



Exeter Centre for Ethno-Political Studies' Workshop

University of Exeter, 19-20 June 2012

Conflict, Peace and the Production of Knowledge

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Rationale

The purpose of this workshop is to explore how knowledge relating to ethnic and/or national conflict and its regulation is produced. Irrespective of one's ontological position, it has been argued that within the physical and social sciences, as well as the humanities, the generation of both research questions and knowledge are both messy and contingent processes (Hacking, 1999).

In terms of academia, the workshop seeks to examine how the demands of the profession (e.g., publishing, obtaining funds, teaching, etc.) affect the generation of knowledge. For instance, does the UK's Research Excellence Framework – the five-year cycle by which academics and departments are evaluated – engender a certain myopia in UK-based academics' contributions to conflict and conflict regulation studies (Baggaley, 2007; Head, 2011)? How do the processes of knowledge production change as conflicts end, thus making such sites ripe for 'lesson' extraction and possible lesson synecdoche? Also, how does the 'global division of social scientific labor' (Alatas, 2003) affect these processes? For instance, while it has been argued that power asymmetries between the global North and South have led to the global South's intellectual imitation of the North (Alatas, 1993; Appadurai, 2001; Wickramasinghe, 2008), such mimesis is not restricted to the former category. Rather, conflict-

affected regions in the global North such as Northern Ireland¹ and Israel are often located on the academic periphery, dependent upon the core – which is dominated by the United States – for publications in top-ranked journals and other related forms of career advancement (Ben-Ari, 2011). Thus, such relations of dependency are liable to privilege the generation of certain types of knowledge over others.

Somewhat analogous relationships of dependency can be seen in academics' need to appeal to audiences beyond academia in order to accrue symbolic capital. In addition to financial remuneration, media appearances and consultancy work provide such capital, and these forces also serve to mould academic output. The bestowing of symbolic capital here is reciprocal, as academic endorsement can suggest the legitimacy of NGO mission statements and newspapers' editorial positions. The need to appeal to newsroom and NGO goals, combined with the need to connect with audiences unfamiliar with a conflict's minutiae, however, can have both distorting and augmenting effects *vis-à-vis* knowledge production.

Beyond these pressures, the ways in which academics conceive of and police their profession represent an additional force shaping scholarly output. In particular, academics' implicit and explicit definitions of what constitute 'worthy' subjects of study – and who constitutes a 'worthy' academic – can shape collective understandings of violence and peace (Gusterson, 2007; cf. Ben-Ari, 2011). These forces exert their influence on academics well-before their doctorates: researchers are socialized into what generates conflict and peace through their undergraduate and graduate coursework, and the nature of doctoral research – for instance, the need to submit within four years within the UK, or the often fractious committee system within the US – often suggests the wisdom of not departing too radically from the established cannon. Methodological frameworks and ethical guidelines employed when researching conflict-affected societies also intimate what constitutes worthy research and who constitutes a worthy researcher. The recommendation of certain research

¹ While Alatas (2003) places the United Kingdom within the academic core, many social science disciplines with the UK – for instance, political science – are heavily dominated by ideas and practices developed in the United States.

topics over others, however, and the tendency for ‘ethics’ to be a watchword for a researcher’s politics, suggests that these guidelines and frameworks may be complicit in the obscuring or excision of certain knowledge from the public realm (Smyth, 2001: 5-9; Ben-Ari, 2011). Finally, the submission of an article to a journal does not represent an endpoint in terms of knowledge creation; rather the review process is a site of negotiation where knowledge is actively shaped and reshaped prior to publication. As such, the processes of knowledge promotion and elision may also be found in the discursive and ‘nondiscursive’ practices of academic publishing (Canagarajah, 1996).

While academia is in the business of knowledge production, this is not the only, or necessarily dominant, site of such production. Discursive practices within governments, NGOs and journalism – along with novels, biographies and autobiographies, films, museum exhibitions, etc. – all serve to shape both public and academic understandings of conflicts and conflict regulation. Like academia, these practices are subject to a diverse array of economic, social, political and organizational pressures that define the contours of their output. Thus, the workshop will seek to detail these practices as well, and their interplay with knowledge production within academia.

A final aim of the workshop is to theorize these processes of knowledge production. Can anthropological concepts such as ‘moral economies’ and/or ‘global assemblages’ help one to explain the various forces which mould knowledge of conflict-affected regions? Moral economies acknowledge that economic exchange takes place within political, social and moral matrices, allowing for both an holistic analysis of economic exchange and a description of the reciprocal effects that norms and questions of economic utility have in such exchanges (Ramsay, 1996). Global assemblages have a similar function: rather than locate explanations within new or changing macroprocesses, global assemblages seek to understand the way certain global practices – for instance, neoliberalism, scientific research, etc. – manifest themselves within particular environments (Ong and Collier, 2005: 4). Specifically, proponents of global assemblages examine heterogeneous, contingent and interdependent constellations of ‘technoscience, circuits of licit and illicit exchange, systems of administration or governance, and regimes of ethics or values’ through which global practices are articulated (Ong and Collier, 2005: 4). Thus, in addition to indicating that broad, macrostructural

explanations are insufficient to explain the shape and trajectory of knowledge production, this approach further signifies that this production will vary significantly between assemblages. These concepts may prove useful to the explanation of knowledge production *vis-à-vis* conflict and conflict regulation, but the workshop will seek to explore concepts from a range of disciplines that may help to illuminate the processes and practices of knowledge production.

Workshop Overview

Abstracts are welcome on any aspect of knowledge production in conflict-affected regions. Selected participants will be invited to a two-day workshop on this theme at the Exeter Centre for Ethno-Political Studies (EXCEPS) at the University of Exeter in June 2012. As the workshop seeks to examine knowledge production both within and beyond academia, abstracts focusing on non-academic sites of knowledge production by either academics and/or practitioners are also welcome. Participants' travel and accommodation will be paid for by the workshop organizers. Please note that drafts of papers should be circulated to fellow participants six weeks before the workshop in order to generate substantive discussion and feedback during the workshop. Final drafts will be expected three months from the workshop. The final drafts will be published as an edited volume.

Interested participants should send abstracts of 700-1,000 words to Mary-Alice C. Clancy at M.A.C.Clancy@exeter.ac.uk by 2 February 2012. Successful applicants will be notified by 14 February 2012.

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