

PACS - Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Newsletter No 11 – September 2024

Editorial

At the beginning of the new academic year 2024/25, we again welcome a large group of students to our minor in peace and conflict studies. It is great to see that the program remains popular amongst students from a large variety of disciplines and universities within and outside the Netherlands, and we hope that the program will survive the expected cuts in Dutch higher education in its current form. At the same time, we are of course aware that students who choose our minor are at least in part motivated by current conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria and many other places, and we wish that we had fewer ongoing real-world crises to illustrate our ideas on the causes of political violence.

Since the previous newsletter in December 2023, PACS has supported several activities that this newsletter reports: John Hogan and Marije Luitjens have taken up the important task to provide a space for students and staff at the VU to talk about the Gaza War. Patrick Mello organized a talk on Kseniya Oksamytna's new book on reforms in the United Nations. At another book presentation, PACS staff presented their work on punishment in international society, which was one of PACS's three research projects over the last years. Finally, PACS contributed to the winterschool on conflict resolution and mediation that was organized by Lenka Adema and Marise van Amersfoort.

Since its establishment in 2018, PACS has been run as a network by scholars in the faculties of social sciences, law, humanities, behavioral and movement sciences and religion and theology. We are very happy to welcome Susie Protschky, professor of global political history, and John Hogan, assistant professor in political science and coordinator of the minor program in peace and conflict studies to our management team. We would like to thank Arno Akkermans who leaves the management team after six years for his support of PACS.

Who are we?

PACS, the Peace and Conflict Studies Centre at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, is an inter-faculty scholarly network for research on the causes of political violence, on strategies to build peace and on the governance of conflict. These issues require an interdisciplinary approach. Researchers from five faculties – law, social sciences, behavioural and movement sciences, religion and theology as well as humanities - collaborate in PACS.

The PACS management team includes: [Wolfgang Wagner](#) (chair), [John Hogan](#) (coordinator minor program in peace and conflict studies) [Paul van Lange](#), [Susie Protschky](#), [Maartje Weerdesteijn](#), and [Srdjan Sremac](#).

More information on PACS can be found [on our website](#).

A space to discuss the Gaza War

by John Hogan and Marije Luitjens

Over the past ten months, with the support of the VU Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, we have organised a number of events and gatherings for VU staff and students that are centred on the ongoing conflict in Gaza and Israel. Like all of our colleagues and students, we were horrified by the Hamas attacks of October 7th and the subsequent assault on Gaza by the Israeli government. However, as scholars of peace and international security, we both felt that the VU was in need of spaces where students and staff could engage in dialogue and learn about the latest tragic stage of the conflict as well as the broader history of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

With that sentiment in mind, we organised a series of events, starting in November 2023 with a roundtable discussion featuring experts in international law, human rights and the history of Palestine and Israel. In December, we followed this with an event at which three NGOs that work on fostering peaceful relations between Palestinians and Israelis were nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize (see previous newsletter).

In March, along with our colleague Yarin Eski, we organised an event at which a legal arms dealer shared his perspective on the war in Gaza in a pre-recorded interview, along with experts in international law and the international arms trade, who were interviewed in person and took part in a Q&A with students.

In addition to each of the above events, which were open to students and faculty, we organised a series of 'Contentious Topics' lunchtime discussion groups at the VU for staff members from early 2024. These took place regularly for the remainder of the academic year at the VU 3D Centre with the much-appreciated support and participation of the centre's manager Miranda van Holland. These sessions focused on a variety of themes related to the events in Israel and Gaza, such as our felt reactions to the conflict, definitions (including 'apartheid' or 'genocide'), and our experiences of discussing the events in Gaza in the classroom.

Although the topics of discussion at all of the above events have been and continue to be distressing, we are grateful for the opportunity to have engaged with students and colleagues on what has been happening in Gaza and Israel over the past year. They have provided a space for us and others to share our concerns, grief, challenges, common ground and, of course, points of disagreement. We are grateful to our colleagues in the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies for all of their support in making these events a reality.

Peace and Conflict Studies in the Netherlands

By Wolfgang Wagner



In 2020, the Dutch Foundation for Peace Studies initiated research on the state of peace and conflict studies in the Netherlands and Flanders. Rosanne Anholt, Nour Gjaltema and Lenneke Sprik, at the time all working at the VU and active in PACS, started this mapping exercise with desk research on peace and conflict studies programs, broadly understood, at Dutch universities and universities of applied sciences. What is more, they also interviewed twenty scholars in the field. Due to circumstances (illness and changes in employment), the report was left unfinished until 2023 when Ellen van Werkhoven at Radboud University Nijmegen took over the task of finalizing the report. In addition to providing an overview of the fascinating history of the field, the report shows that peace and conflict studies have been growing at Dutch and Flemish universities, especially in teaching programs, even though the label 'peace and conflict' is not always used (the authors refer to "silent polemology" to capture this phenomenon. The authors also describe trends in research and identify important themes for the future. You can find the full report at <https://peaceandconflictstudiesnetwork.com/>.

Book Talk on Advocacy and Change in International Relations

By Patrick A. Mello

On March 12, 2024 Kseniya Oksamytna from City University of London gave a well-attended talk on her award-winning book *Advocacy and Change in International Relations: Communication, Protection, and Reconstruction in UN Peacekeeping*, published with Oxford University Press. Following a presentation of the book's core argument by Kseniya Oksamytna, Ueli Stäger from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) engaged in a discussion with the author. The two talked about research practicalities in doing research about international organizations (IOs) such as the UN, the substantive challenges of UN peacekeeping, and questions related to the successful conduct of interview-based research. In her book, Oksamytna shows how change in international organizations (IOs) occurs not solely through IO's member states, as one might expect, also in light of mainstream theories of international relations (IR), but often the sources of change are rooted in advocacy from the outside. This can involve diplomats, bureaucrats, scientific experts, and civil society activists, among others. Oksamytna sketches three advocacy strategies that agents can pursue in order to affect change: social pressure, persuasion, and reference to authoritative sources ('authority talk'). The book's rich empirical chapters draw on a host of interviews that the author conducted

throughout her research. Empirically, the focus rests on three dimensions of UN peacekeeping: strategic communications, protection of civilians, and so-called quick impact projects that UN peacekeeping conducts. The event was sponsored by PACS and moderated by Patrick A. Mello. *Advocacy and Change in International Relations* is the 2024 winner of the Chadwick F. Alger Best Book Award of the International Studies Association (ISA).



Uli Staeger (left) in conversation with Kseniya Oksamytna (right)

Bridging divided perspectives: Winterschool on conflict resolution and mediation. Reflecting and looking forward

By Lenka Adema and Marise van Amersfoort

In the heart of the virtual VU campus, the 2024 Winterschool took place as a practical exploration of conflict resolution and mediation, combining different fields of study and international perspectives. Coordinated by Marise van Amersfoort and Lenka Hora Adema, this course, titled “Bridging Divided Perspectives,” brought together participants from various countries to learn about transforming conflict.

Throughout the sessions, our dedicated lecturers, including Prof. Dr. Heleen Slagter, Dr. Bogdana Cherniavska, Dr. Denis Bikesha, Dr. Simbarashe Maguchu, Dr. Srdjan Sremac, Lenneke Post, Jina Bachunguye, Theophile Sewimfura, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wagner, Em. Prof. Dr. Dick Allewijn, Prof. Dr. Arno Akkermans, Dr. Kirtie Algae, Judith van der Gugten LLM, Maisah Burleson LLM, Prof. Dr. Sven Zebel, and Dr. Nieke Elbers, explored complex topics through the lenses of law, behavioral sciences, social sciences, and theology. This approach not only provided a broad understanding but also highlighted the importance of diverse perspectives in conflict resolution.

The heart of the Winterschool experience was its practical approach. Participants from various parts of the world actively engaged in mediation skills training. They improved their skills in active listening, reframing, and dealing with the complexities of conflict resolution. This hands-on method not only enhanced their abilities but also showed the importance of an international network in promoting peace.

A significant part of the Winterschool was the valuable contributions from our diverse panel of speakers. For example, Jina Bachunguye shared insights into the challenges faced in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while Dr. Kirtie Algae talked about the intersection of conflict, diversity, and mediation in Suriname. These are just two of the many speakers who provided similarly important and appreciated contributions, highlighting the global importance of conflict resolution.

Looking ahead, we are excited to announce that a new Winterschool is planned for January 2025. We expect it to be even more inspiring and essential. Our goal with the 2025 Winterschool is to offer insights and practical tools for managing conflicts, fostering collaboration even in tough situations.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Winterschool is how much we learn from each other, not just from the lecturers but from every participant. It is incredibly special to engage with conflict resolution in such an interdisciplinary and international manner. This learning experience is something we, as coordinating lecturers, eagerly look forward to. Each session enriches our understanding and reinforces the importance of shared learning in our collective pursuit of peace.

See for further information: <https://vu.nl/nl/onderwijs/vu-graduate-winter-school>

The Winterschool was established in collaboration with Marise van Amersfoort (the Centre for International Cooperation CIS-VU & Lenka Hora Adema (the Specialisation Conflictresolution, Courts and Mediation within the master Law, Faculty of Law) & Wolfgang Wagner (PACS – Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies)

Book Launch “Punishment in International Society”

By Wolfgang Wagner



Book Launch

Punishment in International Society: Norms, Justice, and Punitive Practices

22nd March 2024
14:00-16:00
Location: Forum 2

Presentation by the editors:

Wolfgang Wagner

Linet Durmusoglu

Barbora Holá

Ronald Kroeze

Jan-Willem van Prooijen

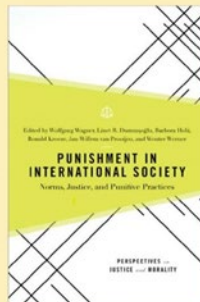
Wouter Werner

Commentary:

Susie Protschky & Paul van Lange

➡ Discussion with the audience,
followed by drinks

Organized by PACS, the VU Centre for Peace and
Conflict Studies



“International Norm Violations, Punishment, and War” was one of three research lines at PACS that obtained funding from the VU Vereniging. After several years of work, the results are now published with Oxford University Press. The edited volume includes chapters by Stephen Neff, Kjersti Lohne, Mario Gollwitzer, Melissa de Vel-Palumbo, Moritz Fischer, Mathias Twardawski, Michal Onderco, Mikkel Jarle Christensen, Elin Hellquist, Siddharth Mallavarapu, Farabi Fakh and of course the six co-editors who were all at the VU when the project started.

The book starts from the assumption that punitive practices are highly revealing of a society's social fabric, its normative order, and power structure and it examines the penal philosophies and practices in international society. The contributions to this book show the added value of a punitive lens to international politics in two major ways: First, punitive practices reveal the contours of the international normative order, its structures, and hierarchies. Second, in contrast to a nation-state, the authority to sanction and act in

defense of the normative order is far more dispersed and contested in international society. Although there is a demand to embed punitive practices in procedures and institutions, the most legitimate site of such authority remains contested as regional organizations such as the African Union compete with the United Nations for the authority to defend the normative order.

Upcoming events

26 September 2024: [Digitised Visual Archives, AI and the Uses of the Past](#). This public symposium will discuss the practical and ethical challenges arising from the mass digitization of European visual archives documenting sensitive, contested histories of colonialism, war, and violence in the 20th century. Registration required.