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PACS During Social Distancing

As we are all engaging in social distancing and learning how to effectively work from home (WFH), it is more important than ever to highlight the interesting and important work that everyone in the PACS network has been doing. Rosanne Anholt recently published an article in the *Journal on Contemporary Security Policy* titled “Under the guise of resilience: The EU approach to migration and forced displacement in Jordan and Lebanon.” This article is available open access [here](#). The first meeting of the Dutch Peacekeeping Network also took place on 2 March 2020. Dr. Stijn Sieckelincx and the Resilient Identities Lab were recently awarded the EDURAD grant for a two-year study. On 19 February, the PACS Student Committee organized an expert panel to discuss sexual violence in conflict. In the newsletter below, you will find more information about the Dutch Peacekeeping Network, one of PACS’s Research Group, the Expert Panel on Sexual Violence in Conflict, a Research Spotlight, and upcoming events on the horizon.

Inaugural Meeting of the Dutch Peacekeeping Network

On 2 March 2020, the VU hosted the inaugural meeting of the Dutch Peacekeeping Network, organized by Lenneke Sprik with Tom Buitelaar (European University Institute, The Hague Institute for Global Justice). This initiative follows the example of the British International Studies Association working group on Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, which is an academic network that organizes interesting events, often in cooperation with think tanks and non-governmental organizations. The Dutch network for professionals working on peacekeeping aims to connect different disciplines, contribute to knowledge-sharing and hopes to bridge the gap between theory and practice. About 40 professionals from academic institutions, non-governmental

organizations, NATO's Centre of Excellence, and the Dutch ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs participated in the meeting.

The aims of this first event were to get to know each other in an informal setting and discuss the future of the network: what aims does the network serve and how will it function in practice? A second question addressed was: what is the Dutch role in peacekeeping? This question was particularly addressed by the keynote speaker, Colonel (rtd.) Willem van Dullemen, former Chief of Operations and Special Assistant to the UN Department of Peace Operations.

The discussion between participants mainly evolved around the why- and how-question regarding the network and in particular, many stressed the importance of using momentum to make the network a success. Apart from the knowledge-sharing opportunities the network may bring, others also referred to the need to bridge the gap between civilian and military actors involved in peace support operations. Another issue that was addressed is the gap between theory and practice, mainly felt by academics, who are often not integrated in existing networks yet.



Research Spotlight: Dr. Stijn Sieckelinck and the Resilient Identities Lab

Every newsletter, PACS will highlight the work of one of its fellows! This newsletter we recognize Dr. Stijn Sieckelinck and the Resilient Identities Lab, which was recently awarded the EDURAD grant for a two-year study: "Addressing Violent Radicalisation: A Multi-Actor Response Through Education." [Read more here.](#)

Research Group Description

The research team from the Faculty of Religion and Theology are working on a reach project on the role of religion in the construction of practices of polarization or transformation in post-conflict societies. The goal of this research project is to explore the role of religion in the construction and transmission of such narratives and images and religion's role in the way people are able (or not) to overcome polarization and seek reconciliation after traumatic national and/or societal conflict.

They use a narrative, social constructivist approach that understands stories, images, symbols, artefacts and rituals as creating a lived reality for people and a common identity in groups. They especially focus on religious narratives, symbols and rituals that play a role in strengthening (or impeding) the mediating (psycho)social factors that sociologist have identified as enabling compromise and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

The research pushes beyond previous work by combining systematic reflection, structured interviews and focus group-research in five post-conflict areas that have been selected so that they share common characteristics yet are different enough to yield comparative insights: the Post-Yugoslav space, Indonesia, South Africa, Colombia, and the Netherlands. In each context they will investigate religious narratives and practices that play a role in shaping the six (psycho)social factors they have distinguished as mediators of transformation/reconciliation: (1) trust, (2) hope, (3) encounters, (4) symbolic forgiveness, (5) critical reflection and (6) sense of fairness. These factors will provide the common grid for their research in the various contexts.

Expert Panel on Sexual Violence in Conflict

The PACS Student Committee, consisting of Nour Gjaltema, Amelia Maradas and Sophia La Marca, organized an expert panel to discuss various issues concerning “Sexual Violence in Conflict” on 19 February. The event took a broad and multidisciplinary approach, intentionally combining both different academic perspectives and the experience from a practitioner. The experts on the panel consisted of Rosanne Marrit Anholt (PhD Candidate at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Vrije Universiteit), Malini Laxminarayan (Programme Officer at the Mukwege Foundation), and Dr. Srdjan Sremac (Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Religion and Theology, Vrije Universiteit).

The event was structured around four different themes: (1) The Gap between Theory and Practice, (2) Accountability, (3) UN Involvement, and (4) Future Perspectives. One of the major conclusions that was made throughout the various topics was the lack of interaction between academic practice and the realities practitioners face. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary approach created a setting in which the experts could interact with each other about what challenges they faced and how this related to the work of others.

Besides the need for more interaction between the two worlds, the experts highlighted several other issues. All experts expressed the inherent difficulty concerning research possibilities when working with victims and perpetrators. Moreover, according to experts, the lack of self-addressing sexual violence in communities (e.g. within the institution of the UN), and the phenomenon of sexual violence itself creating violence as “prevention” (e.g. through forced marriage of minors) are often overlooked. The first expert panel was a success, not only for the organizers, but also for the audience and the “experts.” The PACS Student Committee aims to continue and hopes to soon be able to organize the next expert panel.

Upcoming Events, Conferences, and Reminders

On 24 and 25 September 2020, PACS will organize [a conference](#) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to bring together scholars from various disciplines who work on political violence, peace, and conflict. The keynote, titled “Human Nature and the Decline of War” will be given by Prof. Steven Pinker (Harvard University). As a precautionary note, PACS is following developments with the coronavirus and hope that the upcoming conference will take place.

From the 4th to the 6th of November 2020, [the sixth biannual conference](#) of the International

Humanitarian Studies Association will take place in Beirut, Lebanon and is titled “New realities of politics and humanitarianism: between solidarity and abandonment.” For now, the conference is still ongoing and calls for panels are open until 30 April 2020 and calls for papers open on 5 May 2020.

If you know of any conferences or research that you want to be included in the next edition of the PACS Newsletter, please [send an email here](#) with information. PACS is particularly interested in webinars at this time of social distancing. If you were forwarded this email and are interested in staying apprised, please send an email to pacs.rechten@vu.nl to ensure you continue to receive these emails!