

Imaging War: Intergenerational Perspectives

Vadstena, Sweden

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Sponsored by the European Science Foundation¹

Imaging War, a conference organised jointly by the European Science Foundation (ESF) and UK academics (from Leeds Met and the University of York²) took place recently in Vadstena, a historic town on the banks of Lake Vattern, associated with Saint Bridget, Patron Saint of Europe. Chaired by Professor Dave Webb, this interdisciplinary conference was attended by academics and professionals from across the Globe, who share a common interest in the ways in which war is imaged, imagined and presented in, for example, film and photography; computer games, and the news media. Colleagues from widely differing disciplinary backgrounds, from countries that included Nigeria, Argentina, Sweden, Columbia, Brazil, the US, Bangladesh, Australia, Lebanon, France and Portugal, as well as the UK contributed to many rich discussions and the sharing of ideas, theoretical frameworks, fears, hopes, predictions and experience. An important feature of *Imaging War*, was the wide range of disciplinary and experiential backgrounds present, which included participants from film, photography and journalism; cultural studies and literature; physics and engineering; applied ethics and peace studies. The range of expertise and experience was equally varied with presenters and participants from frontline war journalism; the development of computer games; the critical analysis and appraisal of technologies of warfare - both past and future, along with others who had lived through and suffered as the result of war and conflict, or had been involved in humanitarian work in conflict zones.

One of the particular strengths of the community that formed round our topic, was the contributions that came from people who have experienced war and its consequences at first hand. Our Keynote speaker, the British War Correspondent Kate Adie, gave a very focused and personal talk, drawing on thirty years of reporting on wars in many locations and shared generously from her rich experience with colleagues outside the conference room. Sean Sutton of MAG (the Mines Advisory Group) used photographs that say more than words can imagine about the ways in which the everyday lives of people in war zones are affected for years by unexploded mines and other devices. Rachel Muir, a PhD student in Peace Studies from Bradford spoke of her experiences as a humanitarian worker in Bosnia, while others spoke humanitarian work in other places, including Angola. Several speakers drew on their personal experiences as the victims of conflict, including Ayeray Medina Bustos, a PhD student in the School of Applied Global Ethics and her twin sister Anahi Otby, who with Osvaldo Cesar Gasparini, spoke about the years of oppression in Argentina. Osvaldo, who has recently written a book about his experiences³ spoke movingly about his experience of being imprisoned and tortured for eight years in Argentina.

¹ See: <http://www.esf.org/index.php?id=4564>

² Dr Steve Wright, Professor Dave Webb (School of Applied Global Ethics/Praxis Centre).
Professor Gavin Fairbairn School of Applied Global Ethics.
Dr Krysten Gorton, University of York.

³ "Dias de Prision: Memorias de Sierra Chica, Caseros, La Plata U9" by Osvaldo Cesar Gasparini, Editorial Dunken, Buenos Aires (2008)

Another important aspect of the conference was that of “intergenerational perspectives” Sean Sutton a photographer working for the Mines Awareness Group (MAG) told some powerful stories, illustrated by wonderful photographs, of his experiences with groups of all ages in post conflict zones. Similarly Shahidal Alam (founder of the “*Drik Picture Library and Pathshala: South Asian Institute of Photography*” and founder chairman of “*Majority World*”, a global community that provides a platform for indigenous photographers, photographic agencies and image collections) displayed some fascinating photographs and film clips to illustrate how conflicts in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka affected young and old. Before the conference we were taken to two Primary Schools in Linköping by Anahi Otby who teaches there. We were able to talk to the children there of their ideas and impressions of peace and war and were able to take some of their work (pictures, reflections, etc) to the conference where it was presented by Anahi. In addition, Johan Thomas from the Swedish Student Pugwash Group gave his impressions of “*Youth Perceptions on Presentations of War and Conflict*” and discussed how the use of web-based technologies maybe changing the way that young people interact with national and international events, including conflict and war. Ian Kaplan, another PhD student from Leeds Met., displayed some of his excellent photographs and gave a fascinating presentation of his experiences working with teachers and students in a conflict the Conflict Zone in Karen State, Burma.

The wonderful setting and excellent support provided by the European Science Foundation helped to make this very wide ranging conference very successful and enjoyable. Many new connections and contacts were made – enabling interdisciplinary and international cross-fertilisation of knowledge and ideas. We were approached by three separate publishers who are interested in publishing papers presented at the conference and all the attendees are keeping in touch via a Yahoo email group. All of this made the work and worries leading up to the conference well worth while it was, in the end, an interesting, fascinating and productive event.

*Professor Dave Webb, Dr Steve Wright & Professor Gavin Fairbairn, School of Applied Global Ethics
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