



CALL FOR PAPERS

Researching Violence and Conflict: Methodological and Ethical Considerations

The Centre of African Studies (London), based at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), is pleased to announce a two-day conference on 'Researching Violence and Conflict: Methodological and Ethical Considerations,' to be held at SOAS 4 and 5 July 2008. This conference will be held in conjunction with the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS).

Researching violence and conflict can be challenging for a variety of reasons, including security risks to researchers and informants, restricted or lack of access to informants and field sites, deterioration of the reliability of official data, and the unpredictability of the level of security in the research environment. Traditional methodological approaches (participant observation, surveys, random sampling, etc.) may not be usable without significant adaptation, and new methods may be called for. In addition, such research carries ethical challenges about how informants and information should be represented so as to protect the confidentiality of sources and to minimize the risks that the research may be used for ends which could ultimately bring harm to subjects. Current debates over the ethical implications of social scientists working for military forces capture many ethical issues worthy of examination and debate. Meanwhile, there are still challenging debates over what kinds of evidence carry weight in the analysis of violence and conflicts, representing particularly intense variants of wider debates over alternative, or mixed, methods in the social sciences.

Papers are invited that directly address methodological and/or ethical themes, or that incorporate methodological innovation and ethical considerations into the research. Possible themes to consider include:

Methodological considerations:

- How have established methodological approaches been adapted for use in conflict settings?
- What innovative research tools have been used in the study of violence and conflict (case studies welcome)?
- What problems are involved in the reliability of information in situations where rumour is rife and confirmation of data may be difficult or impossible?

- What challenges are involved in studying extreme forms of suffering while avoiding the 'disaster voyeur' moniker?
- How can access be obtained to all parties to the conflict and what are researchers' responsibilities of representation and protection of informants?
- How does ethnographic research in conflict settings manage the reconciliation of information and perspectives from different levels of analysis (i.e. macro-level data vs. local level 'field observations')?
- How do political economists and others deal with the problems of working with data that may be of questionable reliability or may be only partially representative of conditions in conflict settings?
- What do researchers do about the real security threats that they face, and how do they collect data when they are not able to access an area?
- How have these methodological challenges affected the relationship between research and policy advice?

Ethical questions:

- How should perspectives of informants that may be reprehensible, criminal, and dangerous be represented?
- Is it desirable or possible to achieve and maintain objectivity in researching violent conflict?
- What control and responsibilities do researchers have over how their analysis is used? How might this affect their decisions about how to present their findings and the possible merits of self-censorship?
- Is it ethically responsible to provide information that may be used by military for strategic or humanitarian purposes? What are the benefits and disadvantages of working with security forces? Does the potential to influence strategic and policy decisions of parties to the conflict justify researchers' involvement, and if so what kind of ethical code should govern such practices?
- What is the researcher's responsibility to subjects in terms not only of protecting their confidentiality, but also helping to minimize the risk of retribution to or targeting of civilians?
- What role (if any) is there for an 'activist researcher' to use their research to help bring about an end to the conflict they study? What are the risks of this role?

Abstracts of not more than 500 words should be submitted for review by **28 March** to:

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 or by email to ab17@soas.ac.uk.

Papers selected for inclusion will be notified by 15 April. Participants will be asked to submit a finished draft of their conference paper (8000 words maximum) by 10 June. It is expected that some or all of the papers will be published in an edited volume, and conference sessions will be aimed at providing authors with feedback on their drafts to help in the revision process.

Participants from Africa are particularly encouraged to apply; a limited number of travel bursaries may be available for participants coming from Africa. We regret that financial support is not available for participants coming from other regions.

Feel free to contact the conference organizers for any further information: Professor Christopher Cramer (Chair, Centre of African Studies – cc10@soas.ac.uk), Professor Johan Pottier (Department of Anthropology – jp4@soas.ac.uk), Dr. Laura Hammond (Department of Development Studies – lh4@soas.ac.uk), and Ms Angelica Baschiera (Centre of African Studies – ab17@soas.ac.uk).