

Transformation of Violence and Confidence Building

Research Profile of the Chair of International Relations and Development Policy (2024-2025)

Institute of Political Science, University of Duisburg-Essen

The focus of our research is on overcoming structures of violence and ways of building trust in conflicts within and between states. Violence, in the narrower sense, refers to physical or psychological coercion and the threat thereof. However, violence is also reflected in repressive power structures (*institutional violence*) and in the norms and practices that legitimise them (*cultural violence*). In the transformation of structures of violence, the team ascribes a central role to confidence-building as defined in recent co-operation research. It is only a supposedly "soft factor" and yet often determines whether conflicts in transition processes are dealt with constructively or destructively.

The professorship is characterised by a pluralism of methods that serves both to understand the meaning of the socially constructed world and to explain empirical phenomena. Field research, in which qualitative interviews and focus group discussions are a favoured instrument, is of particular importance. Theoretically, social constructivist, feminist and post-colonial approaches play a salient role. At the same time, our research projects are not committed to any specific paradigm. In line with a reflected analytical eclecticism, they are rather orientated towards open-ended answers to questions, for which specifically suitable theories and concepts are used.

The empirical research at the professorship often relates to domestic conflicts, which are generally characterised by international intervention and transnational influence. One of our focusses is on development and peace policy in fragile states as well as the functioning and processes of confidence-building in hybrid political orders (Tobias Debiel). Feminist and queer perspectives are of importance here: this applies, for example, to transformation processes in post-conflict situations, as in the case of Sierra Leone (Patricia Rinck). The tense relationship between external and local actors, which oscillates between patriarchal paternalism and the proclaimed claim to "local ownership", is often unclear. Ambivalences are also reflected in the roles played by "peacekeepers" in international missions, which is explored in the case of Kosovo (Andréa Noël). Finally, a point of focus is also about disruptions that often go hand in

hand with processes of change in the societies of the Global South. The importance of ideological mobilisation in this context is analysed with a focus on religious and social movements in sub-Saharan Africa (Jannis Saalfeld).

Research at the professorship is not limited to domestic transformations and upheavals but also focusses on interstate and transnational conflict constellations. Here the attention is on global norm dynamics and confidence-building in the area of nuclear order (Leonardo Bandarra; Carmen Wunderlich, currently on leave), such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. An important focus is on the contestation of Western norms by civil society organisations and actors from the global South, including marginalised actors.

In normative terms, our team's research is committed to the idea of a sustainable and emancipatory peace that seeks to overcome structural and intersectional power inequalities. The issue of gender equality is of particular importance in this context. The relevance of research projects is primarily determined by academic debates, but the team is also committed to the socio-political responsibility of science and accordingly strives to communicate research findings to society and politics.