

“The local in global conflict: Anthropological and inter-disciplinary perspectives”

PACSA-PRIO Cyprus Centre joint conference, Nicosia, 1-2 September 2011

The 3rd bi-annual PACSA meeting was organized in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Cyprus Centre on 1st and 2nd September 2011 in Nicosia, Cyprus, and was considered a great success by participants and organizers alike. After the foundation of PACSA at the EASA conference in Bristol 2006, further meetings at the EASA conferences in Ljubljana 2008 and in Maynooth 2010, and bi-annual meetings at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale and at the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR) in Stadtschlaining, this collaborative conference continued the vision of the PACSA network to develop and foster dynamic engagement and dialogue within the communities of European social anthropologists and beyond.

The conference was entitled “The local in global conflict: Anthropological and inter-disciplinary perspectives”. As the call for papers indicated, the last century has seen a proliferation of conflict in different sites, scales, and forms - from civil and revolutionary/liberation struggles, to inter-communal and global wars and, as the case of Cyprus clearly shows, combinations of all the above. While much enquiry about the backgrounds of these conflicts, their nature and the current ‘war on terror’ has brought the international world order and the discourse of liberalism and democracy into question, ‘the local’ still retains a rather parochial position within mainstream peace and conflict studies as the curious exemplar that may confirm or refute the efficacy of ‘international norms’. New approaches in anthropology attempt to break away from the local/global dichotomy and rather focus on the interconnectedness and trans-locality of peace and conflict.

The 2011 joint PACSA-PRIO Cyprus Centre conference thus aimed to re-examine these paradigms vis-à-vis the connection between anthropology and peace and conflict studies. Focussing on the entanglements and overlaps between the local, the national and the global spheres, the conference aimed to re-evaluate and strengthen anthropological contributions to peace and conflict studies, as well as to the study of violence in general, that are able to reveal the connections between micro and macro levels. It underscored the relevance of bottom-up studies of conflict both within and beyond anthropology and within an inter-disciplinary field that connects peace praxis and peace activism to political analysis, sociology, philosophy, international relations and beyond. In combining these perspectives, the conference sought to reveal new potentialities in the re-conceptualisation of the ‘inter-disciplinarity’ of research in peace and conflict.

The organisers invited participants to engage in the development of innovative concepts in peace and conflict studies by integrating local-level analyses of conflict to global understandings of war and peacemaking. Taking place in Nicosia’s Buffer Zone, the conference provided participants with a unique opportunity to explore the comparisons between ‘their’ local sites and the protracted Cyprus conflict (attended by an equally protracted peace process) that reveals the blurred frontiers between peace, negotiations, conflict, militarization and war, and trans-national connections.

The inaugural lecture of the conference was presented by Veena Das (Johns Hopkins University) under the title “When are words at home? Violence, Voice, Location, and

Locution". Further invited speakers were Anna Agathangelou (York University), Eyal Ben-Ari, Philippe Bourgois (University of Pennsylvania), Yael Navaro-Yashin (University of Cambridge), Julie Peteet (University of Louisville), Oliver Richmond (University of St. Andrews), Jeff Sluka (Massey University), and Henrik Vigh (University of Copenhagen). The conference's concluding session was led by PRIO Director Kristian Berg Harpviken.

The conference went beyond previous PACSA meetings in different ways: First, the breadth and diversity of invited speakers from around the world provided an opportunity for attendees to engage more broadly with these global debates. Participant numbers nearly tripled in comparison with the last bi-annual meeting, reaching around 80 participants from 45 different research centers. Second, being a network of EASA, the organizers were happy to welcome not only participants from across Europe, but also several participants from further afield, including the United States and New Zealand. This transatlantic cooperation can be viewed in a long-term perspective: A PACSA workshop (by Erella Grassiani, Barbara Karatsioli, and Nerina Weiss) was also held at the AAA Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Further workshops are currently being planned and encouraged by AAA members. Thirdly, this conference engaged in interdisciplinary dialogue under the umbrella of peace and conflict studies, attracting a considerable number of contributions from the political sciences/ international relations, whilst maintaining the commitment to the embedded, ethnographic methodology and the broader socio-cultural contextualization so characteristic of anthropologic approaches.

Nine participants' journeys were kindly supported by the EASA travel fund. Apart from PRIO and the PRIO Cyprus Center, the meeting was also funded by the University of Nicosia, the Rehabilitation and Research Center for Torture Victims (RCT), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), and the CRIC Identity and Conflict project.

PACSA will continue to explore, emphasize and strengthen social anthropological contributions to peace and conflict studies, and aims to maintain the atmosphere of innovative and dynamic exchange between junior and senior colleagues within the network and beyond. PACSA workshops are currently being planned for the 12th EASA Biennial Conference in Nanterre from 10th to 13th July 2012. The next bi-annual PACSA meeting is scheduled to take place in autumn 2013.

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