SESSION ABSTRACT

Peaceful civilians? Boundaries of civility in peace and conflict
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The session examines and compares the ways that ideas and practices of civility shape and transform violent conflicts and politics of peace in various local and translocal contexts across the world.

Over the last two decades, ideas about “civil society” and “its” participation in conflict resolution have increasingly shaped transnational peacebuilding and activism. Including local groups of civilians as partners in international peace interventions is often seen as crucial to their success. At the same time, civil society is regarded as an end of peacebuilding in itself – that is, something that needs to be achieved and preserved in order to create lasting peace. Despite the ubiquity of calls for “civil peacebuilding”, some important questions have remained largely unexplored in anthropology and peace and conflict studies: how are the boundaries of “civil society” and its “civility” drawn in conflict contexts and what do they “do” with regard to processes of inclusion and exclusion in society?

Drawing on current anthropological debates, we use “civility” as a conceptual “lens that allows us to focus on moments where people try to understand what respect and restraint for each other might mean in the face of potential, and maybe radical, disagreement” (Thiranagama et al. 2018: 153). This broad conception allows us to go beyond liberal political theories of civil society by examining who is considered civil and peaceful in a given society at a given time and who is not. Civility, in other words, imposes moral claims about people, practices and the ways that power relations and inequalities can be contested in society.

In this regard, the panel critically examines how civility is imagined, used and contested by local and global actors in and across various places and contexts. How does civility draw boundaries in society that create solidarities, conflicts and power disparities between people and groups – as “local partners” and “global professionals”, as peaceful and violent, modern and traditional, state, military and civilian etc.?
We invite theoretical and ethnographic contributions (presentations) that explore these and related questions and practices of civility in contexts of warfare, violence and peace activism.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 30, 2020 | Slot 4 | Room4

Pascale Schild: Introduction

María del Pilar Ramírez Gröbl: Architectures for Peace in Rurality: Community Pathways to Post-Conflict in Colombia.

Ernst Halbmayer, Philipp Naucke & Lena Schick: Diverse Civilians – Diverse Peace. On the Heterogeneity of Civilian Participation in the Colombian Peace Process

Chris van der Borgh: Informal peace politics in El Salvador - old and new truces

Wednesday, September 30, 2020 | Slot 5 | Room4

Erella Grassiani & Nir Gazit: Securitized Volunteerism and Neo Nationalism in Israel's Rural Periphery

Sarah Ewald: ‘Performing the state’ - Theatre practices as spaces to negotiate ways of living in a conflict zone?

Katarzyna Grabska: Artistic practices of peace in war and conflict: encounters with Rithy Panh and Stella Gaitano

Concluding Discussion

SESSION PAPERS

Architectures for Peace in Rurality: Community Pathways to Post-Conflict in Colombia.
Ramírez Gröbl, María Del Pilar (Institute of Social Anthropology, Bern, CH)

Disputes over land and territory and rural development have been the roots of Colombia’s protracted armed conflict (Reyes, 2016). Control and territorial dominance have been disputed by armed actors who have taken advantage of the shortcomings of a fragile state. Likewise, landowning elites have taken advantage of the weakness of the state to gain power in institutions, policy design and national decisions. Land dispossession and forced displacement are part of a complex structure of territorial control, in which different actors at the regional level have contributed to the reproduction of violence, causing strong but differentiated impacts on rural populations. In some regions, programmes apparently aimed at establishing peace, such as palm oil production, have led to land dispossession. Civil society responses to land dispossession and forced displacement are diverse and vary
according to regional specificities. Some of the rural communities uprooted from their territories have mobilized different mechanisms and built peaceful environments to forge environmental justice. These grassroots communities have initiated peacebuilding processes to return to their lands by strengthening their cultural knowledge and re-signifying their cultural and ethnic identities. In addressing conflict transformation theories, especially those proposed by J. Lederach, this paper explores how civility is imagined when social cohesion is based on communal patterns and local identity: How do landless rural communities recreate community spaces and how do they represent in lyrical discourse the construction of peace, by redefining the cultural meanings of nature?

Diverse Civilians – Diverse Peace. On the Heterogeneity of Civilian Participation in the Colombian Peace Process

Halbmayer, Ernst (Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg, GER), Naucke, Philipp (Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg, GER & Schick, Lena (Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg, GER

The regions, in which programs and measures of the current peace process in Colombia are to be prioritized, have in common that they are strongly affected by the armed conflict. The geostrategic relevance of these regions is shown, among other things, by the massive presence of armed actors and the selective presence of state institutions, the coexistence of legal and illegal economies, land conflicts and displacement. Further, these regions are characterized by an extremely diverse civilian population, which is composed of peasant-mestizo, indigenous and afro-Colombian groups and communities. The Colombian constitution grants these groups different rights (e.g. regarding land ownership) and the Colombian peace agreement establishes different measures for them (e.g. regarding reparation). In addition, within these groups, different conceptions of peace and violence, ideas of reparation and compensation, conceptions of rural development and relationships with territories coexist, in which diverse socio-cultural life worlds are expressed. The experiences with the current peace process are ambivalent, which is related to the diversity of life worlds, the different degrees of implementation of the process and the context in which it takes place. In a comparative research project, the authors of this paper study the current peace process and the associated conflict transformations from the perspective of three socio-culturally diverse communities. The focus is on the ideas, practices and strategies of a peasant, an indigenous and an afro-Colombian community dealing with the challenges of violence transformation and peace building. In this paper, they discuss the diversity of civil actors and socio-cultural contexts in this peace process and the heterogeneous degrees of implementation of the agreement. They show how different rights, measures and moral demands can become the subject of new and ongoing conflicts between different civil actors during an ongoing peace process. Affiliation: Prof. Dr. Ernst Halbmayer (halbmaye@uni-marburg.de), Dr. Philipp Naucke (nauckep@uni-marburg.de), Lena Schick M.A. (lena.schick@uni-marburg.de) DFG-Project: Competing (In)Securities. Frictions of Violence Transformation and Peace Building in Colombian Institute of Social Anthropology and the Study of Religions (ISAR) Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology Philipps-University Marburg Deutschhausstr. 3, 35037 Marburg, Germany
Informal peace politics in El Salvador - old and new truces
Van der Borgh, Chris (Utrecht University, Utrecht, NLD)

This paper deals with the efforts to contain gang violence in El Salvador through dialogue, pacts and truces between residents, politicians and gangs. It compares the gang truce of 2012, which made headlines as it led to a reduction of homicide rates, with the practices that can explain the current drop in the homicide rates in El Salvador and which received far less attention in the press. The contribution shows that there are marked similarities between the two processes, while it also points at the different contexts in which the efforts take place, as well as the risks and controversies that surround both processes. The paper shows that in a context of chronic violence, where government responses are mostly repressive and have included extra-judicial killings, the practices of truce and dialogue – both at the local and national level – that seek to contain violence, have not disappeared and mostly take place 'backstage'. While a lot has been published about the gang truce of 2012, this paper will look beyond this unique event, and analyse the existing and ongoing processes of dialogue, 'trucing', bargaining and pact-making. It is argued that dialogue can be an important means to reduce violence, but it will only lead to sustainable results if it is part of a more comprehensive and transparent approach. The paper will use of interview material and observations of the author.

Securitized Volunteerism and Neo Nationalism in Israel's Rural Periphery
Grassiani, Erella (University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NLD) & Gazit, Nir (Ruppin Academic Centre, Emek Khever, ISR)

Hashomer Hachadash (The New Guardian) movement claims to fill a gap of security, and moral education in the Israeli landscape that in the words of the organization 'has forgotten its Zionist roots'. It frames itself as a bottom up organization that brings together people (mostly Jews) who feel connected to the land of Israel and want to protect it against an often-unnamed enemy. The movement, which was founded by a farmer's son and a small group of friends, has expanded into a conglomerate that provides free security services and labor assistance to farmers and settlers in the Israeli frontier. It also organizes countless educational and cultural activities with schools, youth movements, and the private sector, which combine civilian and military themes and promote a neo-national (neo-Zionist) agenda. Today, ten years after its establishment, the organization includes tens of thousands of activists and volunteers. Although rooted in a particular socio-political context, we believe that this case demonstrates how militarism may re-eminate in civil society, in the margins of the state, with almost no influence from military actors. Ethos and practices of voluntarism play an important role in this process as they enable the organization to nurture a civilianized and populist form of militarism and neo-nationalism, outside the monopoly of formal governmental institutions. It further helps it to attract various audiences. As such it serves as a platform for new social new alignments between social sectors and groups in Israeli society.

'Performing the state' - Theatre practices as spaces to negotiate ways of living in a conflict zone?
Ewald, Sarah (University of Tuebingen, Tübingen, GER)

The submitted proposal is part of an ongoing PhD project on the topic of civil society dynamics in the contested Himalayan region of Kashmir with a focus on the last thirty
years. While for the larger research the practices of several groups and initiatives are of relevance, in the context of the Vienna conference I want to present a chapter currently in progress, about the practice of theatre performance and more specifically the work of one particular, Srinagar based political theatre group, Theatre of Kashmir, which addresses in sometimes more sometimes less explicit ways the workings of the Indian state and army in Kashmir. Theatre and performance practices have for centuries been a central mode of collective communication for common people in Kashmir and created spaces for exchange where everyday sorrows or dissent could be discussed and articulated in creative ways. Around the 16th century after the practice moved out of the temples and had to sustain without the patronage of a ruling power it got transformed into ‘people’s theatre’, though with a lot of performers struggling under precarious conditions. The work of the group Theatre for Kashmir will be introduced via three short insights in different aspects of their civil society engagement: their actual theatre plays, workshops with children and young people, their interaction with the larger Kashmiri civil society. In doing so I want to reflect on the one hand about possible functions of theatre work in a zone of long term conflict and thereby explore the conceptual idea of Webber (1991) that “to represent something or someone in performance is to assert symbolic control over it”. One the other hand, slightly more theoretical, I want to think about how state, in the understanding of scholars like Fassin (2015), as being (re)produced by its institutions and the routine work of its agents and the everyday interactions with their publics, and civil society actors and practices become entangled with each other and how these entanglements shape and are shaped by the ways the theatre practices imagine and give space to negotiate how people in Kashmir want to live their lives.

Artistic practices of peace in war and conflict: encounters with Rithy Panh and Stella Gaitano

Grabska, Katarzyna (Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Oslo, NOR)

In this paper, I engage in conversations with two artists and their art: Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh and Sudanese-South Sudanese writer Stella Gaitano. Rithy Panh in his cinematographic work and in installations comes to terms with his childhood, the death of those close to him, as well as the suffering of his people during the Khmer Rouge regime. His films show both the work of history and of mourning, in a process that combines individual and collective memory and search for justice and reconciliation. I juxtapose Rithy Panh’s work with the analysis of short-story writings by Sudanese-South Sudanese writer, Stella Gaitano, who is in between the status of a displaced and a citizen in Khartoum. I ask: in what ways artists as civilians participate in the processes of peace-making and reconciliation? How can encounters between the artists, their art and the audience create a new understanding of coming to terms with war and conflict? My inquiry focuses on the way in which artists who come from conflict-ridden contexts engage with war and peace, how their artistic practice contributes to a different understanding of the personal trajectories, experiences and emotions connected to these events. How are artists through their creative practice opening up spaces for the contestation of the the past and the present, creating spaces for mourning and reconciliation? Through the engagement with trajectories of two artists, I consider how civility is imagined, used and contested by artists in war and conflict contexts, as well as through their engagements locally and globally. What are the boundaries and opportunities of artistic civility in the context of peace-making and reconciliation.