the superhero.

Hardeen's relative ordinariness is reinforced sonically through his gruff but otherwise generic American accent. Kenobi, on the contrary, is voiced to sound upper-class British. This reflects a tendency in the Star Wars universe to locate British accents within the 'core

worlds' of political power such as Coruscant and to imbue such accents with high-status (and power), on both the light and dark sides of the Force. From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, voices in film, including language and the attribution of regional or ethnic dialects or accents to some characters (and not others), are deserving of consideration, particularly when such choices are relatively free, as in animation (Bateman, 2018). Such political choices also extend beyond people, and into representations of place in a galaxy limited by only the imagination of the writers, designers, concept artists and animators of *The Clone Wars*.

The importance of place has been central to the sociological and criminological imagination since at least William Foote Whyte's 1943 account of *Street Corner Society* (1943), and the symbolism and power of place is readily apparent in the Star Wars universe. In *The Clone Wars*, for example, Kenobi is frequently found attending important Jedi Council meetings in the physical overworld of Coruscant, the political core-world of the Republic. Hardeen, on the other, is found celebrating Kenobi's death in a dark drinking den in Coruscant's underworld. Both the idea of the criminal underworld (Kalifa, 2019) and the affective atmosphere of the night-time city (Shaw, 2014) have been important developments in criminological scholarship. In episode 15 both are immediately represented and imbued with the corresponding status. The underworld of Coruscant, in particular, is coded with neon-lighting, vandalism, promiscuity and excess, contrasting with the muted browns and ceremonial symbolism of the Jedi temple and Republic politics of the planet's overworld.

The second episode of this arc (Friends and Enemies, episode 16) deepens Kenobi's metaphorical and physical descent, disguised as Hardeen, into the criminal underworld beyond Coruscant. Following a prison break, Kenobi and his two new criminal associates depart for Nal Hutta, a mist-covered swamp world located in the hinterland Outer Rim Territories. Nal Hutta is portrayed as a place penetrated and defined by the presence of organised crime, as part of an autonomous region of the galaxy controlled by the Hutt Clan crime family. Cad Bane describes Nal Hutta as a 'slime pool' where 'everyone is an outlaw', whilst Eval remarks upon it as a 'festering stink-hole'. The characterisation of Nal Hutta as a stigmatised and politically peripheral community, but one connected to a broader network of flows and interactions beyond its borders and boundaries, resonates with recent criminological research discussing the relationship between place, territory and organised crime (see Clark, Fraser, & Hamilton-Smith, 2021). In the arc under examination, these settings form the stage for Kenobi's undercover practice.

## Undercover practice

The literature on police culture has persistently highlighted the perception held by police officers, across various jurisdictions, that their job is dangerous (see Skolnick, 1966; Loftus, 2009), with this disposition representing a core characteristic of police culture (Bowling et al., 2019). Whilst not all policing roles are defined by their inherent 'dangerousness', undercover policing is a specialist role that is understandably considered to present unique operational challenges. Miller (2006) highlighted the numerous dangers associated with undercover policing, and in particular the 'deep' undercover work that involves changes in the operative's identity and appearance. For Miller, these dangers include being subject to physical violence and the psychological stress associated with



maintaining cover in complex circumstances with very little supervision or support (Miller, 2006). More recently, Kowalczyk and Sharps (2017) have suggested undercover assignments are amongst the most stressful faced by law-enforcement officers, and Curran (2021) considered the range of challenges faced by undercover officers, including exposure to dangerous and life-threatening situations.

Given the risks associated with undercover policing, and in particular that undercover operatives are placed in complex and often hostile environments where cover must be maintained for the purposes of safety and security, a key challenge therein is how to safely and securely communicate intelligence from the operative to the investigating agency. This challenge is apparent across the undercover Kenobi arc, emerging as a recurring issue in episode 16. The communication between Kenobi and the Jedi Council members (Mace Windu and Yoda) is notable for the lack of operational security displayed by both parties. Operational security in communication during undercover intelligence deployments – through both the technology used and the manner in which any information is disclosed – is vital to ensure the safety of the deployed officers and the integrity of the mission itself. In episode 15, for example, Kenobi makes an effort to communicate using the name 'Ben', but in the ensuing conversation Mace Windu uses Kenobi's real name, and Kenobi responds by acknowledging that he is working undercover.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, in communicating with his fellow Jedi Kenobi's accent remains incognito (as Hardeen) but his vocabulary reverts to his own. For example, when covertly speaking via remote communications with the Jedi on Coruscant Kenobi uses the more formal phrasing 'I shall' rather than gruff forthrightness apparent in his dealings with his fellow fugitives when undercover as 'Hardeen'. A Lombrosian framing in *The Clone Wars* is also apparent here. In *Criminal Man* Lombroso stated in his short account of the language of criminals that,

Criminals speak differently because they feel differently; they speak like savages because they are savages, living amidst the very flower of European civilisation. (Lombroso, 2006, p. 77)

Lombroso notes that the criminal lexicon is natural, in the sense that it impedes surveillance by outsiders and confirms a sense of belonging, and that the use of particular jargon is also apparent in the police. Kenobi's reversion to his formal lexicon would also suggest that he is skilled enough to avoid the dangers of in-situ 'role generalisation', and that he is able to maintain his core identity and focus on the overall mission (see Miller, 2006). More critically, this subtle word choice is indicative of how language and dialect maintain the distinction between high and low status in the Star Wars universe.

The representation of undercover practice in the Kenobi arc also highlights how the undercover operator must develop rapport with the targeted individual, in this case with the 'criminal mastermind' Moralo Eval. In discussing the use of undercover informants Atkinson (2021a) drew upon and developed social penetration theory to show how the covert operator must, through mutual self-disclosure and the development of trust, move from superficial acquaintance and towards closer relations, in order to obtain closely guarded information. This was apparent in Kenobi's initial interaction with Eval in prison. Prior to his undercover deployment, and in undertaking his physical transformation to assume Hardeen's identity, Kenobi is briefed by his fellow Jedi on the main operational target [Episode 15, 05:24–06:04]:



OBI-WAN KENOBI

Tell me more about my target.

MACE WINDU

His name is Moralo Eval. Works directly for Count Dooku. Rumour is their plot will be hatched in three revolutions at the festival on Naboo. We tried to make a deal with Moralo for more details, but he was uncooperative.

OBI-WAN KENOBI

Any details that might help me gain his trust while in prison?

MACE WINDU

Eval killed his mother when he was only a boy. Told the authorities he did it because he was bored.

OBI-WAN KENOBI

Hmm, I'll try not to bore him.

YODA

Not a game is this, Obi-Wan. The risks, great they are.

OBI-WAN KENOBI

Yes, and so are the rewards. Besides preventing Eval from abducting the Chancellor, he could lead us to Grievous, and possibly Dooku himself.

This exchange provides the wider operational context and justification for Kenobi's undercover deployment, but also background information that Kenobi uses to develop rapport with Eval when they first meet in prison later in the episode. The scene plays out at a prison table during mealtime, as Eval approaches Hardeen and sits opposite him [Episode 15, 11:51–12:10]:

MORALO EVAL

Rako Hardeen. Your reputation precedes you. I'm curious, when you killed that Jedi, was it for money or revenge?

OBI-WAN KENOBI (AS RAKO HARDEEN)

I don't know. Guess I was bored.

Eval chuckles, finding this retort amusing. This positive encounter forms the basis for their subsequent interaction in which Eval solicits Hardeen's involvement in the kidnap plot.<sup>7</sup>

Kenobi's evocation of Eval's response to his childhood trauma provides a useful indication of how the episode invokes the operational use of target profile analysis; a set of intelligence analysis techniques that aim to describe the criminal, their criminal activity, lifestyle, associations, the risks they pose, and their personal strengths and weaknesses in order to give focus to investigative targeting (see Gottschalk, 2009; Keay & Kirby, 2017). Similar background research on targets was noted by Gregory Feldman in his ethnographic study of undercover policing, highlighting how the investigative team in his

study researched the social background and modus operandi of the target, drawing upon extensive exploitation of intelligence and surveillance activities (Feldman, 2016). More problematically, Kenobi's ever-increasing involvement in this criminal conspiracy, whilst disguised as Hardeen, only serves to increase the ethical dilemmas of the operation.

## Undercover ethics

Issues of ethics permeate all aspects of covert policing, from the use of human informants to property intrusion for the purposes of installing hidden recording devices. Undercover policing, in particular, poses serious ethical issues and dilemmas. The recent history of undercover policing of political activism and protest in the UK is an illustrative example. In exploring this issue Katerina Hadjimatheou (2017) highlighted how a secret undercover unit of the Metropolitan Police charged with investigating political activism and protest had faced serious allegations, some proven to be true, including that undercover officers stole the identities of dead children to provide their cover and that they engaged in sexual and intimate relationships, including marriages in which they fathered children with operational targets, to build their credibility. Corroborating this account Bonino and Kauollas (2015) noted that in developing their credibility in these 'deep cover' assignments the undercover officers in this unit not only developed new identities and physical appearances but also committed minor crimes.

Murphy (2016) has noted that undercover investigations have for some time involved the undertaking of technically unlawful activity, but that the emergence of regulatory systems that authorise and facilitate such activities is a recent development. This view is supported by recent developments in the UK. The Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021, for example, amends the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 to allow specified government bodies to authorise covert human intelligence sources (including undercover officers) to participate in conduct which would otherwise constitute a criminal offence. In the process of bringing this Act into force, the UK Government was clear on two matters. Firstly, that participation in criminal conduct is an essential and inescapable feature of the use of covert human informants, and that such participation is vital in maintaining the credibility of covert source and to gain the trust of those under investigation. Secondly, that whilst the proposed legislation was new, the capability was not. Such authorised criminal conduct is a 'longstanding tactic' to prevent harm to national security and to prevent and detect crime (Home Office, 2020).

Throughout episode 16 Kenobi is involved in criminality, including perpetrating serious violence against other prisoners. However, in the course of the prison break Kenobi encounters an especially acute and significant ethical dilemma. In a physical confrontation between the prospective escapees and the prison guards, Kenobi (as Hardeen) points a laser blaster at a guard but does not shoot. His vacillation allows the guard to raise an alarm, before Bane, noticing Hardeen's hesitation, shoots and kills the guard. Bane chastises Hardeen for his hesitancy, and Kenobi (as Hardeen) must think on his feet:

CADE BANE

What's the matter with you?!

## OBI-WAN KENOBI (AS RAKO HARDEEN)

My blaster jammed.

As they leave, Eval is seen mercilessly assaulting a fallen guard [20:18]. This sequence raises the pertinent issue of ethical problems and dynamic decision-making in undercover policing and intelligence operations. As Murphy (2021) has noted, undercover agents are routinely placed in life-threatening situations, and in doing so find themselves acting as a criminal in circumstances where they would otherwise exhibit strong law-enforcement values, and in doing so they learn to perform a sophisticated deceit to ensure that their cover is not broken. Here, Kenobi chooses to risk the credibility of his cover to ensure that *he* does not kill the guard. In fact, at various points in the arc Kenobi is caught between maintaining his operational cover as a ruthless criminal, with a view to penetrating this dangerous network intent in causing harm, and his imperative to refrain from perpetrating criminal acts. However, there is no mention of an underlying legal code to regulate Kenobi's actions whilst undercover.

The absence of an explicit legal code is perhaps not surprising given the short episodic nature of *The Clone Wars* as an animated series. Moreover, this absence is also quite typical of the wider Star Wars franchise. In his analysis of the live action theatrical releases Episodes I to VI (*The Phantom Menace to Return of the Jedi*) Timothy D. Peters (2016) argued that despite the lack of any overt reference to law and legality the Star Wars franchise is, in fact, saturated with law, found in both the mythological underpinnings of the Jedi and the capitalist construction of the wider galaxy. It is in the underpinning myth and philosophy of the Jedi – the Jedi Code – that Kenobi finds his ethical compass for authorised and forbidden criminal acts in this arc. In his discussion of ethics among undercover police operatives, Feldman (2016) noted the importance of law and bureaucratic regulation in providing protection from the follies of peoples' particular judgments and actions. The Jedi Code thus represents a *de facto* legal framework to guide Kenobi towards authorised conduct and away from unauthorised acts. Kenobi is thus faced with a dilemma of maintaining his cover and refraining from actions that would constitute serious crimes, such as murder. It is clear, however, that Kenobi's undercover deployment presents the protagonist with circumstances that challenge the principles of this code, with Kenobi (in his undercover identity as Hardeen) perpetrating acts of physical harm that would otherwise be considered as aberrant, disdainful, and criminal.

## Discussion

Despite depicting a fantasy world in the genre of science fiction, the undercover Kenobi arc reflects and represents many of the real-life challenges and practices of undercover policing and intelligence gathering. Writing in the context of policing in Australia, for example, Brendon Murphy posited an overview that could serve as a *de facto* synopsis of the undercover Kenobi arc,

Undercover work is a specialised covert model of policing where the identity of the investigator is (usually) unknown to the suspect. While traditional investigation tends to involve open interviewing, surveillance and recovery of evidence, undercover work extends those methods to include deceptive infiltration, covert surveillance and communications interception. It is a model where deception is an essential mode of practice. (Murphy, 2016, p. 228)

However, in any critical discourse analysis, it is important not simply to provide a detailed description of statements, but also to also uncover the ideological work that the discursive formations in question perform. The point of any critical discourse analysis is thus not to simply uncover injustice or the (re)production of inequality, but to promote resistance and catalyse change against the dominant ideologies that sustain inequitable circumstances (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1993). In this spirit of resistance, which critical discourse analysis shares with cultural criminology, this paper identifies how the undercover Kenobi arc in fact develops a critical position on this subject across two narrative structures: the militarisation of policing and the routinisation of covert tactics in the context of 'just war', and the simultaneous decline of the Jedi as bastions of truth and justice in a galaxy ridden with conflict. These narratives are inter-related and must be understood together.

A superficial analysis of the discourse of the undercover Kenobi arc offers a Manichean view of crime and justice in the context of righteous galactic war, and thus a conservative reading of the ethics and practice of undercover policing. Christopher Nathan (2017) outlined an 'instrumental model' of undercover policing that could support this analysis, wherein such covert work is justified because the harms caused are outweighed by the benefits gained. The dire circumstances of the Clone Wars would seem to reinforce such a reading, signalling a shift in the array of acceptable conduct from *jus in pace* to *jus in bello*. In the swing to war the Jedi are presented in ways that are indicative of the militarisation of policing; shifting from the type of keepers of the peace that predated even the Peelian reforms of modern policing, and towards a more militaristic model in which they are cast as Generals in a galaxy-wide civil war.

In the academic literature the militarisation of policing has across time been identified in the police *aesthetic*; that is to say, the various ways in which the police are made visible in increasingly militarised forms (see Kosliki, 2021; Kraska, 2007; McCulloch, 2001). Visually, the Jedi in *The Clone Wars* do adapt to the circumstances of war, apparent in the wearing of armour over their more monastic robes. Such armour offers physical protection, but also serves to signal their senior military rank to their wartime clone trooper battalions. Importantly, however, depictions of the militarisation of policing also highlight an unseen shift towards a more military model of operational police practice; including through the increasingly intensive use of intelligence (Kraska, 2007). Covert and undercover policing practices are nested within this paradigm, particularly when the underpinning circumstances are framed as 'war'. In the undercover Kenobi arc the deceptive, violent and ordinarily unethical actions of the Jedi protagonist, sanctioned by the Jedi Council, seem justified in the sense that, at an operational level, the approach gleaned intelligence that ultimately prevented the kidnap of the Chancellor. Indeed, recent research has identified how such instrumental justifications have been apparent in undercover policing in the UK (Schelmbach, 2018).

Whilst an instrumental justification of Kenobi's actions seems apparent in this specific case, a deeper analysis in the wider context of *The Clone Wars* offers an account that is instead fundamentally critical of the militarisation of policing and the routinisation of deceptive undercover policing practices. Within the wider Star Wars story developed across the 'Skywalker saga' – that is to say all events in the canon from *The Phantom Menace* (Episode I) to *The Rise of Skywalker* (Episode IX) – *The Clone Wars*, including the undercover Kenobi arc, is pivotal in contributing to the events that lead to the fall of

Anakin Skywalker and thus the rise of Darth Vader. Anakin's participation in the Clone Wars moulds him as a warrior, shaped in the crucible of combat, rather than a keeper of the peace. The status of the Jedi, as the standard bearers and enforcers of good and lawful conduct in the galaxy, is transformed here by their increasing participation in actions that are instead indicative of 'warrior mindset' (see McLean, Wolfe, Rojek, Alpert, & Smith, 2020). This imbues them with an increasing moral ambiguity. John Richard Harris (2011) explored the contradiction between the 'virtuous' Jedi (and the Rebel Alliance) fighting for good in *A New Hope* and the numerous instances in which they lie across this episode; not least in the account Kenobi gives to Luke Skywalker about the fate of Luke's father, Anakin. Indeed, in his undercover mission in *The Clone Wars* Kenobi's lies and deception – not simply within the criminal network, but also amongst the Jedi themselves – contribute to Anakin's rage, shaking his faith in the Jedi Council and deepening his descent to the dark side of the Force.<sup>8</sup> Understood as such, the actions of Kenobi and the decisions of the Jedi Council are, in fact, indicative of the moral decline of the Jedi and thus operate as a critique of the militarisation of policing and the percolation of the covert tactics across the contemporary policing landscape.

Such a reading of Star Wars content is not unique; other scholars have also interpreted elements of the Star Wars canon as nuanced social critique. Harris's appraisal of honesty in *A New Hope*, for example, is helpful in understanding that Star Wars is 'more than just fun entertainment', and instead,

It challenges a simplistic moral tenet – good people do not lie – and may leave us with a more sophisticated, and ultimately, more accurate view of the demands of morality. (Harris, 2011, p. 120)

The covert and militarised policing as depicted in the undercover Kenobi arc of *The Clone Wars* – in contrast to a rules-based, visible and democratically accountable organisation fundamentally rooted in the Peelian principles of policing by consent – raises questions of the legitimacy of policing. However, in doing so it also highlights the challenges of adhering to high ethical standards in the context of dynamic intelligence operations that require on-the-ground decisions to be made by practitioners in real-time, with little, if any, recourse to consultative deliberation. That it is Obi-Wan Kenobi, a Jedi Master of the highest esteem, who is the undercover protagonist in this story arc serves only to symbolise the serious dangers and ethical dilemmas that can affect any undercover operative during covert policing operations.

This complexity may be welcome news for practitioners, who will readily recognise the messiness of undercover and covert intelligence operations, and the challenges of maintaining cover and relaying actionable intelligence. Perhaps as importantly, it should also serve to remind practitioners across all areas of intelligence work – desk analysts, surveillance officers, informant handlers, undercover operatives, tactical commanders, and strategic leaders – of not only the risks that can arise 'in the field', but also of the wider consequences of their decisions for public confidence in, and consent for, policing more broadly considered. Being attuned to the wider field of policing, within which police intelligence work is fundamentally nested (see Atkinson, 2017), can act as an important guide to those delivering covert police operations. An understanding that police intelligence work, despite its necessarily confidential and compartmentalised nature, is not insulated from the opportunities and demands of wider policing practice may help

to prevent the controversial episodes and excesses that have plagued undercover policing in the UK (see Bonino & Kauollas, 2015), Australia (see Bleakly, 2021) and beyond (see Loadenthal, 2014). For those practitioners who are willing to engage with representations of their craft in popular culture, there are lessons to be learned from fictional accounts.

## Conclusion

In 2018 John Bateman highlighted the considerable potential for the critical discourse analysis of film as an audio-visual medium, including a particular appreciation of the ideological work performed by science fiction and superhero genres (2018). The findings of this research, as a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the undercover Kenobi arc in *The Clone Wars*, present a realisation of the potential highlighted by Bateman. The analysis indicates how the invocation of war through the narrator, present at the beginning of each episode of *The Clone Wars*, serves to shift the array of acceptable conduct from *jus in pace* to *jus in bello*. This frame of war has especially important consequences for the undercover Kenobi arc. Despite the potential, as animated science fiction, to usurp stereotypical depictions of people and place, *The Clone Wars* presents the viewer fairly stereotypical renderings of 'criminal' people and 'dangerous' places that appear to draw upon outdated tropes and prejudices. Such characters and settings – and the backdrop of galactic conflict – comprise the stage for the depiction of undercover policing and intelligence operations.

Despite its status as science fiction *The Clone Wars*, and the undercover Kenobi arc in particular, engages with several of the real-life practices and challenges of undercover policing and intelligence operations. At the level of operational practice, Kenobi must develop rapport with hardened criminal across an array of hostile and dangerous operational settings, as well as relay intelligence back to the Jedi Council safely and security. In doing so Kenobi encountered the types of ethical challenges that permeate covert policing, principally through his engagement in oftentimes serious criminality in the course of penetrating the criminal network and maintaining his cover. Kenobi's covert actions here would appear, upon a superficial reading, justified by the instrumental model of undercover policing, given that the harms caused by the undercover operations are arguably outweighed by the benefits gained. A deeper analysis of this undercover operation, in the wider context of *The Clone Wars* and the overall Skywalker saga of which is it part, offers an account that is instead fundamentally critical of the militarisation of policing and the routinisation of deceptive undercover policing practices. Kenobi's covert operation, developed by the Jedi Council, is best understood as an indication of the moral decline of the Jedi, with the lies, deception and violence of the undercover operation serving as a proxy for their overall decay. Understood as such, this arc of *The Clone Wars* thus presents an important critique of the militarisation of policing and the percolation of the covert tactics across the contemporary policing landscape.

## Notes

1. A notable exception here is Derek Sweet's study of spirituality in *The Clone Wars* (Sweet, 2019). Sweet's research also demonstrates the value in exploring a smaller story arc within the wider narrative of *The Clone Wars*.

2. Although it is important to recognise that in the history of the Old Republic the Jedi had been involved in conflict with enemies including both Mandalorians and Sith.
3. Ahsoka explicitly acknowledges this in *The Clone Wars* season seven, episode 11 ('Shattered').
4. There is also a disturbing racism in *Criminal Man*, albeit that this is not replicated in the depiction of Hardeen.
5. Indeed, Larsen et al. (2014, p. 672) note that the term stigma itself has its origins in the Greek process of the marking of criminal and slave bodies with tattoos.
6. This is a chronological foreshadowing (in the Star Wars timeline) of Kenobi's exile on Tatooine in *A New Hope*, where he is known as 'Ben'.
7. The success of Kenobi in gaining Eval's trust is in direct contrast to his relationship with Eval's criminal accomplice Cad Bane. In the initial encounter between the three criminals, Bane rejected the idea of Hardeen's involvement in their prison escape. The encounter was tense and confrontational. Bane's distrust of Hardeen persists across the arc.
8. The unsettling and disruptive impact of covert policing tactics on family and kinship networks, and a concomitant lack of faith in public institutions such as the police, has been noted in recent research on the covert policing of football fans in Scotland (see Atkinson, 2021b).

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