



CLASHING VULNERABILITIES



Swedish
Research
Council

Conference in Uppsala, May 13-14 May, 2020

Hosted by the [Engaging Vulnerability research program](#)

Contact: clashing2020@antro.uu.se

CONFERENCE THEME

A major advance in social and cultural theory during the past twenty years has been a frank recognition that the prototypical human being is not best thought of as a free, equal and independent subject. Environmental degradation, burgeoning economic disparities, global conflicts, the alarming loss of biodiversity, and the call to arms of activist and social movements such as Black Lives Matter or #MeToo demand a fundamental rethinking of what it means to be alive in the world today. Instead of independence and freedom, theoretical and empirical work in a wide range of disciplines has highlighted relations of intertwinement and dependency.

Vulnerability has emerged as a key trope in this ongoing reconfiguration of how we might approach our world. The new approaches to vulnerability have moved away from regarding vulnerability as a condition or state to be liberated from or empowered to leave. Instead, vulnerability is increasingly perceived as a productive force that makes things happen.

These new approaches have opened up refreshing and respectful ways to think about interdependency, but they tend to approach the topic either very generally (“We are all vulnerable”) or extremely specifically (“Group X is vulnerable to exploitation by Group Y”).

Much less common are considerations of what happens when different vulnerabilities clash. How might we approach situations in which the vulnerabilities experienced by one person (or set of people), or one non-human being (or set of non-human beings), are in blatant conflict with one another? The entitlement of tigers to live in the wild vs. villagers who live in the same area and who risk being hunted and eaten by the tigers, or displaced to create a game reserve for the tigers? The desperation of farmers to earn a living by depleting natural resources they fully realize are dwindling? The human rights of migrants and refugees in relation to the economic, cultural and social effects on the communities that receive them? The clashes that occur *within* groups made vulnerable by neoliberal policies and the aggressiveness of global capital?

This conference calls together scholars to discuss how we might think creatively about vulnerabilities that clash: in relation to resources such as recognition, environmental protection, political engagement, affective sympathy, and economic support.

How might we adjudicate between positions or states of vulnerability in conflict? From what position – and with what approaches – can we determine or acknowledge conflict? Critique or dismiss it? Is there a metric we might use to decide who or what is “most”

vulnerable? What difference would such a judgement make? Who gets to make such a decision? What consequences might such a perspective have for both theories of vulnerability and effective engagement with the world?

The conference seeks to address this challenge not just by highlighting complexity, but by taking the bull by the horns and addressing it directly. The panels and keynotes ask how we might acknowledge that vulnerability itself is a contested term, one that can be wielded for both progressive and retrogressive ends. It is associated with a variety of rewards – and risks. How can we think imaginatively and concretely about who or what is vulnerable, and what that means when different vulnerabilities clash?

Topics that might be addressed include the following:

- Clashes regarding welfare distribution among different groups
- Improved (or, alternatively, decreasing) standards of living vs. degradation of the environment
- Biodiversity loss vs. human needs
- Clashes around gender and/or sexuality (#Metoo; versions of feminism wary of trans-activists vs. trans-activists)
- Wildlife protection vs. populations displaced to provide land for game reserves, or prevented from exercising traditional rights (to hunt whales, for example)
- Digital freedom vs. digital terror (revenge, shaming, etc.)
- The politics of charity, humanitarianism and the suffering other
- Rights of caregivers vs. entitlements of those who receive care
- Economic, social, cultural and political conflicts between peripheries and centers
- Clashes within vulnerable groups
- Freedom of speech vs. the protection of individuals and minorities from threats and abuse (hate speech)
- How accommodation or acknowledgment of vulnerability can produce further insecurity and vulnerability
- The temporality of vulnerability and how ageing or changes of status contribute to new relations of conflict or competition with others

CALL FOR PAPERS AND PANELS

The Clashing Vulnerabilities Conference invites abstracts for papers and panels. Abstracts should be no longer than 200 words. Please avoid boring ponderous titles.

Sessions will be two hours long, with four 15–20 minute papers, a 5 minute discussion after each paper and a 15 minute general discussion at the end of each session.

Panel proposals should include a title for the panel, a list of presenters with their academic affiliations and four abstracts (see above).

Send all abstracts to clashing2020@antro.uu.se
The deadline for abstracts and panel proposals is **October 1, 2019 at 5 pm CET.**

All abstracts will be reviewed by the conference reviewer board. You will receive notice whether your abstract/panel proposal has been accepted for presentation at the conference no later than 29 November 2019.

Please note that participants are expected to fund their own costs for travel, accommodation and conference fee.

The registration fee includes:

- participation in the conference
- participation in the evening mingel on Wednesday 13 May
- lunch on Wednesday 13 May and Thursday 14 May, as well as refreshments in the breaks

There will be a conference dinner on Wednesday 13 May, which participants may register for and pay separately from the registration. The conference dinner will cost €35. Registration and payment will be possible from 29 November 2019.

REGISTRATION FEES

University-affiliated participants: €150

Participants from lower-middle-income countries and low-income countries (based on the World Bank Classification): €100

Independent scholars: €100

PhD students €100

For more information, visit the Clashing Vulnerabilities Conference Website:

<http://clashing2020.engagingvulnerability.se>