Call for Papers

Interdisciplinary Conference in Peace and Conflict Studies
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 24 and 25 September 2020

The causes of political violence, strategies to build peace and the governance of conflict are key issues of our time that transcend the boundaries of established disciplines. PACS, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam stimulates interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly between political science, law, history, psychology, theology and religious studies, criminology, sociology and anthropology. On 24 and 25 September 2020, PACS organizes a conference at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to bring together scholars from various disciplines who work on political violence, peace and conflict. Next to a keynote and a plenary discussion, the conference is organized in four sections with one or two panels each that zoom in on ongoing research projects hosted by PACS. For these sections, we invite 200 words abstracts plus short biographical notes by 15 November 2019. Please send your proposal to the respective section convener(s).

For paper givers, accommodation will be provided and no conference fee will apply.

Section Norm Violations and Punishment in International Politics

Like domestic society, international relations are imbued with norms that express shared values and are designed to guide the behavior of states. States have invested enormous resources into the negotiation, codification and recalibration of international normative orders. However, in contrast to domestic society, the sanctioning of norm-violations is not fully delegated to an elaborate system of courts and law-enforcement agencies. Instead, the activities of international courts and tribunals and the sanctioning powers of the United Nations have remained contested and are frequently challenged. As a consequence, international institutions cannot fully absorb the ‘penal heat’ that often follows violations of international norms such as the prohibition to use chemical weapons or to protect human rights. Norm violations are therefore often followed by complex processes of discussing appropriate reactions that reflect different philosophies and practices of punishment in different societies.

In this section we want to bring scholars from international relations, international law, psychology, history and criminology together to contribute to the study of norm violations and punishment in international politics. We want to study punishment in international politics on the macro level of the international system and its institutions as well as on the micro level of citizens’ perceptions and attitudes. We are particularly interested in paper proposals that

- study punitive philosophies and practices of the international courts and tribunals as well as other international institutions with sanctioning powers such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization,
- examine punitive practices outside established institutions and procedures,
- analyze the punitive philosophies and practices in earlier historical periods and their possible legacies for current practices,
- scrutinize the attitudes on and perception of norm violations and punitive practices and their legitimacy, in particular amongst different societies and segments within society.
We are aiming to publish the contributions in an edited volume with a high-quality university press. We will use the two panels at this conference as an authors’ workshop where advanced drafts are discussed.

Conveners: Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Wolfgang Wagner, Wouter Werner, Barbora Hola, Ronald Kroeze and Linet Durmusoglu

Please send your abstract to w.m.wagner@vu.nl.

Section Transgenerational Transfer of Trauma: The role of religion in the construction of narratives of polarization or transformation in post-conflict generations

Research in post-conflict areas, like post-Yugoslav space, Northern-Ireland, Indonesia, Colombia or South-Africa, shows that second- and third generation survivors are often more angry, intolerant, and uncompromising than their parents and grandparents who actually lived through the violent period of conflict. They are not simply unsatisfied with the failure of post-conflict administrations to deliver social justice; they actually re-enact the painful memories of former generations. This has led to impressive studies on the transmission of collective traumas to post-conflict generations. It appears that the reconstruction of the traumatic past through specific narratives and images strongly influences young people's self-understanding. The goal of this panel is to explore the role of religion in the construction and transmission of such narratives and images. We understand religion not in terms of institutions or dogma's 'from above', but as any concrete practice of symbolic reconstruction of reality and any form of giving meaning to one's life and one's world. This includes for instance the use by secularized younger generations of profoundly religious symbols, forms of 'grassroot spirituality' or the imagination of an (in)glorious past. We also want to pay attention to the positive role of religion in reconciliation and transformation of communities.

The objectives of the panel are:

1. To analyze the ways in which religious, political, and cultural actors use the past to influence the construction of meaning in post-conflict generation’s identities
2. To analyze the ways in which young people appropriate a traumatic past in narratives of polarisation and/or transformation and what role religion plays in this appropriation.
3. To analyze post-conflict narratives on various levels and in various media, from official canons of history and national school programs to influential films, messages on social media and even 'streetwise wisdom'.
4. To understand the role of religion in producing polarisation and/or transformation in societies which are experiencing varying degrees of secularisation/desecularisation.
5. To identify factors that contribute to peaceful societies by supporting the construction of reconciliatory identities, narratives, memorials, and commemorations – especially among the post-conflict generations.

Aim: The aim of the panel is to bring together scholars from different areas, disciplines, and interests to share ideas and explore the links between religion and transgenerational transfer
of traumas/narratives. We prefer a case-based approach focused on the narrative construction of personal and group identities.

Conveners: Theo Willigenburg, Fernando Enns and Srdjan Sremac
Please send your abstract to s.sremac@vu.nl

Section The Social Ecology of Trust and Peace versus Distrust and Aggression

Much theorizing on peace and aggression focuses on poverty or governance, highlighting the importance of economics and political structure, most importantly, level of democracy. Further, there has been theorizing on historical variables, such as a history of colonization, and religion. This session seeks to integrate these findings by looking at other (social) ecological variables that may be important. One such variable is climate, which may influence a host of variables, including economic variables (e.g., poverty, water shortage), governance (e.g., degree of democracy), cultural variables (e.g., planning culture), or health-and stress related variables (e.g., pathogen prevalence, heat). A related ecological variable is the presence of rice, wheat, or fishery cultures, which has found to influence individualism versus collectivism. Yet another ecological variable is population density, a variable that is closely linked to mechanisms rooted in reputation and indirect reciprocity, such that (local) peace is often greater in less populated areas. In this session, we examine how the interplay of ecological variables with economic, cultural, and health variables might impact peace versus aggression, as well as distrust versus trust. Presentations focus on programs of research that have examined the links between variables such as temperature and psychology, between climate and aggression and violence, between planning culture and peace and trust, or between population density and distrust and norm violations. It seeks to contribute to our understanding of how the social-ecological variables may underlie economic, cultural, political, and stress-related differences and shape peace versus aggression, and trust versus distrusts—key features on which regions in the world differ, sometimes for substantial periods of time.

Conveners: Paul van Lange, Hein Daanen and Wouter Botzen
Please send your abstract to p.a.m.van.lange@vu.nl

Section The Distributed Work of Warfare: Technology, Expertise and the Legitimation of War

In recent years, Western states have increasingly relied on remote and automated technologies to govern emerging threats that are largely outside of conventional warzones. While contemporary warfare is often said to be unmanned, automated or conducted at a distance, a recent and empirically-grounded body of scholarship within science and technology studies, International Relations and legal studies has emphasized how current military operations by Western states are labor-intensive, distributed across humans, and humans and machines, and sustained by material and legal infrastructures as well as logics
and practices that are deeply gendered and racialized. Following these contributions, this panel broadly focuses on the range of practices, actors and infrastructures that make contemporary war and particular forms of violence possible, actionable, and permissible.

We invite contributions from across the social sciences, international law and humanities. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- The role and enactment of technical or legal expertise in the conduct and legitimation of war;
- Empirical inquiries into human-machine relations interactions in contemporary warfare;
- Practices related to the design and development of technological warfare and the organization of violence;
- Technology, militarism and the everyday;
- The relationship between technology and secrecy, transparency and resistance.

Conveners: Tanja Aalberts and Marijn Hoijtink

Please send your abstract to t.e.aalberts@vu.nl and m.hoijtink@vu.nl