Who/what is local?

Although critical peacebuilding scholarship appear to pay more attention to the effects of liberal peacebuilding and the role of local actors in the process of liberal peacebuilding on the ground, it is not clear who/what “local” is in academia and politics. The concept of local tends to be constructed against the category of the international assumed in much local turn literature and practices. However, without an ethnographic understanding and awareness of power relations underlying local, who/what the local is can be easily generalized, essentialized, and undermined by the limited understanding of local by political leaders, experts, and scholars. This panel addresses the gap between theory and practice of peacebuilding in the Timorese context by asking: who/what the locals are, who/what are silenced and who/what are represented, as well as what the political and social consequences of perpetuating the particular knowledge and local practices are. This panel contributes to bridging the enlarging irrelevance of theory and practice of the local turn of peacebuilding by developing the concept of the local and more gender-informed empirical study. The panelists from Anthropology and Social Science approach one or more of the following questions coming across the disciplines: how does a political understanding of the concept of local help problematize the everyday or hybrid experiences of individuals in the peacebuilding stage of Timor-Leste? Does the concept of local offer different sense of "power" and "agency" embedded in social contexts and peoples’ experiences as our research exemplifies? In which way is “local” a valid analytical or political tool to politicize individual experiences and understanding in the peacebuilding or post-peacebuilding discourses and its practices? What epistemology and methodology are suggested in a local-based empirical study of Timor-Leste?