Conflict & Development

Institution: University of York

Year: Year 2

Course type: Track specific course

ECTS: 10

Brief description (including learning outcomes): The module seeks to develop a critical understanding of development in contexts of pervasive violence. In doing so it takes a broad understanding of "conflict" which is not limited to "war" or even "armed conflict". Our interest includes contexts of pervasive violence involving organised criminal gangs or widespread societal violence without clear sides as well as wars and armed conflicts. We seek to understand the political and economic relations which produce and sustain violence, and how societies might move out of violence. In doing so we focus on development in terms of human development and the agency and strategies of local actors.

After an introduction to key concepts and issues, the module develops in three parts.

1. States, economies and violence. Rather that assume that contexts of pervasive violence are "failed states" or that violence is due to a lack of development, we examine the ways that modern states (colonial and nationalising states) and economies have shaped identities and power relations, and in turn patterns of violence. We examine the political and economic relations created in contexts of violence and how people in conflict-affected societies negotiate their livelihoods and identities in the context of power relations and violence.
2. Humanitarian Action. We examine the moral dilemmas of humanitarian action and how states and humanitarian actors respond to emergencies. Do all humanitarian disasters have political causes? Does it matter? Can state or international interventions be effective in ending violence and promoting human rights?
3. Liberal Institutions and Local Peacebuilding. We examine forms of peacebuilding including attempts to end violence, reconstruct violence-affected regions and reintegrate divided societies. We engage in the debates between liberal peacebuilding theory and its critics as well as forms of bottom-up and everyday peacebuilding.

Throughout the module we seek to look from the local to the global – to focus on the analysis of cases taking into account the agency of local actors while recognising that the identities and strategies of local actors are shaped by global connections.

Each week students can choose a case study reading from Latin America (eg Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru); Sub-Saharan Africa (eg Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia); the Middle East and Central Asia (eg Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan) or South East Asia (eg Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines).

At the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the roles of states and economic development in the emergence of violence.
- Explain the complex relations between development and violence in some contemporary conflict zones.
- Demonstrate awareness of the non-formal institutions and cross-state networks that connect conflict zones, state actors and the global economy.
- Analyse the ways in which political and economic relations are produced and reproduced in violent contexts.
- Critically reflect on the coping strategies of local populations in contexts of pervasive violence.
- Critically analyse the relations between international peacebuilding and the emergence of everyday and local forms of peace.