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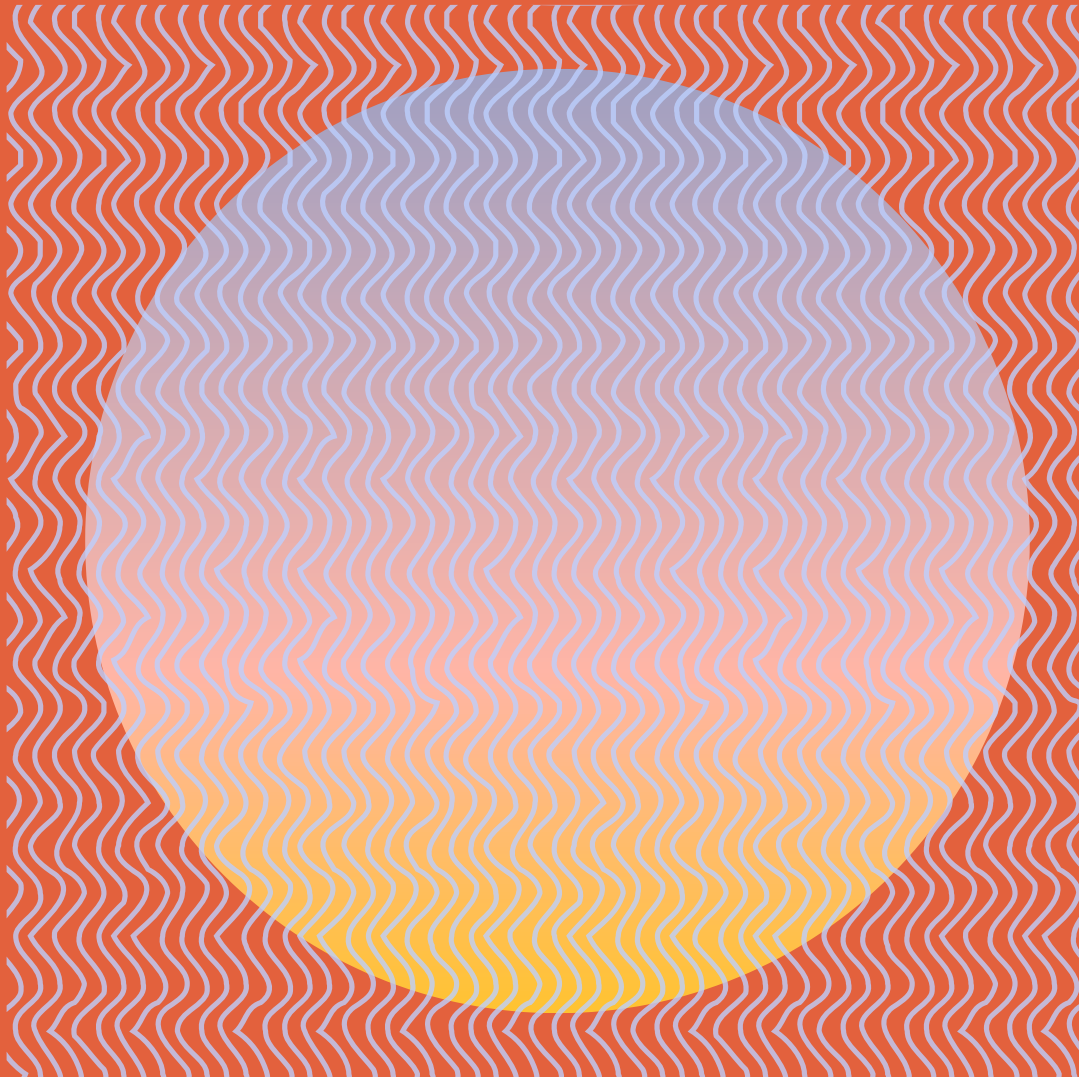
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# PRAXIS

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PEACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON  
VIOLENCE, JUSTICE AND PEACE

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## WHAT IS PRAXIS?

*Praxis is born out of critical discussions and reflections on violence, justice, and peace, taking place in a classroom at Lund University in a course led by Barbara Magalhães Teixeira (shoutout!). It is the result of frustration linked to the current global state of affairs, as well as the colonial and patriarchal legacies and continued practices within the field we seek a place in. Mostly, it is created from our optimism and sentiments of solidarity in our quest to find viable ways forward and our aspiration to take concrete action in order to contribute to change. Each and everyone of us are students of global politics in some form. Whilst we are an international class, of various backgrounds, we also note that we are all students of the Global North and we acknowledge the perspectives, biases, and privileges which that entails. We do not always agree with each other on these topics, but what we do agree on, and what we strive for, is to create a space for discussions, to engage in critical reflections, and learn from both each other and others. We have different understandings of concepts such as violence, justice, and peace and our communal goal is to widen the debates on these matters in order to break past patterns of narrow conceptualizations. Praxis is our attempt to look beyond our worlds of imagination and to engage with broader critical peace studies and practices. This is our attempt to act, instead of to react.*

*We refer to Praxis as a creative, illustrative academic paper. It is filled with our reflections on violence, justice, and peace from wide-ranging perspectives. It includes critical reflections on the origins of peace research, case studies on conflicts as well as peace practices, in-depth examinations of various forms of violence, practical educational materials, and anything else we find informative, inspiring, or fun. We view the premise of our contribution in line with a feminist, critical approach that rather than attempting to once again write authoritative stories, make hard-edged conclusions, and decide what qualifies as valid knowledge, we partake in open-ended conversations and we hope to never quit doing so. With that in mind, our creation is also an encouragement, to listen and to learn. It is an invention to question our assumptions about the world and how it is allowed to be considered and studied.*

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# AT A CROSSROADS

By: Karin Hansson

## How did I end up here?

Three years into my peace and conflict studies (PCS), and I cannot help but wonder whether I made the right choice. I find myself wondering what exactly it is that I am contributing to.

The reasons why I initially chose to study peace and conflict were manifold: it appeared to be an intriguing field, an ever-relevant subject. Above all, my decision to pursue PCS was rooted in the belief that it might enable me to contribute to some good in this ~~shitty fucking~~ world.

Of course, I am not the first activist to go into this field; the discipline of PCS itself has deep-seated roots in peace activism. Born out of the limited peace agenda within the sister subject of *International Relations* (IR), PCS has, from its inception, been imbued with a normative ambition—a pursuit of peace. This can be largely attributed to the international peace movements and their robust growth in the decades following the Second World War.

PCS thus found its wings as scholars broke free from the rigid boundaries and the pessimistic analysis of the realistic school. These scholars were driven to contribute to peace, bound together by the fundamental notion that comprehending the causes, processes, and consequences of war and armed conflict is indispensable for achieving this overarching goal (Aggestam & Höglund, 2017: 26-27).

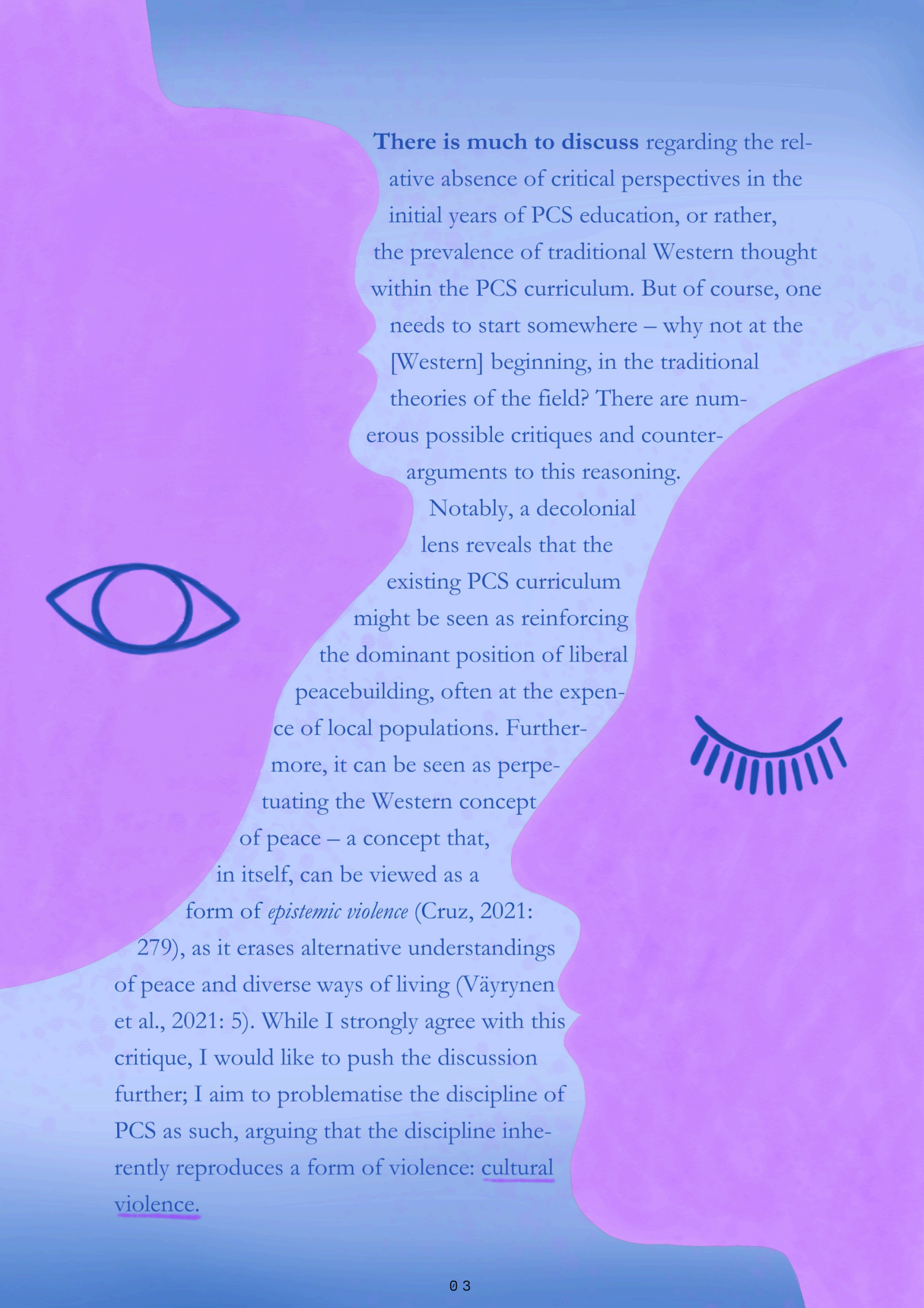


**Since its emergence** in the aftermath of the Second World War, the ties between PCS and peace activism have become less clear, the relationship having turned somewhat complicated (Bright & Gledhill, 2018: 130, 131). Nevertheless, it is apparent that PCS has a historical commitment to the pursuit of peace, as many of its scholars have dedicated their lives to fostering a more peaceful world—free from war, armed conflict, and violence. However, after three years of frolicking in the field of PCS myself, delving into its theories and knowledge, I am beginning to contemplate whether, instead of contributing to the greater good, I might inadvertently be contributing to a form of violence.

**Starting the bachelor's program** in PCS at Lund university is a dive straight into the theories of Mary Kaldor, Carl von Clausewitz and Johan Galtung (To this day, Kaldor's *New and Old Wars* (2012) holds a bible-status in my mind, being the first book introduced to me at university). We explore the perspectives of realism, liberalism, and constructivism; we delve into the ideas of democratic peace and fragile states, of greed and grievances, of securitisation and conflict transformation. We dive deep into root causes and processes of armed conflict, beginning with traditional theories and concluding with supplementary critical perspectives: a small taste of feminist intersectional thought and postcolonial critique that always leaves me wanting more.

It is important to emphasise that PCS encompasses much more than what has been outlined here. Within the realm of PCS research, there is of course a vast flora of perspectives, studies, and theories. I am simply seeking to raise questions about the organisational structure of PCS education, wherein traditional Western thought continues to occupy a central position, while alternative perspectives are often relegated to a supplementary role, seen merely as a critical afterthought.





**There is much to discuss** regarding the relative absence of critical perspectives in the initial years of PCS education, or rather, the prevalence of traditional Western thought within the PCS curriculum. But of course, one needs to start somewhere – why not at the [Western] beginning, in the traditional theories of the field? There are numerous possible critiques and counter-arguments to this reasoning.

Notably, a decolonial lens reveals that the existing PCS curriculum might be seen as reinforcing the dominant position of liberal peacebuilding, often at the expense of local populations. Furthermore, it can be seen as perpetuating the Western concept of peace – a concept that, in itself, can be viewed as a form of *epistemic violence* (Cruz, 2021: 279), as it erases alternative understandings of peace and diverse ways of living (Väyrynen et al., 2021: 5). While I strongly agree with this critique, I would like to push the discussion further; I aim to problematise the discipline of PCS as such, arguing that the discipline inherently reproduces a form of violence: cultural violence.

## Divisions & knowledge

Let us take a step back. Drawing on scholars such as the post-structuralist Michel Foucault (1969) and feminist theorist Sandra Harding (1986), we can view academic disciplines not as naturally given but rather as socially constructed entities.

While these distinct fields of academic study serve practical purposes, adopting a post-positivist epistemological standpoint allows us to perceive them as intricately tied to the sociocultural context and the production of knowledge.

The world-system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein (2007: 23) outlines how, in the 19th century, the study of contemporary society and human life gave rise to the three disciplines of economics, political science, and sociology. The division of these disciplines originated from the dominant liberal ideology in the Western world at the time, charac-

terised by the separation of the three societal spheres: the market (economics), the state (political science), and civil society (sociology). Additionally, a distinct discipline emerged to study life in the colonised world, life that was perceived as 'primitive' (anthropology). Consequently, the division of academic disciplines can be regarded as a reflection of the dominant worldview of the time, of the prevailing power structures.

The academic disciplines of economics, political science and sociology continue to thrive. Although there is often significant overlap, with scholars borrowing from and contributing to each other, these disciplines are still acknowledged as legitimate and separate fields of study, thus reproducing the notion that they represent distinct spheres of knowledge.

**But is the division of** these academic disciplines not simply reasonable, given that students of economics aim to learn different things than students of sociology? Scholars of anthropology typically research something distinct from scholars of political science. The student of PCS is interested in different social phenomena than the student of development studies. Is it not natural, then, to allow these academic entities live on without a fuss?

While there are practical reasons for the segmentation of academic disciplines, it is crucial to recognise that these divisions carry implications for the production of knowledge and our perception of the social phenomena ‘distinct’ to each academic discipline. The key point I wish to emphasise here is thus: the division of academic disciplines is not a neutral process, but rather a distinctly social, and consequently political, one. Ergo, the division of academic disciplines bears political consequences – consequences that may even be understood as violent.

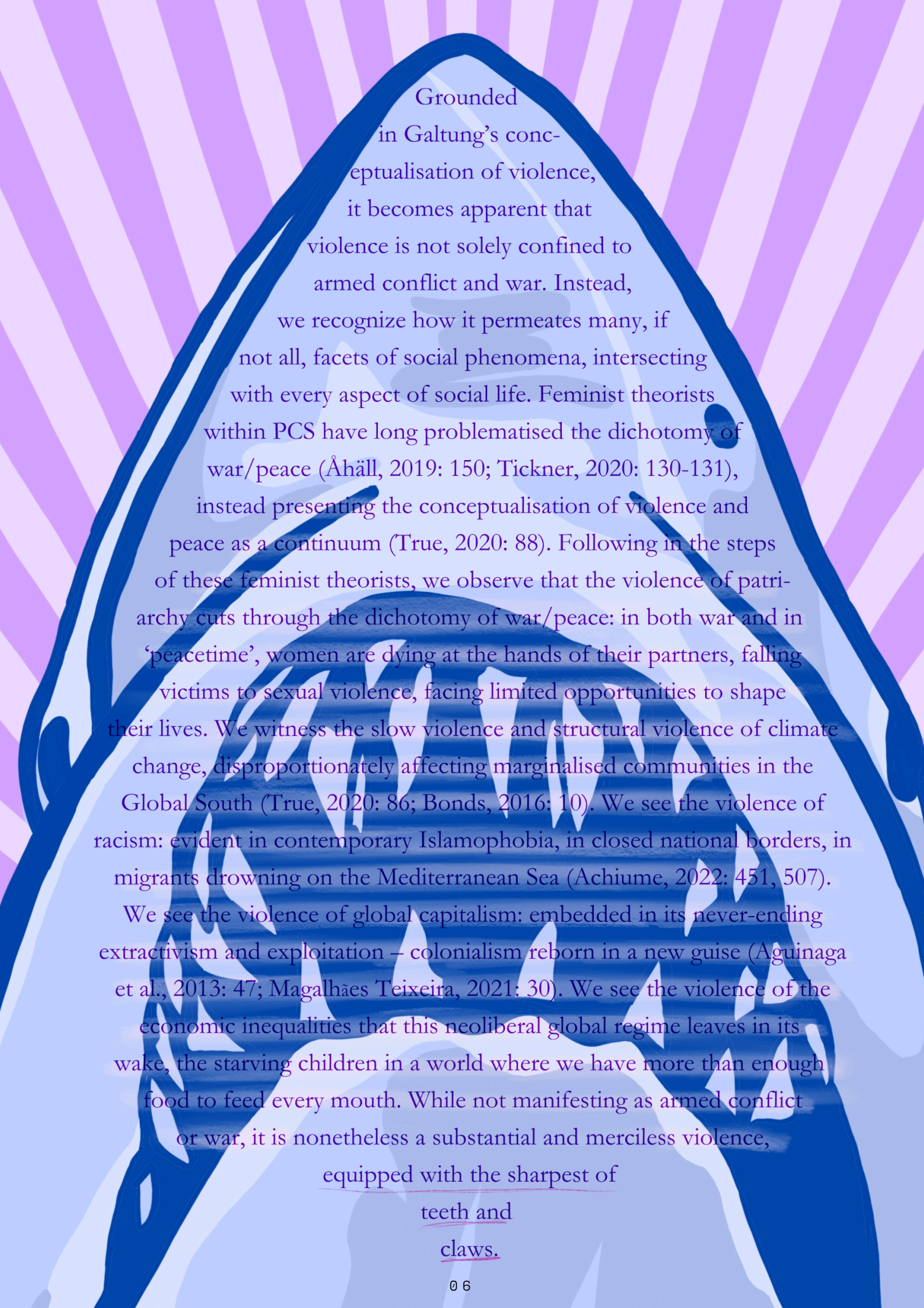


## THE VIOLENCE

Before delving into the discussion of the potential violence inherent within PCS, it is imperative to commence with an exploration of the concept of *cultural violence*.

Johan Galtung (1969: 170-171) introduces the concept of cultural violence within his framework of three categories of violence: *direct*, *structural*, and *cultural*. While direct violence is overt and manifest, structural violence is less visible, existing indirectly within societal structures and materialising in the form of avoidable injustices and inequalities.

Both forms of violence yield physically and mentally violent repercussions for humans, resulting in deaths, ill health, and shattered lives. Additionally, Galtung introduces the concept of *cultural violence*, which he defines as that which “makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong” (Galtung, 1990:291). Cultural violence can thus be comprehended as the societal norms, beliefs, and understandings that justify, legitimise, or naturalise other forms of violence.



Grounded in Galtung's conceptualisation of violence, it becomes apparent that violence is not solely confined to armed conflict and war. Instead, we recognize how it permeates many, if not all, facets of social phenomena, intersecting with every aspect of social life. Feminist theorists within PCS have long problematised the dichotomy of war/peace (Åhäll, 2019: 150; Tickner, 2020: 130-131), instead presenting the conceptualisation of violence and peace as a continuum (True, 2020: 88). Following in the steps of these feminist theorists, we observe that the violence of patriarchy cuts through the dichotomy of war/peace: in both war and in 'peacetime', women are dying at the hands of their partners, falling victims to sexual violence, facing limited opportunities to shape their lives. We witness the slow violence and structural violence of climate change, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities in the Global South (True, 2020: 86; Bonds, 2016: 10). We see the violence of racism: evident in contemporary Islamophobia, in closed national borders, in migrants drowning on the Mediterranean Sea (Achiume, 2022: 451, 507). We see the violence of global capitalism: embedded in its never-ending extractivism and exploitation – colonialism reborn in a new guise (Aguinaga et al., 2013: 47; Magalhães Teixeira, 2021: 30). We see the violence of the economic inequalities that this neoliberal global regime leaves in its wake, the starving children in a world where we have more than enough food to feed every mouth. While not manifesting as armed conflict or war, it is nonetheless a substantial and merciless violence, equipped with the sharpest of teeth and claws.

## CULTURAL VIOLENCE OF PCS

What, then, does this have to do with PCS as an academic discipline? Let us return to the discussion on the division of academic fields: by compartmentalising social phenomena into different spheres of knowledge, one could argue that we also *hierarchise* these social phenomena.

A. Dirk Moses (2021: 1, 41, 43), in writing about the concept of genocide, argues that there is a normative hierarchy of violence. Genocide, Moses contends, is perceived as the “crime of crimes”, blinding us to other causes of civilian deaths in war, such as aerial bombings and starvation blockades. Moses then raises the poignant question: is it truly worse to die as a victim of genocide than as a victim of an air raid?

I wish to take this question further, arguing that a normative hierarchy of violence sits at the heart of the discipline of PCS, ingrained in its very definition. I would argue that PCS, due to its disciplinary focus on the phenomena of war-peace, inevitably privileges the direct violence of war and armed conflict over other types of violence. I would argue that the discipline of PCS thus reproduces a normative hierarchy of violence, blinding us to the surrounding structural violence—rendering PCS itself a manifestation of cultural violence.

But is it really worse to die as a victim of war than to die as, for instance, a victim of the structural violence of starvation? As aptly articulated by the sociologist Eric Bonds (2016: 11): “narrowly focusing on dramatic forms of direct violence will let the biggest killers in contemporary global society go free, and mostly unnoticed”.

As previously mentioned, numerous scholars in PCS have problematised the presumed dichotomy between war and peace, urging for a broader examination of these social phenomena. Scholars such as Juan Daniel Cruz (2021) argue for alternate understandings of peace, thereby shifting the focus towards other forms of violence. And let us not forget Galtung himself – often seen as the father of PCS – who formulated the concept of structural violence, thereby also steering PCS towards an expanded scope beyond the direct violence of armed conflict and war.



However, my contention is that by placing war-peace at the crux of the discipline, PCS implicitly and inadvertently makes less visible forms of violence fall into shadow. While PCS does acknowledge structural violence, even to a great extent,

I would argue that in practice, it primarily does so in the context of its potential role as a *cause* of armed conflict and war, rather than recognising it as a significant form of violence in its own right. Consequently, I argue that the discipline of PCS as such cannot escape hierarchising the direct violence of armed conflict and war over other forms of violence. Moreover, as a bachelor's student of PCS, I contend that this normative hierarchisation of violence is particularly noticeable in the PCS curriculum, in the university

classrooms where students take their brave first steps into the world of academia. Here, in my experience, the direct violence of war is truly the focal point, with critical perspectives serving as mere supplementary components.



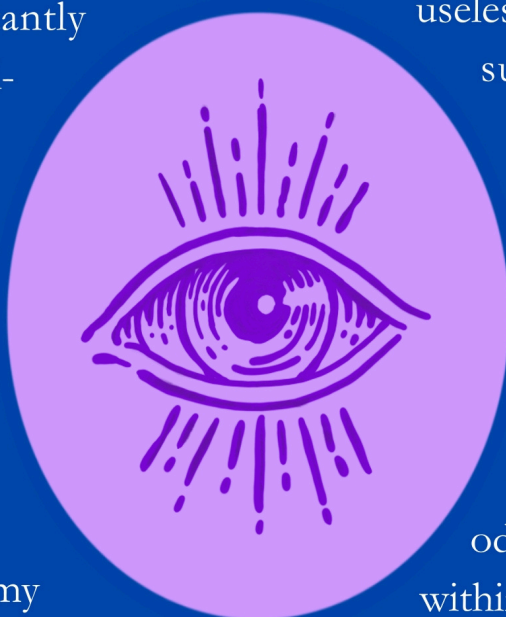
## IN DEFENCE OF PCS

Now perhaps it is in place to defend the discipline of PCS. War and armed conflict are brutal social phenomena, their human consequences incomprehensible in their devastation. Does the direct violence of war not deserve its central focus in PCS? If we are obliged to constantly consider all forms of violence, how are we to effectively study armed conflict and war?

This argument has been made by PCS theorists such as Alex J. Bellamy (2019: 114), who asserts that “if we define peace so broadly as to include virtually every aspect of human wellbeing then the problem of organized violence slips from view”, emphasising the methodologically practical reasons for the prioritising of direct violence in PCS. Of course, the counter-argument here is, as articulated by feminist scholar Jacqui True (2020: 88), that this narrow focus results in *other*

types of violence slipping from view. True further emphasises the need to address other forms of violence if we are to build peace.

**The point I wish to** make here is not that PCS is by any means useless or worthless. To be sure, I fully recognise the significance of studying the puzzle of war-peace. I am, however, trying to emphasise the importance of recognising that the production of knowledge within PCS is not a neutral process, but rather a distinctly political – and violent – one. Despite its academic importance, it remains crucial to bear in mind that PCS can be viewed as reproducing a normative hierarchy of violence – a power structure that, in its prioritisation of one type of violence, *obscures* or even *naturalises* other forms. Consequently, as I have argued, PCS may be understood as inherently reproducing cultural violence.



Hence, I call for us, students and scholars within PCS, to further open our eyes to the violence that surrounds us, permeates us and our production of knowledge. It is a call for us to open our eyes to the violent nature of global neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy, racism—intricately intertwined, interlaced, and intersected, collectively shaping a neocolonial world deeply rooted in systems of oppression. It is a call for us to recognise this violence not just as a potential cause of armed conflict or war but as a significant form of violence in itself. In the end, both direct and structural violence are devastating. The death of a child in an air raid. The death of a child due to famine. Both are abominable. Both are avoidable.

## CLOSING REMARKS

I am proud to be a student of PCS. Despite the never-ending stress, quite a few shed tears, and the occasional breakdown, I have loved learning about the phenomena of war, peace, and violence. While my desire to learn more is strong, after three years of study, I find myself contemplating what it is I am contributing to. What, then, is the pathway forward? Is it to jump ship? To give up and abandon all this acquired knowledge? Certainly not.

I argue that the way forward lies in advocating for a radical change in PCS: a pathway beyond the hierarchisation of violence. This pathway requires more than merely ‘adding’ critical perspectives as supplements. What is needed is an overturning of knowledge, challenging the very nature of PCS and the disciplinary boundaries of academia. Numerous scholars have called for a critical turn within PCS (see e.g. Cruz, 2021; Kappler & Lemay-Hébert, 2019; Millar, 2019; Rasmusson, 2023; Åhäll, 2019). But perhaps it is time to, in the production of knowledge, call instead for a revolution?



av händerna som bär oss  
av munnarna som kysser oss  
av öronen som hör oss  
av fötterna som dansar oss  
av ögonen som ser oss

det är så vi bygger den  
(Agnes Török, 2022)



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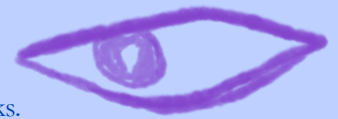
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The poem is an excerpt from the poem 'Det är så vi bygger den' by Agnes Török, in *Amma, Arv, Arbeta*. (2022). Föreningen Arbetarskrivare.



# ON VIOLENCE



CHAPTER I. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON VIOLENCE

# EXPLORING ABLEISM AS CULTURAL AND EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

AN AUTISTIC FOCUS AND PERSPECTIVE

In this text, I draw on works from both Critical Disability Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies, as well as my personal experience of autism; being an autistic person and student of peace and conflict, this essay is where these spheres of knowledge intersect. Central to my essay are concepts from critical perspectives on themes such as violence and justice. I explore and discuss how ableism against autistic people and its consequences can constitute cultural and epistemic violence.

[TW: mention of suicide]

## DISABILITY

To define the term “disability” I employ the definition from Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006): “[p]ersons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” Worth noting is that disability is a very diverse concept, incorporating, as defined above, all from physical and mental to intellectual disabilities, and thus the experiences are likely to differ greatly from one disabled person to another. In this essay I have chosen to delimit the focus of this text to autism, which is categorized as a neurological and developmental disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023), that can be incorporated under the umbrella of mental disabilities described above.

## CULTURAL VIOLENCE

The concept of “cultural violence” was introduced as the third point of Johan Galtung’s violence triangle and is defined as aspects of culture that justify or legitimize direct or structural violence (Galtung, 1990: 291).

## EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Epistemic violence can be defined as denying certain people or groups of people the role of agents able to produce, understand or evaluate knowledge; it relies on “othering” to distinguish between those who are deemed able or worthy to produce and participate in knowledge and those who are not and can therefore be denied epistemic agency (Pérez, 2019: 3-4). Epistemic violence is difficult to recognize since it can operate largely under the radar and has thus been seldomly addressed, especially when it comes to disability (Pérez, 2019: 1-2; Scully, 2019: 299).

## WHY EXPLORE ABLEISM IN PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES?

Given the fact that ableism has rarely been discussed from the conceptual point of view of epistemic violence, and even less in terms of cultural violence, one might ask why it is relevant to take an interest in exploring ableism, specifically relating to autism, within such a conceptual framework. I argue that it is precisely this sheer invisibility of epistemic violence in general, and especially with regards to disability (Pérez, 2019: 1-2; Scully, 2019: 299), that makes it necessary to explore. I would argue that this pervading invisibility, together with the fact that autism has been specifically used as a metaphor for states acting (*lägg till här*) within the discipline of International Relations (IR) based on degrading and stereotypical notions of autism and disability (Christian, 2017: 464, 473), makes it necessary to explore in further detail in terms of cultural and epistemic violence. Worth acknowledging is also the fact that language and discourse are powerful in how they affect the way we think about and understand the social world. This means that theorizing IR using metaphors based on stereotypical and negative perceptions about autism can have further effects on people’s overall understanding and thus perpetuate these stereotypes further (Botha, 2021: 7; Christian, 2017: 467-469). Furthermore, with a closer look at peace and conflict studies, especially critical perspectives, it is possible – and I would argue that it is its *duty* – to highlight the various types of violence and injustice inherent to our societies; I would argue that the purpose of the field is to *make visible* the violence that is difficult to uncover, in societies deemed at first glance as *peaceful*.

## ABLEISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

To start with it is useful to explore how ableism is expressed towards autistic people and its consequences. *Ableism can be defined as a set of ideas and systems that discriminate against people based on their identity as disabled. It can involve ideas of disabled people as subordinate to people without a disability, and the thought that disabled people are less able to participate because of their disability – rather than the understanding of it being societal obstacles making them less able, society not being made for them* (Christian, 2017: 467).



As seen in the definition of *ableism*, it is to a great extent built on certain set ideas, preconceived notions and stereotypes about disabled people and society. When it comes to autistic people there are several different stereotypes, such as the idea that autistic people are inherently asocial, that they have none or little interest in communicating with others or the world, that autism is a disease in need of a cure, that autistic people are perpetual children, and that they are violent and most often in a world of their own (Catala et al., 2021: 9018; Botha, 2021: 2; Christian, 2017: 466): the list goes on and on. As exemplified here the stereotypes about autism and autistic people are mainly negative (Botha, 2021: 3), and given these negative connotations that accompany what people think of disability it is not surprising that disablement is generally seen as an “unfortunate state” (Scully, 2019: 308); it is them that are “wrong”, not society.

The fact that ableism values able-bodied or able-minded people more than disabled people, has made it possible to marginalize, objectify and silence the latter (Christian, 2017: 467-468). This marginalization of autistic people has been found to, for instance, lead to what is called “minority stress”: high psychological stress and mental health issues as a result of experiencing everyday discrimination, rejection, internalized stigma, and more (Botha, 2021: 5; Radulski, 2022: 116). In general, it can be said that autistic people often experience significant excess stress during their lives, which contributes to both poor mental and physical health (Botha, 2021: 3-4). Unfortunately, as a consequence of this, it comes as little surprise that suicide is a leading cause of death among autistic people, with up to 35% having planned or attempted suicide and with an especially high risk seen in autistic women without a co-occurring intellectual disability (Botha, 2021: 3; Newell, 2021). Adding to the already-mentioned complexities of ableism affecting autistic people is the fact that autism is typically regarded as an invisible disability, meaning that it is not immediately apparent that the person is disabled (Radulski, 2022: 114). Due to the invisibility of autism, autistic people are more likely to indirectly experience ableism through, for instance, microaggressions, which share many similarities with the consequences of minority stress as discussed above (Kattari et al., 2018: 479). Finally, in addition to this, it is worth noting that not all autistic people experience the effects of ableism in the same way. From an intersectional point of view, it is possible to discern that other social identities intersect and affect the experienced oppression: being queer, transgender, woman, part of a racialised group or having a co-occurring intellectual or physical disability are all different lived experiences that intersect with the experience of being autistic and should not be overlooked.

With regards to the fact that ableism and notions of “normality” – which disability is often contrasted to – shape society it can give way for structures that in many ways disabled people more than only their disability would (Catala et al., 2021: 9017). This creates a form of social oppression where disabled people are prevented from participating in their full rights in society (Arneil & Hirschman, 2016: 4-5). Here it is possible to draw parallels to Nancy Fraser’s (2005: 5) notions on justice as being “parity of participation”; when ableism creates these societally institutionalized obstacles preventing autistic (and disabled people as a whole) from fully participating equally in society it becomes an injustice -- and can further be viewed as a form of *structural violence*. Fraser emphasizes the importance of dismantling these obstacles to parity of participation as a way towards justice (Fraser, 2005: 5), which in the case of ableism is made very difficult by the fact that “it is so integrated in multiple facets of society”, such as language, culture and the regulation of bodies (Kattari et al., 2018: 486). This *disparity* of participation is further exemplified by Kate Precious (2021: 186), who explains that marginalized groups in general are excluded from social and democratic spaces which makes them politically disadvantaged. The injustice of exclusion from participating and being represented in politics and society, as described by Fraser (2005: 7-8), is reflected in that autistic people, at least in Western European countries, are not considered capable or valued enough to have their political participation facilitated (Precious, 2021: 202). Following the discussions above, it can thus be argued that the ableist ideas and structures that create obstacles and ill-health for autistic people constitute *cultural violence*, seeing as it justifies and facilitates both structural and direct means of violence towards autistic people.

#### EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE AGAINST AUTISTIC PEOPLE

Now, I move on to how notions of autism and autistic people, fuelled by ableism, can lead to experiences of *epistemic violence*. As mentioned before, there are many negative stereotypes about autism and ideas of who autistic people are. This is something that Catala et al. (2021: 9018) has argued affects how people listen and evaluate the knowledge of autistic people. They argue that ableism creates biased credibility judgements of autistic people’s accounts, which consequently leads to them not being “taken seriously as knowers”. This means that autistic people’s epistemic agency is questioned or erased, as they are not seen as capable of knowledge production as nondisabled or neurotypical people (Catala et al., 2021: 9015). This ignorance of autistic people’s epistemic agency and credibility is argued to stem from society’s neuronormativity, which fuels neurotypical ignorance (Catala et al., 2021: 9017). Furthermore, autistic people – and disabled people in general – are more likely to be regarded as untrustworthy because they are seen as prejudiced by their social identity (Scully, 2019: 301). In general, both widely in society and about their experience as autistic and disabled individuals, autistic people are rarely listened to or consulted (Catala et al., 2021: 9019).

This is, arguably, particularly prevalent regarding the question as to whether autistic people have the credibility to know about autism and their own experiences of being autistic. According to Monique Botha (2021: 7), this means denying autistic people “epistemic authority”. This can, by extension, result in autistic people expecting that their thinking and knowledge will not be taken seriously, something that in turn may ultimately lead to them refraining from taking part in the production of knowledge (Catala et al., 2021: 9019). Hence, the emic knowledge of autistic people, especially their knowledge of the experience of autism in an ableist world, is being erased. In line with this argument, Scully (2019: 303) argues that marginalizing people’s epistemic contributions will impede their possibility of gaining important self-understanding of their experience. Finally, as a consequence of autistic people being seen as less epistemically credible or capable, there is also little societal interest in working to involve or facilitate autistic people’s participation in politics, democracy and society as a whole (Precious, 2021: 202).

As I have argued, the way in which autistic people’s knowledge is devalued in favour of non-disabled and “non-biased” knowledge constitutes a form of epistemic violence. Following this, I would thus like to draw on Paulo Freire’s (1996: 46–47) concept of a paternalistic teacher-student relationship to draw a parallel to how autistic people are often positioned in society as the students with the role of receiving knowledge unquestionably: autistic people are constructed as objects *thought of* rather than subjects *thinking*. The position of autistic people is thus different from that of those in the role of the teacher, such as neurotypicals, psychologists, scientists, politicians, policymakers, and more. Although Freire does not explicitly use the concept of “epistemic violence” to describe his ideas in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), it may be understood as connected to his way of thinking, discerned from the following reasoning: “[a]ny situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence” (Freire, 1996: 58). Thus, preventing autistic people from participating in the process of inquiry or knowledge production can be considered one of violence, specifically epistemic violence.

The experience of “epistemic exclusion” is described by Scully (2019: 300) as resulting from social and political oppression which in turn is the result of power relations that pervade society. Furthermore, seeing as epistemic violence is expressed when people’s epistemic agency and authority are denied with regard to an “extra-epistemic trait” that is used to question their credibility and capability (Pérez, 2019: 4), it has become clear that it is the case for autistic people when they are seen as less credible and capable because of their extra-epistemic trait of autism. As previously discussed, autistic people face different types of ableism, seeing as other parts of their identity intersect with them being autistic. Thus, the experiences of, and vulnerability to, epistemic violence may differ – and for some be even more violent.

As argued by Pérez (2019, 7): “people are located under multiple axes of oppression”. Finally, epistemic violence is important to understand because it does not exclusively stop at hampering marginalized groups from engaging in knowledge production, it also causes a social and societal disparity that can cause justifications of “other types of violence and exclusion” (Pérez, 2019: 1).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this essay has explored various consequences of ableism and the harmful effects it has on autistic people in both their personal lives and on a societal level. Considering this, I have argued that ableism may be considered a type of cultural violence. In addition to this, I have also explored how ableist ideas and stereotypes work to deny autistic people their epistemic participation and agency – something that arguably constitutes *epistemic violence*. Having drawn from both Fraser and Freire I have shown that this exclusion of autistic people to participation in society and epistemic production, is unjust and violent. Finally, I would argue that this calls for further inquiry and self-reflection within Peace and Conflict Studies to dismantle the evident ableism that pervades this academic discipline and society as a whole.

## DISCLAIMER

Due to the scope of this essay, I have not been able to delve very deep into the causes and effects of ableism in general or towards autistic people specifically. Rather, my focus has been to explore various examples of ableism mentioned and studied in critical disability studies, and to discuss how it constitutes cultural and epistemic violence. I recognise that this may result in certain generalisations being made or certain terms or topics not discussed in the scope and detail they deserve.

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# “PEOPLE LIKE ME DON’T GET A CHANCE TO A WHITE JOB”

## APPLYING A CRITICAL PEACE & CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE ON ORGANISED CRIME

Widely discussed in the media and among politicians as well as around the dinner table: with almost absolute certainty, it has escaped no Swedish person’s consciousness that organised crime has become an increasing issue during the past few years. I have found myself reflecting on the matter gradually more, perhaps because of the increased media coverage hand in hand with an increasingly alarmist discourse, or because it has become clear that this is not something that simply will pass. I have found myself reflecting specifically on the way organised crime is framed and handled, perhaps because of my studies in peace and conflict. Why, for example, is gang violence and crime not approached as a conflict, when media and politicians speak about a making CCTV-cameras *front soldiers against the gangs* (Henriksson & Tamsons, 2024), *we are not finished until we have defeated the gangs* (Kristersson, 2024), *gang conflicts*? Therefore, I ask: what can we learn through applying a critical peace and conflict approach to gang-based crime and violence in Sweden?

### WHY IS A CRITICAL PEACE AND CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE USEFUL FOR STUDYING ORGANISED CRIME?

A broadening of the application of critical peace and conflict approaches to intrastate organised crime could allow for addressing its underlying causes more accurately, and consequently pave the way for increasingly holistic efforts to deal with it. The study of criminal groups in peace processes is traditionally limited to the field of sociology (van Santen, 2021: 347), but I wish to broaden this to discuss what knowledge can be brought to the study of organised crime by exploring a sociological conflict analysis, alongside a number of elements from other critical perspectives.

First, I provide a brief background to organised crime in contemporary Sweden and the discourse surrounding it. I then discover and discuss what lessons might be drawn from the concept of sociological conflict analysis and other critical notions: how might they prove useful to understand the Swedish context, and what implications might this bring?

It is contested how extensive organised crime is in Sweden. Former national police chief Anders Thornberg claimed in 2023 that around 30.000 individuals have connections to criminal gangs, whereas criminologists like Manne Gerell hold that around 5000 are hard core criminals (Haglund, 2023). According to the recently published (February 2024) *Resistance and action – a national strategy against organised crime* (Regeringen, 2024, author’s transl.), what the term organised crime intends is at least two persons who continually over time commit serious crimes in cooperation with the aim of economic gain. (Regeringen, 2024: 4, author’s transl.).

Organised crime affects large parts of society both directly and indirectly. Over the past decade, criminal networks have grown along with criminal activity such as drug trade and fraud, and violence with and without firearms connected to gangs has become increasingly common (Regeringen, 2024). The violence as well as criminal networks is mostly confined to what the police categorise as vulnerable areas, of which there are 60 in Sweden. These vulnerable areas are characterised by socio-economic deprivation and often maintain parallel or alternative societal structures (ibid: 5-6).

First, there is a need to critique the nation-state centric notion of peace to show why critical peace and conflict approaches could prove useful for understanding gang criminality. Feminist scholar Jaquie True (2020) highlights that the conceptualisation of peace and violence needs to change to be able to achieve a sustainable peace. The emergence of organised crime in Sweden ought to demonstrate that a broadened conceptualisation of peacetime different to the ideas which has laid the ground for the current nation-state-centric view on security. True (ibid:93) argues for the importance of an understanding of the different types of violence within a society that pose a threat to peace, and that these must be addressed. Thus, if the concept of peace is broadened, it would allow us to view organised crime through the lens of critical peace and conflict studies instead of limiting it to the field of sociology.

Judging from the predominant discourse surrounding gang criminality, it appears criminal networks and their members have undergone a securitisation. For example, minister of justice Gunnar Strömmer compared gang members to terrorists in an official statement from the Department of Justice (Justitiedepartementet, 2023). Gangs are something to *defeat* (Kristersson, 2024), technology acts as *front soldiers* (Henriksson & Tamsons, 2024) and we need to *crush the gangs* (Moderaterna, n.d.). Organised crime is hence depicted as an external threat.



When an issue is securitised, it creates a binary of the outside threat, the Other, and the referent object in need of protection (Waeber, 2011:469). An impression is created that the issue in question exists as an exception which is outside of and separate from the political sphere (ibid). The securitised issue hence seems to exist in a socio-political vacuum. Given how gang criminality is discursively constructed, this seems to be what is happening.

The Other in this context can be argued to be subjected to what Opatow (2018: 42) call moral exclusion, as someone not entitled to fairness. The creation of the gang member as an external threat would intend that he or she is not a part of the civilised society in Sweden, and therefore not subject to justice. The national strategy against organised crime highlights that the norms and rules in vulnerable areas often differ from those in the rest of society and that this poses a threat to democracy - without questioning why these separate norms and rules exist (Regeringen, 2024: 5-6). This paints a picture of something that is separate and not part of Swedish society, hence simplifying the moral exclusion of these areas and its inhabitants. However, beliefs about moral exclusion are not static but changeable (Opatow: 41). Hence, the idea that crime is depoliticised and exists in a vacuum can also change.

While securitisation allows for and legitimates certain types of action (Waeber, 2011: 469) – for instance, Strömmer mentions allegedly effective CCTV networks, facial recognition technologies and the possibility to deploy drones (Strömmer, cited in Alexandersson, 2023) –, securitisation of gang criminality and violence seems to be leading to a somewhat parochial field of vision. Organised crime is often framed in military terms, which would seem strange as it is not, as previously highlighted, treated as a conflict. This can be explained with the deep ties between national security and militarism illustrated by feminist scholar Annick Wibben (2018). She, like others, emphasises that securitisation may contribute to militarisation of further aspects of life and society (Wibben, 2018: 140) (Mabee & Vucetic, 2018: 101). For example, this an increased reliance on the use of force and strong hierarchies that promotes limited violence to ensure peace (Wibben, 2018: 140-41). The proposed measures by the minister of justice all align with this; drones, CCTV networks and facial recognition are connected to the controlling powers of the executive as well as hierarchies.

It is important to highlight that gang criminality cannot be said to be fully securitised. There are several competing narratives highlighting among other things underlying structures that may or may not contribute to giving rise to criminality. On a general level however, it seems the discourse is leaning towards a higher degree or securitisation when criminality becomes something to defeat and gangs something to crush.

Evin Cetin and Jens Liljestrand (2022: 11) point to this shift in recalling that we used to speak about the importance of employing youth, whereas we now wish for tougher punishments, destroying gangs and stopping shootings.

By exploring critical peace and conflict perspectives, organised crime emerges as coming from within society rather than from the outside. Gang-based crime and violence exists not in a vacuum as a securitising discourse would suggest, but in a distinct social, economic and political context, which would imply other measures for dealing with the matter. Moreover, a conventional understanding of conflict knows parties to a conflict only as nation-states and armed groups (van Santen, 2021: 348). A critical peace and conflict approach that broadens the scope of peace and violence, however, could include unconventional violent non-state actors in conflict analyses.

Emma van Santen (2021: 365) suggests applying a sociological conflict analysis to unconventional armed violence such as gang violence, thereby reconceptualising it as a social issue rather than one confined to the security sector. This perspective reveals the underlying structural issues that precedes crime and views it *as community-based response to poor state and local governance that socially excludes and disproportionately affects marginalised and intersecting gender, race, class and ethnic identities* (ibid: 355). Inherent to the contemporary neoliberal era is a harmful politics-crime binary, she argues (ibid: 350). This binary depoliticises crime and fails to confront the issues and structures rooted in neoliberalism itself in which organised criminality emerges (ibid:364). Depoliticisation of crime allows for it to be treated as an outside threat, hence facilitating a securitisation process. Apart from concealing social, economic and political structures, it renders gang members unable to participate in the political sphere (ibid: 73-74). According to this view, organised crime can be seen as emerging from unjust societal structures that oppresses certain groups, for whom it subsequently may seem a rational choice to engage in criminal activity. Furthermore, these structures can be seen as the sources of violence and oppression in a society that True argues need to be addressed to achieve sustainable peace. Similarly, Paulo Freire (2018) claims that liberation of the oppressed cannot occur within the same structures that oppress them, which further makes a sociological conflict analysis appear as an appropriate perspective to apply on organised crime.

Furthermore, there seems to be a discrepancy between the narrative offered by the *othering* discourse and stories collected from the ground. Cetin and Liljestrand exemplify how young boys can be drawn into organised crime by telling the story of a young man, Ali, who Cetin encountered many times while working as a lawyer representing families of victims of gang related violence.

Ali grew up as a son of socio-economically deprived immigrant parents, and describes what can be interpreted as Freire's (2018: 62–63) notion of internalised feelings of inferiority among the oppressed. As a young teenager, he felt outcast as could not afford the same clothes as them or participate in society in the same way – or at least so he interpreted it. He therefore felt he needed an income of his own to be able to fit in among the financially better off (Cetin & Liljestrand, 2022: 47–48).

As Freire states, money is the measure of all things in the neoliberal world, and profit the primary goal (Freire, 2018: 58). Ali's brother and others he knew were involved in organised crime, so for him it did not appear immoral to get involved in the narcotics trade. It was an environment more familiar and more profitable than a conventional job. Several times, he says, he tried to leave. But despite having been detained several times for drug related crimes he kept coming back to the narcotics trade because *it's the only thing I can trust* (Cetin & Liljestrand, 2022: 53, author's transl.). *What should I leave for? People like me don't get a chance to a white job* (Cetin & Liljestrand, 2022: 66, author's transl.). This seemingly aligns with what van Santen means when she describes how a sociological conflict analysis sees organised crime as a response to poor governing, hence making it appear as a sensible lens to see gang-based crime and violence in Sweden through. For Ali, organised crime came across as the most rational source of income. Similarly, criminologist David Sausdal (cited in Oredsson, 2023) suggests that entering the criminal sphere is most often perceived a rational choice, where people know they may end up in jail at some point. He therefore argues that only harsher punishments and increased control and surveillance is not sufficient to deter people from criminality, as is not aimed at changing the alternative norms and rules which make crime a rational choice.

Moreover, much of the Swedish discussion on strategies related to gang criminality is inspired by Denmark, in particular the “hard” measures. However, Sausdal highlight two things that often are ignored. Firstly, the Danish context is not comparable to the Swedish one. Secondly, in combination with the harder measures, Denmark has also made great efforts to improve welfare and decrease social exclusion (Oredsson, 2023). As a sociological conflict analysis is highly context-based, this denotes its usefulness for seeing further than “hard” measures, and thus seems a viable addition to the neoliberal interpretation of organised crime.

To understand *why* especially children and young people enter in organised criminality, which the national strategy lifts as a growing issue (Regeringen, 2024: 8), a reasonable starting point seems to be to the unjust structures within society. It is not a coincidence that the vulnerable areas mapped out by Swedish police are characterised by socio-economic deprivation.

According to Ferreira and Goncalves (2022: 3), organised crime can be fuelled and fortified by clusters of poverty, unemployment and informal employment; all common in these places. As in Ali's case, if the simplest perceived way of gaining money is by engaging in organised crime, it may appear a rational choice to engage in organised crime.

Intersectionality of peace can help dissect why only certain voices and perspectives are heard and listened to while others are not (Kappler and Lemay-Hébert, 2019: 162). The approach focuses on power relations and structures which silences certain narratives and can be useful to understand why perspectives like those of Ali's are marginalised.

Therefore, an intersectional approach could help focus a greater attention to and inclusion of parallel perspectives. As Freire (2018: 45) states, the ones who know unjust power relations the best are the oppressed who experience them themselves. Hence, it could be argued that a kind of epistemic violence is carried out against people in vulnerable areas, which is why the reframing of criminality from a security issue to a social issue could contribute with recognising the obscured perspectives and the knowledge within these.

### SO, WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM APPLYING A CRITICAL PEACE AND CONFLICT APPROACH TO ORGANISED CRIME AND GANG VIOLENCE?

This text shows that it becomes possible to broaden the way gang-based organised crime is viewed. Subsequently, this would make possible to tackle the matter from a different approach than a securitising discourse allows for. For example, CCTV networks and harder punishments may be useful for what might be referred to as the symptoms of gang-based crime, but it will not cure the structures that gave rise to it. This view of crime and its emergence challenges the neoliberal approach of crime as something external and depoliticised belonging to the security sector. A critical perspective sees that the neoliberal approach risks strengthening the same oppressive structures that are capable of nurturing organised crime and violence. Instead, organised crime emerges as coming from within the society rather than an external threat. It becomes a politicised issue and a consequence or societal response of inequalities and oppression. By employing a critical peace and conflict perspective, the necessary space for additional measures outside of the security sector can be created.

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# VIOLENCE, JUSTICE AND PEACE IN (CRITICAL) MILITARY STUDIES

I had not heard much about peace and conflict studies before starting my PhD at Lund University in 2022. I am a student of political science and sociology, with a focus on international relations, a discipline that many view as stodgier and more conservative than peace and conflict studies, but that has also produced a vast variety of interesting critical theoretical and empirical work on the international system. I also find it strange that I do not know much about peace and conflict studies, and yet I teach in a peace and conflict studies program. However, I know that peace and conflict studies has roots in interdisciplinarity and the bringing together of non-academic and academic perspectives (often in the form of activism). I suppose because of this I am welcome, but there are moments of lack of fit, and wondering what I can provide to the students interested in this discipline. In this short piece, I will reflect on my own academic journey and my own specific (sub)field of military studies and how that fits with the topics of violence, justice, and peace, as covered in our course.

The subfield of military studies is connected to many other fields, and has grown out of a general interest in studying military institutions. Military studies is not always called such, and similar strands of research can be found in what is called security studies, war studies, defence studies, strategic studies, the study of civil-military relations, and even military science. Each of these subfields has its own unique focus, and belonging to one or the other indicates some of the key concerns of your work.

In the preface to the *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies*, Soeters, Shields, and Rietjens (2014) note that military studies is made of separated larger disciplines including political science, sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, administrative sciences, and economics. Later, in their introduction to the handbook, the authors outline the study of the military starting after the second world war, the birthtime of many disciplines, including international relations and peace and conflict studies. Soeters, Shields, and Rietjens (2014) also briefly chart how military studies started from a focus on research for the military in their introduction. Today, military studies offers diverse perspectives on every aspect of how the military fits into our lives and world politics. Just one year after Soeters, Shields, and Rietjens published their handbook, the journal of Critical Military Studies published its inaugural issue with an introduction by the founding editors Victoria Basham, Aaron Belkin, and Jess Gifkins.

They sought to distinguish themselves from ‘the rest of military and security studies’ by emphasizing that critical military studies scholars approach ‘military power as a question,’ problematize neat boundaries between what is military and civilian (Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins 2015, 1), and share a ‘desire to question how military institutions, practices, processes, and geographies are an outcome of social practices and political contestation.’ (Ibid, 2)

My own journey to military studies was mostly by chance. I searched for a job for six months with no luck during my bachelors program, working odd jobs with bad hours until I was hired as a research assistant at a research institute which focused on studying international and defence policy from a variety of perspectives. Before this, I had been interested in how both gender and technology influenced international politics in a variety of ways, and during my time as a research assistant, I became interested in how individuals within powerful organizations such as the military thought about their place in these organizations, how they created communities, how their identities were shaped and formed. During the same time in my bachelors program, I was exposed to a variety of feminist approaches to international relations, such as Sjoberg (2009), who approaches feminist research as a ‘journey of critique’, Butler (2011, 2016) whose theories of gender, performativity and violence have influenced my work, and Enloe’s (2014) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* which interrogates gender in the international system in a narrative and accessible form. These works also led me to feminist methodology, which we also practiced to an extent at my research institute. While there is no one united feminist methodology, there are certainly common threads. Ackerly, Stern, and True (2010) in their introduction to *Feminist methodologies for International Relations* note that they ironically have the task of ‘writing a definitive text for a field that eschews definition’ (2) due to feminist commitments to complicating definitions and binaries. The authors identify reflexivity as a key approach in feminist research, where researchers consistently reflect on their scholarship and positionality. There is also a focus on power relations between researcher and researched, and attentiveness to power through a feminist lens more broadly throughout the research process and analysis. The field of critical military studies, which often applies feminist approaches to studying the military and militarized aspects of international relations and world politics, is where I have felt most comfortable for a few years now. I will now turn to how my work specifically, and critical military studies more broadly can attend to the themes of violence, justice and peace. These themes are the themes which have steered the course this magazine was born out of. During the course, I taught in the violence section, and taught a seminar on militarization, where I discussed with students how the military impacts our everyday lives, from the stories we tell about our history to the everyday objects in our homes.

Since I taught in the violence section, it might seem obvious that my work is deeply related to violence. A core goal of state militaries across the world is to be one of the instruments the state uses to express their monopoly on violence, among other institutions such as the police. As the arm of the state engaged in foreign operations and domestic defence, militaries are obviously meant to commit violence. I study militaries by investigating the thoughts and feelings of their members, by direct conversation with those who commit (or at times do not commit) the violence of the state. In one study I worked on, we asked Canadian military reservists about why they stay in the military, despite its functional problems, unpacking the ways these military members related to the broader top down policies they were impacted by (von Hlatky and Imre-Millei 2022a). Most of these reservists did not discuss the military's violence as something present in their day to day lives, instead, they connected their willingness to join and stay in the military to ideas such as helping people, or camaraderie. Military studies can be one way to study how violence happens, but also how violence is often relegated to the background when we talk to military members themselves.

Critical military studies in particular has made a variety of contributions to the study of violence from multiple perspectives, however the connection of critical military studies of the study of violence becomes more complex when the types of violence possible in relation to military institutions become examined. Multiple levels emerge, as does the possibility to examine both violence committed by state militaries and violence committed within state militaries. When we cast the net broader than military members themselves, we can also see how broader systems of militarization and/or militarism in society are connected to violence. As Soeters, Shields, and Rietjens note, 'researching the military is valuable and in fact indispensable because the use of violence, the military's core business, is probably one of the most unpredictable and impactful forces in social dynamics.' (2014, 3)

Much of my work has previously focused on issues of women's integration and sexual misconduct in the Canadian military. This work led to in depth conversations with military men and women about what sexual(ised) violence and misogyny meant within a violent institution. Perhaps most critical feminists are not surprised that military members also experience violence from their own institution, but interrogating this violence through the voices of those who have experienced it gives rise to new insights which trouble binaries of victim/perpetrator by showing how systems of violence reproduce themselves through individual experiences. One of the studies I was a part of interrogated how veterans thought about their transition to civilian life, and it allowed many of the women veterans in our focus groups to unpack the masculinised expectations of the institution. Women discussed how military structures were set up for them to fail, how they were subtly and unsubtly excluded from military life, and how gendered expectations clashed when it came to the relationship between motherhood and military service in particular (von Hlatky and Imre-Millei 2022b).

My still forthcoming work, to be published later this year investigates sexual violence in Canadian military reserves, and how women and non-binary people in the military more broadly have navigated experiences of sexual trauma. These studies showed me how important it is to pay attention to the lives of military members, as their lives can show us how militarised violence intersects with other types of violent institutions and practices in our society such as patriarchy and rape culture.

Talking with those who have experienced violence within military institutions also undoubtedly leads to conversations of justice. Critical military studies allows for engagement with justice from a variety of perspectives. First, we can see how states justify military action as a tool of justice, relying on narratives of victimhood to do so. Second, militaries have their own complex forms of justice which regulate (or not) their members' actions. And third, we can think of a need for justice when it comes to acts committed by militaries and their members, and the various mechanisms (internal and external) to hold militaries and their members accountable. We can also think of the ways militaries and their members have not been accountable, and the politics of accountability when it comes to which actions are seen as worthy of condemnation and by who they are (not) condemned. My work so far has mostly on these last aspects, on the how military members who have been hurt by their institutions or other military members navigate this type of trauma. For example, some of my work has focused on why military women who experience military sexual do not report it, and the institutional and culture barriers in place which affect such decisions (Brown et al 2024).

We can also learn about peace while studying militaries. As Karin Hansen notes elsewhere in this zine, we must attend to the types of violence that are present in spaces and times we think of as peaceful, and the way violence and even war work in our daily lives in these spaces and times. My own work is focused on 'western' countries which have not been declared by their governments to be 'at war.' In Canada and in Sweden, the reputation of the peaceful democracy often leaves militaries in these countries unproblematic and unexamined. The examination of militaries in peacetime allows for a complication of the concept of peace, as militaries continue to train, to go on deployments and operations at home and abroad, to acquire weapons, and to commit violence against their own members.

My own approach to studying militaries, is to put the focus squarely on what the lives of military members can tell us about the way wars are fought. Feminist methodologies encourage us to engage directly with our research subjects, to view our interactions with them as a co-creation and to veer away from extractivist approaches. But often when feminist and critical scholars approach the military, they are wary of engaging with military members themselves for fear of co-option.

There is constant debate in academic spaces, and in journals such as *Critical Military Studies* about what we can both gain and lose from closeness with military members. As I noted in my Plan Paper for my PhD thesis:

“EL-HAJ (2022) CRITIQUES THE APPROACH OF ENGAGING DIRECTLY WITH MILITARY MEMBERS AS OPPOSED TO KEEPING CRITICAL DISTANCE, WHEN SHE NOTES THAT ACCOUNTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SOLDIER CAN NEVER ESCAPE THE SOLDIERS VIEW, THAT SUCH ACCOUNTS ARE LIKELY TO REPRODUCE AT THE MOST BASIC LEVEL ‘GOOD WAR STORIES.’ I DO NOT DISAGREE, I SIMPLY TAKE IT THAT ONE READING CAN ONLY GO SO FAR WITHOUT THE OTHER, THAT WE NEED ACCOUNTS WITH CRITICAL DISTANCE AND ACCOUNTS FROM ‘THE MILITARY BED’ (COLLA 2014), NO MATTER HOW UNEASY WE MAY FEEL ABOUT LAYING IN IT.” (IMRE-MILLEI 2023, 7)

Because of my conviction that accounts from ‘the military bed’ (Colla 2014) which attempt critique can create productive tensions, I continue to engage with military members as full people capable of making life choices that we might not expect from them as critical scholars. My approach is precarious even to myself, and I am constantly re-evaluating the ways I can approach military members with respect, while leveling critique against the institutions they are part of, and sometimes them personally. In the spirit of this course, my work is a critical dialogue between myself and my participants, where I often find my own beliefs challenged. I take Cynthia Enloe’s call for a skeptically curious (2015) interrogation of military institutions seriously, and allow that curiosity to lead me to military settings. We can’t have dialogues about violence, justice, and peace in our societies if we do not recognise military members to be full parts of those societies, not just cogs in bureaucratic machines. My work aims to take an empathetically critical approach (Molendijk and Pascal Kalkman 2023) to military members and military power, allowing for an exploration of military life which sheds light onto the way our societies function. While I do not always see myself as fitting neatly into the field of peace and conflict studies, I see my investigation of military lives as my most important contribution to the field. I will take these reflections with me in the next few months as I go on fieldwork in Canada, where I will stay with an army unit which works with military drones, interviewing and observing the units members.

BY BIBI IMRE-MILLEI

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# THE MANIPULATION OF MEDIA AND THE MILITARIZATION OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY

## INTRODUCTION

On February 24, 2022, Russia initiated a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, escalating a conflict that originated from the unlawful annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 (Regeringskansliet, 2022). The Kremlin's media machinery has been actively engaged in crafting a narrative to justify this breach of Ukraine's sovereignty, despite lacking logical and factual foundation. The absence of a well-constructed strategic narrative could have potentially led to internal discontent within Russia. This is especially evident considering the significant consequences of the conflict, including restrictions on individual freedoms and the situation where Russia has become the most sanctioned country in the world. Despite these challenges, Vladimir Putin maintains a notable 82% approval rating in Russian society, according to Statista (2023). In light of this complex situation, the question arises: How does the Kremlin manipulate media and narratives to shape Russian public opinion and justify its aggressive foreign policy in Ukraine?

The text will begin by explaining the significance of strategic narratives in the context of war and conflict, followed by a discussion of key concepts such as securitization and militarization. It will then highlight how the Kremlin has suppressed the free media and established what this text terms as "media monopolization." After outlining the position of Russian state media within society, the text will explain central aspects of the Russian strategic narrative and argue for its strong links to securitization, resulting in increased militarization of Russian society. The aim of this text is to improve understanding of how the Kremlin's media strategies impact both the global context of wars and conflicts and the internal dynamics by promoting increased militarization, nationalism, and societal conformity within Russia.

## STRATEGIC NARRATIVES

Linus Hagström highlights the central aspect of strategic narratives as a cohesive narrative constructed to shape reactions to an event (Hagström, 2023). The strategic narrative serves as a mechanism for individuals in positions of authority to justify their actions, presenting them favorably to garner public support for their objectives. A well-defined vision aligned with the nation's values, ideals, and perceptions of its role tends to enhance the effectiveness of the strategic narrative. Often grounded in a semblance of reality, these narratives in the context of war usually suggest positive outcomes resulting from military intervention (Sjöstedt et al, 2017: 148). In this context, the strategic narrative becomes a potent tool for influencing perceptions and swaying opinions in favor of a particular stance. A notable example from Russia's perspective is the assertion that Ukraine lacks a valid historical claim to the land it occupies (Zygar, 2024). This narrative fosters a perception that portrays the invasion as a logical response to the situation, thereby lending legitimacy to it. However, the success of strategic narratives is not guaranteed, especially in environments where there is intense competition for information. Consequently, press freedom often faces challenges in closed autocratic states.

## SECURITIZATION

According to Jarrod Hayes (2012: 66), securitization involves highlighting a specific issue or problem to the level of a security concern. This highlighting results in the issue being seen as more pressing and could potentially result in the legitimization of military intervention to address it. Additionally, securitization not only prompts immediate action but also sustains the conflict over time. When individuals perceive a military setback as a significant threat, it enhances the state's rationale for mobilization, potentially prolonging the conflict. Consequently, one can establish a perceived need for action, which seeks to advance its agenda by creating a perceived necessity for action. Hence, authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin can utilize people's concerns and feelings of insecurity in constructing an enemy, thereby acquiring a broader capacity for action and maintaining popular support. Securitization has also been utilized as a political tool to redirect the population's understanding of the underlying issue, as demonstrated by Joanne Finley (2021: 350) in the context of China's measures against the Uyghurs. While the root problem is ethnic inequalities, it is framed as a terrorism issue, with Islam and the threat of terrorism taking precedence, thus diverting the discourse from the existing ethnic disparities. In conclusion, securitization could serve as a tool for justifying military intervention, but also as a mechanism for influencing public perception of complex issues, thereby shaping political agendas and carrying the risk of escalation and perpetuation of conflicts over time.



## MILITARIZATION

As Bryan Mabee and Srdjan Vuceitc (2018: 96) point out, the concepts of militarization and militarism are highly contested within the field of international relations. However, this article will primarily adopt Cynthia Enloe's (2000: 3) definition of militarization as a gradual process where individuals or societies become increasingly influenced by the military, while militarism entails the prominence of militaristic ideologies in addressing societal needs and objectives. Building on this, Linda Åhäll (2019: 151) emphasizes the importance of considering the normalization of politicized processes, such as the heightened military presence in everyday life. This normalization may stem from a greater symbolic and/or cultural prevalence of militaristic ideals and principles. Moreover, in highly militarized societies, social relations often revolve around war or preparation for it (Åhäll, 2019: 158), thus, leading to an increased allocation of resources towards the military (Bourke, 2022: 13). After providing a brief overview of pertinent concepts related to the topic, the following section will explain how the Kremlin has gained control over the media in Russian society.

## MONOPOLISATION OF MEDIA

According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 43 journalists and media workers have lost their lives in Russia since Putin assumed power in the late 1990s. While the use of physical violence against dissenting voices has declined over time, it has gradually been replaced by legislative measures (Malig, 2023). Maxim Alyukov, a postdoctoral researcher affiliated with King's College London, highlights a significant tactic employed by the Kremlin: the use of television as a powerful tool to shape and influence public opinion (Alyukov, 2022: 764). This strategy becomes particularly evident during the invasion of Ukraine. According to the Reporters Without Borders index on press freedom, Russia's global ranking dropped to 164th place in 2023, reflecting a decline from its previous position of 155th place (RSF, 2023). Under Putin's leadership, the Kremlin has implemented measures to counter potential competition from international organizations challenging the state's control over information dissemination. One notable action was the enactment of Federal Law 121-FZ in 2012, which requires all organizations in Russia receiving international funding to register as 'foreign agents'. This classification imposes substantial financial burdens, including more frequent audits and higher fines for NGOs labeled as 'foreign agents' who fail to promptly meet documentation requirements (Andreevskikh, 2023: 13). Making independent media less competitive in relation to state-run media outlets.

Marie Struther, Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at Amnesty International, highlights a significant trend with her statement: "After Russian tanks entered Ukraine, the authorities switched to a scorched-earth strategy that has turned Russia's media landscape into a wasteland" (Struther, 2022). Struther's observation suggests a broader tightening of press freedom in Russia. This trend began with the widespread arrest of individuals participating in anti-war protests, totaling approximately 13,800 individuals (Amnesty International, 2022). About a month after the invasion, on March 23rd, the Russian parliament initiated significant restrictions on criticism of the Russian military, extending these limitations to cover all government actions. This includes a prohibition on referring to the war as a war or invasion, instead mandating the use of the term "special military operation" (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Furthermore, alongside the implemented censorship, the Kremlin conducted a comprehensive crackdown on previously tolerated independent media outlets, resulting in over 150 journalists fleeing the country. Among the media channels censored by the Kremlin are broadcaster TV Rain, the Echo of Moscow radio station, Latvia-based Meduza, and critical Russian news outlets Mediazona, Republic, and Sobesednik (Amnesty International, 2022). By discussing the Kremlin's media restrictions, the next section will illustrate how the Kremlin uses this position to shape a narrative about Ukrainian Nazism and the threat from NATO.

## THE CENTRAL ASPECTS OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

The negative portrayal of the Ukrainian state by the Kremlin has been notable since the Euromaidan, particularly during the annexation of Crimea and the partial occupation of Donbas in 2014. During this time, there was a dissemination of information through Russian media, including claims about Ukrainian soldiers. One example includes allegations of Ukrainian soldiers crucifying a young boy, although this story is challenging to factually substantiate. Such narratives have contributed to shaping a negative perception of the Ukrainian government and potentially legitimizing Russia's actions for some observers (Aspriadis, 2023: 25). Therefore, over nearly a decade, the Russian state has consistently presented information about alleged incidents involving the Ukrainian government and the Russian minority.



In 2021, a media campaign was initiated, one year prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, aiming to construct a strategic narrative favorable to the Russian military. Led by Putin, this endeavor depicted Ukrainian society as increasingly militarized, repressive, and fostering fear among its populace. Simultaneously, Russian media constructed the idea that the Ukrainian state was infiltrated by neo-Nazis (Bartamini & Daxhelet, 2023), a narrative which intensified during the subsequent full-scale invasion. Initially, Russian media portrayed various instances of alleged Nazism within Ukrainian state and society, despite a lack of factual evidence, seeking to establish Ukrainian nationalism as a significant and concerning phenomenon. Subsequently, the narrative evolved to emphasize that Russian citizens within Ukraine were subjected to genocide and cultural oppression. This narrative expansion presented the perceived threat as an international concern, asserting its relevance to Russians residing within Russia itself (Aspriadis, 2023: 33).

This is rooted in a historical event in Russia, adding significance to its strategic impact. Specifically, the accusation of Ukrainian Nazism is associated with Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union—a significant event marked by extensive loss of life, ingrained into Russia's collective memory. Consequently, this narrative carries historical resonance, tapping into Russia's transgenerational trauma to evoke sentiments. In this way, securitization is applied in the form of the Nazi threat, which, combined with its historical context, can explain its ability to create credibility within Russian society.

The second aspect of the Russian strategic narrative focuses on Western rhetoric, with Putin arguing that the Western world is characterized by misinformation and double standards. This includes the presentation of "false" reassurances by NATO and the US regarding past issues. This narrative is rooted in a media construction that portrays the Russian state as disadvantaged, where Russia's position in the international arena is perceived as not receiving adequate attention (Aspriadis, 2023: 34).

At the same time, the perception that NATO poses a significant threat, linked to the principle of securitization, is constructed. This narrative is frequently propagated in Russian media, portraying NATO as a direct challenge to Russian sovereignty and, consequently, as a threat to Russian culture and society. The perception of NATO and the US as threats to Russian sovereignty and culture is also grounded in a historical context shaped by narratives, dating back to the Cold War era. This historical backdrop is further emphasized by Putin's expressions of discontent with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent shift from a bipolar to a unipolar world order. (Isachenkov, 2022).

The perceived threat posed by NATO and the US is also intertwined with a perception of the Western world as morally corrupt, thereby posing a challenge to traditional Christian Russian values (Reid, 2023). Since 2000, the Kremlin has adopted a neo-conservative ideological stance, prioritizing the institutionalization of heteronormative and traditional values. This ideological shift culminated in the establishment of Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation in 2013. This article imposed a ban on "propaganda" perceived to promote non-traditional sexual behaviors and relationships, particularly targeting children (Andreevskikh, 2023: 13). In practice, it led to widespread censorship and marginalization of LGBTQ individuals within Russian society.

This example illustrates the ideological strategy implemented by the Kremlin, which could potentially exacerbate cultural differences between Russia and the Western world. According to Arlene Tickner (2020: 129), such dynamics could lead to a situation where differences between people are perceived as inferiority, potentially resulting in physical destruction or exploitation of others. Consequently, this situation could lead to the legitimization of direct/physical violence by reinforcing perceptions of differences between the in-group and the out-group. This established narrative, as argued in this article, has contributed to the increased militarization of Russian society, a situation that will be illustrated in the next section.

## THE MILITARIZATION OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY

The escalation of militarization within Russian society spreads across every aspect of society, as evidenced in the study conducted by Nicolas Hayoz and Viktor Stepanenko in their article "The Social Organization of War: Ukrainian and Russian Societies Mobilized for War" (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023: 354). Among other things, they emphasize how Russian society is characterized by a combination of military statism and militarized patriotism. Hayoz and Stepanenko argue that this can be linked to historical Soviet practices, which experience a resurgence through the cultural and ideological reconstruction of Soviet traditions and institutions. Examples of this can be seen in Putin's strategic use of events such as the "Immortal Regiment" and the commemoration of the Battle of Stalingrad, as reported by The Times (2023). This underscores the deliberate efforts to mobilize the civilian populace towards a militarized agenda. Once again, these initiatives capitalize on the transgenerational trauma of World War II, emphasizing perceived threats to Russia and the necessity of military readiness. As a result, the strategic narratives become integrated into Russian traditions, further solidifying the militarization of society.

Moreover, the focus of militarization extends prominently towards the younger generation, as demonstrated by initiatives like the establishment of the Youth Army, Junarmija, outlined by Hayoz and Stepanenko (2023: 356). This emphasis is evident within the education system, where a shift towards "patriotic education" is observed. The restructuring of the curriculum to incorporate basic military training reflects the belief that the entirety of Russian society must be equipped to counter potential threats from the Western world (Coalson, 2023). Consequently, education now places significant emphasis on fostering Russian civic identity, nurturing patriotism, and instilling a sense of responsibility towards one's homeland. Furthermore, the militarization of education extends to higher levels, exemplified by the establishment of the Institute of World Military Economics and Strategy at the Moscow Higher School of Economics (Ukrinform, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

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# CHOOSING THE WRONG OOTD

## HOW SWEDISH STOP AND SEARCH ZONES NURTURE VIOLENCE AND INJUSTICE

### INTRODUCTION

*The police have a very clear idea of how gang members dress and act. And that differs from decent young people who live in these areas.*

– Martin Melin, Swedish Liberal MP and spokesperson for policing matters (Tanaka & Lund 2024)

On 8 February 2024, the Swedish government and Sverigedemokraterna presented a contested government bill for stop and search zones in certain urban areas. The bill suggests that the police should have the authority to do body searches and sweep vehicles without suspicion of a criminal offense. Police forces will build their searches and sweeps on risk profiles based on intelligence information and other leads, but they will also be entitled to intervene if they encounter certain behaviors and pieces of clothing, such as Gucci caps. Further, both adults and children may be targets of body searches (Tanaka & Lund 2024).

A stop and search zone, earlier called security zone, can be created if there is a high risk of shootings or bombings in an area with ongoing gang conflicts. The bill is one of several measures to deal with organized gang crime in Sweden, and the change of law is assumed to enter into force on 28 March 2024 (Tanaka & Lund 2024). Nevertheless, it has been heavily criticized by referral bodies such as Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, Justitieombudsmannen and Justitiekanslern, fearing that the change of law may result in discrimination and a weakening of the rule of law. These bodies also highlight the risk that targets of body searches will be picked too randomly and based on vague characteristics, which can result in ethnic profiling and violations of personal integrity (Tanaka 2024).

In this paper, I will discuss the bill with the help of the concept of "othering", as well as theories on securitization, mobility justice and (critical) feminism. I will explore how perspectives on international politics and conflict can be implemented on the Swedish government's offensive against gang crime. I have chosen to do so since gang crime is a large-scale and internationalized issue in contemporary Sweden, and to dismantle it, effective strategies need to be implemented on a structural level. Moreover, Försvarsmakten have been assigned to step in to solve the issue – making it a militarized matter (Försvarsdepartementet & Justitiedepartementet 2023). To clarify, I myself am not classifying the situation as a war and take a step away from doing so.

### THE PROCESS OF "OTHERING"

Amoore and de Goede (2013) underline the difficulty in distinguishing between war and non-war, combatant and non-combatant, particularly when modern wars are fought against dispersed enemy networks blended with normal populations and urban environments. The authors also point to the fact that it is not always easy to recognize violence: although we think we know it when we see it, political measures that are pushed forward through diplomacy and international dialogue can still have violent implications and effects on the ground. In this sense, rules, negotiations and political relations may have violent presuppositions or effects (Amoore and de Goede 2013, p. 508). What is more, dehumanization discourses play a key role in politics turning violent. Actors in power might categorize citizens based on ethnic and religious divides and thereby cast particular social groups as inferior, unreliable or simply "other". In wartime, the recognition of safe from dangerous, us from them and ally from enemy structures the power relations, but this is also present on a micro level in the everyday experience. By this, violence is defined through the power that renders othering possible. Othering makes violence politically acceptable (Amoore and de Goede 2013, pp. 510-513).

Going back to the quote by the Liberal MP Martin Melin that was mentioned in the introduction, we note that he claims that there is a clear distinction between "decent" and "non-decent" young people appearing in the same area. But these people may still be dressing and acting in similar ways, and a

diffuse dividing line is being drawn when individual police officers are given the task to point out gang members from "common people" who move in shared urban spaces. As we have heard, the government bill has met critique because of this, as there is an impending risk of ethnic profiling and discrimination, which may result in violence through the political legitimization of othering. As Amoore and de Goede (2013) call attention to, there can be violent structures submerged in political dialogue, negotiations and rules. The example of the Swedish government's fight against gang crime is relevant here. Liberal MP Martin Melin again:

*...something that makes me rather furious is that people think Swedish police officers would go around discriminating against people (...) young men and women in police uniforms are working around the clock all year round, risking their own lives so that all of us here can be safe and go to work and our children to school (...) the people who live in these areas, they want something to be done. They want the police to work effectively and aggressively against gang criminals. (Tanaka & Lund 2024)*

In this context, one has to assume that Melin is arguing that young police officers are risking their lives to defeat specifically gang crime. Simultaneously, he argues that people in these areas wish for the same. But there seem to be no clear divisions between the ones who need protection, the ones who live close to the issue and who, according to Melin, want these interventions to happen, and the big group of "them" who need to be dealt with. This makes a critical view of the government bill even more relevant, as it raises the question of who is actually seen as a threat to security, which will be discussed in the following part.



If we argue that the process of othering would be carried out in Swedish urban areas through the government bill, what could be the next step in fighting gang crime through generalization tactics? The stop and search zones would indeed be implemented to combat the violent crime wave in general, but also to protect "common people" from the consequences of shootings and bombings (Tanaka & Lund 2024).

According to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Thus, securitization can be seen as a more extreme version of politicization, where the issue is presented as an existential threat requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998, pp. 23-24).

With this in mind, it is interesting to think about the fact that critics have claimed that the government and Sverigedemokraterna have prepared new laws to combat crime-related security threats far too rapidly (Tanaka & Lund 2024). What is more, gang-related clothing as one of the parameters of the stop and search zones has met huge social media engagement and sparked debates in various different Swedish media outlets. "It is like going from a democratic country to a police state", a concerned citizen told the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet (Sahlin Ekberg 2024). Using the definition of securitization provided by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), a philosophical implementation of it could be done on the case of the stop and search zones. In Sweden, we might be moving to a discourse where Gucci caps and other attire are by default seen as security threats and therefore as reasons for suspicion or even violence. Because of this, some bodies wearing the "wrong" outfits – e.g. brands that gang members are known to be loyal to – could be securitized before others, creating deeper societal divisions.

## MOBILITY WITH LIMITATIONS

For Sheller (2018), the issue of mobility justice and uneven mobilities can be anchored in questions such as the following: Who is able to exercise rights to mobility and who is not capable of mobility within particular situations? The unevenness of mobility may take the form of uneven qualities of experience and uneven temporalities of stopping, going, passing, pausing, and waiting. These are social practices in which unpleasant events are an everyday experience for those who must move through marginalized spaces. Mobility begins with our bodies and the ways in which some bodies can move more easily through spaces than others. Therefore, it is a product of hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and disabilities. Among other principles of mobility justice that should be legally protected at a bodily scale, Sheller proposes that racial, ethnic, or national profiling shall not be used to police entire groups or stop particular individuals from exercising freedom of movement (Sheller 2018, pp. 22-26).

As we know, the government bill for search and stop zones builds upon the police being entitled to intervene if they encounter certain gang-related outfits or behaviors. Sheller's (2018) arguments urge us to think about what this may result in with regards to mobility justice for people who reside in the affected urban zones. As both adults and children may be targets for body searches, one could point to a dilemma in setting parameters for odd or otherwise noteworthy behaviors.

Similarly, this raises the question of whether some bodies will have the right to use these urban spaces in a more freely manner than others. As mobility is a product of different social hierarchies, it is troubling to think about the limitations that some people could be dealing with in the future even though they have no involvement in crime at all. In Stockholm, the average age of a gang member is 21, but a lot of gang members are even younger – some as young as 12 years old. Most of the time these young people identify as boys (Brottsförebyggande rådet 2023, SVT Nyheter Stockholm 2023). Is it politically acceptable that they should be ready to give up their freedom of movement and mobility regardless of their involvement in criminal activity?

## AN EXTENSIVE FEMINIST READING

A feminist view on peace, according to True (2020), is more than the absence and prevention of war. We must bring our attention to all causes of insecurity, as well as to victims and survivors of a myriad of harms and systemic violence. If we adopt a broader understanding, we can analyze other types of violence that could be defined as "organized", predictable and explicable patterns of violence by a group of perpetrators, and violence which has a basis in social structures. From a feminist viewpoint, we need to ask what peace looks like from the perspective of marginalized actors (True 2020, p. 86-87).

I find this lens useful when examining the Swedish government's offensive against gang crime as it sheds light on both the violence that gang crime carries *and* the potential violence of searches and sweeps. The Social Democratic MP and legal policy spokesperson Ardalan Shekarabi claims that the stop and search zones are an ineffective reform: "Instead of putting resources on things that can make a difference, the government proceeds with this prestigious bill which has become more of a symbolic issue". Activist Aysha Jones has expressed how many young people in Swedish suburbs feel like authorities do not care about them and that this law could enhance that feeling – as well as leave more suburban citizens with traumatizing experiences (Blomberg & Johansson 2024). As a matter of fact, reports by Brottsförebyggande rådet show that discriminating ethnic profiling *is* prevalent in the work of the Swedish police force. There are e.g. systematic differences in suspicion of drug crime and consequential searches and sweeps based on ethnic background (Civil Rights Defenders 2023).

Through this, one could argue that other types of strategies are needed to create peace in these urban areas – not just disarming people through potentially violating personal integrity. A feminist approach makes it clear that gang crime in Sweden is *de facto* causing structural violence and suffering, and therefore needs to be addressed with the concept of peace in mind. This actualizes questions such as: What social structures have caused these conditions and how can we work for something better with that knowledge? What view of peace and peaceful conditions do the people residing in these areas and/or affected by gang crime have? And is the solution only about securitizing or is there a need for new community building, as stop and search zones might spark even more violence? Additionally, True (2020) writes that any vision of peace must grapple with continuums of violence and peace that extend from the home and community. Building onto this, feminists argue that patriarchy is a form and a root cause of war – part of the "big" violence, the important violence, the violence around which the world system is structured (True 2020, p. 87). With this in mind, to conquer gang crime, the Swedish government should put in place more efforts to combat patriarchal norms and aspirations that nurture violence, both in challenged urban areas and in the law enforcement. Body searching young men will not do the trick, at least not fully.

Moving on, True (2020, p. 90) holds that we must understand that gender-based discrimination conducive to violence could itself be a threat to peace and even a form of organized violence. If the fears of discrimination and ethnic profiling with regards to the stop and search zones are realized, we could be looking at a big group of particularly non-white young men in certain urban areas who have to experience systematic disruptions of freedom and violations of personal integrity. This could lead us away from peace in urban environments, to more suspicion towards law enforcement, authorities and the government, and spark even more violence.

Lastly, with the help of Wibben (2018) and through a critical feminist lens, we can examine ideas of security and militarism side by side in the phenomenon of stop and search zones. This kind of scholarship highlights everyday practices and how militarist logics are deeply embedded in securities – shaped, in turn, by social hierarchies around gender, race and class and often couched in the language of protection. Think e.g. about the quote by Liberal MP Martin Melin: "(...) young men and women in police uniforms are working around the clock all year round, risking their own lives so that all of us here can be safe and go to work and our children to school" (Tanaka & Lund 2024).

In this way, security is more often than not militarized. Militarization consists of multilayered and messy transformations that take place over time and in different sites at the same time. Militarism is embedded within society and anyone can be militarized: adopt militaristic values as one's own, see military solutions as particularly effective, or see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes (Wibben 2018, pp. 138-144).

Concerning the search and stop zones, we can see how they uphold ideas of control, dominance and surveillance – i.e. characteristics of military life. This is accompanied by the fact that the police and Försvarsmakten have been assigned to deepen their cooperation in combating organized crime in Sweden (Försvarsdepartementet & Justitiedepartementet 2023). The question is: Will the new zones result in an even further normalizing of militaristic practices?

## CONCLUSION

The proposed stop and search zones in Sweden, designed to combat gang crime, have sparked controversy and raise questions about violence, justice, security and societal values. The concept of "othering" plays a central role in the potential consequences of such legislation. The risk of ethnic profiling and discrimination, evident in vague parameters like fashion, could legitimize violence through the political acceptance of othering. The consideration of attire, exemplified by the "Gucci cap", introduces concerns about securitization and moving beyond established political norms. The rapid pace in which laws have been made and the potential societal shift towards viewing certain clothing items as inherent security threats accentuate the broader implications of securitizing everyday elements. Building onto this, mobility justice sheds light on the potential unevenness in the application of such laws. The question of who has the right to move freely within urban spaces becomes critical, considering the inherent biases in societal hierarchies.

A feminist perspective emphasizes the need to broaden the definition of violence. The potential harm of body searches, especially for marginalized groups, highlights the importance of addressing root causes to structural gang crime. Peace, in this context, demands more comprehensive strategies that go beyond securitization and delve into community building and dismantling patriarchal norms. A critical feminist analysis also underscores the embedded militarization in security measures.

The cooperation between the police and the military in combating the crime wave raises concerns about the normalization of militaristic practices.

In sum, the Swedish government's response to gang crime, while driven by the intention to enhance security for "common people", requires an examination of its potential societal implications. I have explored several aspects surrounding the proposed legislation, emphasizing the importance of considering the underlying violence and injustice that it risks nurturing.

BY NORAH LÅNG

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ANGELA DAVIS  
ON VIOLENCE  
1972







# ON JUSTICE



CHAPTER II. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON JUSTICE

# A GREEN DEAL FOR WHOM?

## EXTRACTIVIST LOGICS CHALLENGED BY PROTESTS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE IN SERBIA



At the turn of the year 2021, a wave of large-scale environmental protests swept across Serbia. Subject of the protests was the planned establishment of a mineral mine intended for extraction of lithium in the Western part of the country. Serbian citizens felt trapped between the interests of big business and the EU, stating that the EU treated Serbia as an environmental “sacrificial zone” (European Western Balkans, 2021). The protests of 2021 were heard, and the government annulled the license of the planned operator of the project, mining giant Rio Tinto. It was seen as a victory for protestors (Kendrick, 2023: 99-101). However, much is now pointing to that the Serbian government is taking up their plans on enabling large-scale mining again. The EU, Serbia's biggest trade partner, is hungry for raw materials to develop “green technologies”<sup>1</sup> necessary to the Union’s mission to embark on a green transition, and in autumn 2023, the European Commission signed a letter of intent together with the Serbian government, stating that the two parties intend to trade in metals extracted from mining on Serbian lands (Balkan Green Energy News, 28/10-2023). Climate change calls for action, but the power to decide on that action reflects unequal power structures in environmental governance. Using the case of lithium extraction in Serbia, I will discuss injustices embedded in the climate action pursued by the EU.

### “GREEN” EXTRACTIVISM AS A CLIMATE POLICY

In 2019, the European Commission introduced the European Green Deal, a robust package of policies aimed at making Europe the first “climate neutral” continent by 2050. The Green Deal is all framed under the concept of the green transition, reforms needed to keep global warming below 2 degrees (European Commission, 2024). It includes policies like shifting away from fossil fuel dependency to renewable energy sources, to developing circular economy systems, all while sustaining economic growth (European Commission, 2024). One component of the European Green Deal concerns the need for raw materials crucial to the production of so-called green technologies such as electric cars.

The idea of finding solutions to adopting and mitigating the climate crisis within the system of the global market economy has been widely criticized from critical theorists, but also from communities in the periphery of the world economy (Yumie Aoki Inoue & Franchini, 2020:302-304). One critique concerns the lack of systemic change and the continuation of the logic that sparked the climate crisis in the first place. Extraction of environmental resources was central to the emergence of modern day capitalism. Extractivism refers to the process of extracting raw materials on a large scale, most often for the purpose of exporting and using the materials in manufacturing elsewhere. The process has close links to colonialism, meaning much of the accumulation of natural resources historically has taken place through violent conquests by Western empires (Acosta, 2013:62). Acosta (2013:70-74) discusses the extraction of raw materials used to trade on the global market today as a form of “neextractivism”, meaning that it follows the same economic rationale as the violent extraction of resources conducted by colonial powers five hundred years ago, assuming that the extraction and trade with primary commodities will generate growth, but today under the consent of national governments.

Extractivism today is intrinsically linked to the idea of local economic development, but due to liberalized policies, the economic benefits of large-scale extraction are usually reaped by transnational companies, while local populations are left with few opportunities to be employed within these companies, which contests the economic benefit-argument used to legitimize extractivist activities. Local populations must also bear the heaviest environmental and social costs of exploitative activities. In relation to the green transition, we can see the emergence of something framed as “green extractivism”, extractive activities presented as a necessary means for adapting to climate change (Djukanovic, 2023). However, there is research pointing to how reconciling economic growth and sustainable usage of natural resources within the planetary boundaries is not possible at the pace stipulated in for example the Sustainable Development Goals (an annual growth rate of 3%). In order to decouple economic growth from resource use, the realistic scenario would require a scale down of economic activity and GDP growth rates, in other words a process of “degrowth” (Hickel, 2019:879).

### FRAMING THE PROBLEM

The responses to climate change raise questions of agency. Who gets to name the problem, and who gets to frame the solutions? What the EU’s green transition discourse fails to recognize is that the resources needed to develop so-called green technologies do not exist in abundance, and the process of extracting them has severe environmental as well as social impacts; mining for example demands extensive supplies of water, and risks disrupting both biodiversity and people’s livelihoods (Acosta, 2013:69-70). The usage of words like “clean” and “green” in relation to mining has met resistance from local communities all across the world. Let us dig into one example.

## THE JADAR CASE: EXTRACTING IN THE NAME OF CLIMATE ACTION

In 2004, the multinational mining corporation Rio Tinto discovered jaredite (a mineral containing high levels of lithium) in the Jadar Valley in Western Serbia. In 2020, Rio Tinto began to lay the ground for large-scale mining by buying off land and exerting political influence by making donations to the local communities in the concerned area. The demand for lithium has risen drastically due to its usability in batteries in electric vehicles (Kendrick, 2023:100) and the EU has labeled lithium a critical and strategic raw material needed for the transition toward “clean technologies” and EU’s objective of becoming “climate neutral” by 2050 (European Commission, 2023). If the mining along the Jadar valley was to be established, it is estimated that the extraction of minerals could provide for 90% of the expected demand on lithium in Europe (Reuters, 17/1-2024) and the European Commission has stressed that the Jadar project constitutes an opportunity for economic growth in Serbia (European Western Balkans, 22-12/2021).

However, the citizens of Serbia seemed not to agree with the alleged cleanness of the mineral extraction in Jadar, nor were they convinced about the growth argument. During winter 2021, widespread protests against Rio Tinto’s planned lithium mining emerged in the country. The protests grew from the local level, where residents raised concerns about the potential harmful environmental impact of the project, bearing in memory an incident of heavy water pollution caused by mining activities in the region just a few years earlier. Further, local citizens were pressured to sell off their lands and risked facing expropriation if they refused (Kendrick, 2023:101). An interview study with residents of the Jadar region showed that a majority opposed the establishment of a mine because of the lack of transparency and inclusion of locals in the project (Ivanovic et al, 2023). Over 20 000 people risked having their agricultural livelihoods disrupted by mining activities (Kendrick, 2023:101), but local residents also invoked non-monetary values in their resistance towards the project. A majority of the respondents said they valued their cultural and historical connection to the place more than the potential economic gains from Rio Tinto’s mining operations. The opposition towards Rio Tinto should also be read in the light of the company’s history of aggravating injustices (Ivanovic et al, 2023:8-9); their mining activities have for example endangered the lives of residents on the island of Bougainville by causing severe water pollution (The Guardian, 31/3-2020), as well as caused displacement of some of Madagascar’s poorest inhabitants (Curtis, 2016:14-18). Similar to the case in Serbia, these operations have been marked by a lack of dialogue with the affected communities.

The protests spread across the country and culminated in December 2021, when tens of thousands took to the streets and issued road blockades to pressure the government to annul the planned mining. The protests are not the first of its kind, but the largest protests with environmental concerns at the heart of their demands seen to this day in Serbia (Kendrick, 2023:97-102). The Serbian government responded to the protests by revoking Rio Tinto’s right to launch the mining project in Jadar in early 2022. This took place in the run-up to the national elections in April 2022. However, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic declared that revoking Rio Tinto’s license was “one of his biggest mistakes” just days after his party had once again secured their electoral victory (Djukanovic, 2023). In autumn 2023, Serbian media outlets leaked a letter in which the Serbian president and the European Commission declared their intent to establish a strategic partnership on critical raw materials and batteries. The agreement points to the government’s intent to revive plans on expanding mining activities such as the one along the Jadar river (Economist Intelligence, 2023). The EU’s willingness to collaborate with Vucic despite his continuous undermining of democracy in Serbia has led independent Serbian journalists to label the president as “Europe’s favorite autocrat” (Eror, 2018).



### CLIMATE JUSTICE AND THE JADAR CASE

One core issue to the protestors was the injustice embedded in the planned mining project. Protestors and civil society organizations accused the EU of using Serbia as a “sacrificial zone” in the green transition (European Western Balkans, 22-12/2021). Scholars have described the extractivism conducted in Eastern Europe by Western European actors in the name of the green transition as an expression of ecological imperialism (Petrovic & Pesic, 2023:401). Whether such labels are accurate to prescribe to this case is a topic of discussion in itself, but what we can conclude is that the critique pertains to the power imbalances that this case illustrates, more specifically the unequal opportunities to decide on how environmental resources are governed.

How can the concept of justice be understood in relation to climate change and the green transition? Nancy Fraser (2005:71) argued in the early 2000’s that contemporary discussions on justice needed to leave the nation-state as the unit of analysis, and instead analyze justice on a global scale due to the globalized character of the economic systems and societal challenges that emerged in the 1990s. Fraser’s notion that justice must be discussed within a global frame applies especially well to the issue of climate justice.

Climate change is a transboundary phenomenon, and it is unjust to its core since its most devastating effects are felt not among the actors that currently and historically constitute the drivers of global warming and environmental degradation, but rather in communities and environments highly vulnerable to climate change, communities that often contributed very little to global emissions. The distribution of the detrimental effects of climate change is thus unjust (Yumie Aoki Inoue & Franchini, 2020:297). Further, the extraction of minerals and metals in this case is linked to global production chains, where the users of the final products are detached from the resource's geographical place of origin. It leads us to ask; for whom is lithium a critical raw material? The injustices of control over resources in the Serbian context could be summoned in a quote from a blog post by the environmental geography researcher Nina Djukanovic (2023);

*“In a country where the median salary is around 550 euros, only a few would be able to afford an electric car while the environmental pollution could affect thousands”*

## FRASER'S DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE

Fraser (2005:73–76) identifies three dimensions of justice; it consists of cultural recognition, resource distribution and political representation. While recognition and distribution have long been recognizable components of justice, Fraser argues for the incorporation of political representation into the concept of justice, since representation “furnishes the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out... it tells us not only who can make claims for redistribution and recognition, but also how such claims are to be mooted and adjudicated” (Fraser, 2005:75). In other words, equal participation in decision making is a prerequisite for achieving the cultural and material aspects of justice. Representation does not merely refer to the right to vote, but to the ability to partake in decision making on equal grounds, thus addressing also structural obstacles to participation (Fraser, 2005:73). Building on this understanding of justice, how can we understand justice (or the absence of it) in the Jadar case? First, Serbian citizens have limited access to political representation because they live in a country with severe democratic deficiencies, seen how a majority of media is government controlled, and in how civic and political rights are gradually being infringed upon (Sotiropoulos, 2023:237–238), thus the electoral system is insufficient to provide “parity of participation” (Fraser, 2005:73) even within the traditional system for political representation. Second, they have limited opportunities to demand accountability from the multinational corporation Rio Tinto since they have operated under the mandate of the government. Third, in a globalized economy, locals find themselves subject to international demands on materials obtained through extractive activities.



Serbian civil society organizations have called for climate justice by addressing both the EU and Serbian institutions (Petrovic & Pesic, 2023:414), but when both these entities have shown a high interest in mining in Serbia, it is fair to assume opponents of the mining activities perceive these actors as biased in favor of mining, and the question is then, where do they turn to for redress?

## TOWARDS CLIMATE JUSTICE

To conclude, the protest against Rio Tinto's planned lithium mining is an example of how citizens' mobilization disrupted extractive activities. The example points to the contradictory practice of managing the climate crisis within the frame of ever-increasing economic growth; to achieve the green transition that the EU has embarked on, it will need to disrupt agricultural livelihoods, biodiversity, in this case in a country that is not yet part of the Union. The Jadar example unveils that “climate neutrality” and “green technology” can never be neutral nor completely green. As put by one of the locals in Jadar; “There is no such thing as green mining. What is green are fields and leaves because of chlorophyll, that is green” (Djukanovic, 2023).

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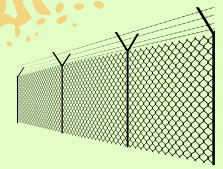
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# THE MILLIONS OF MIGRANTS DEEMED ILLEGAL BY U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW



## INTRODUCTION

Today, the U.S.-Mexico border is characterized by a large influx of legal and undocumented immigrants seeking mobility within the United States. Every year, millions of people attempt to migrate to the United States, but very few are granted permanent residency, largely due to

restrictive U.S. immigration law that puts citizens of the Global South at a disadvantage. This shines light on the ongoing discussion within peace and conflict academia on Global South mobility injustice and structural violence. By drawing from perspectives of peace- and conflict researchers on the role of borders in producing and reproducing values and phenomena, I will discuss how citizens of the Global South may be significantly disadvantaged in access to freedom of movement to the United States, and how this may be connected to a larger debate on structural violence.

## U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW

The largest cause of authorized migration to the United States is economic migration, fueled by people seeking employment in the United States through better working conditions than in their home countries (Gans 2007, p. 1; USAFacts, 2023). This is barriered by the annual cap on green cards authorized, with a majority being allocated to migrants falling under the category of family reunification (i.e. people with family members living legally in the country), and recipients of employer-sponsored visas which prioritize high skilled workers (Hanson 2009, p. 6). The remainder of economic migrants may apply for diversity visas which are distributed via a lottery at a cap of 55,000 annually, a miniscule number in relation to the number of people seeking migration in the United States (Hanson, Liu & McIntosh 2017, p. 114). This leads to the larger category of unskilled workers often being denied entry to the United States as a result of limited legal channels for economic migration into the country (Ibid).

In addition to economic and family related migration, security is one of the leading causes of migration to the United States, particularly in Central America where gang related violence in namely El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras has displaced hundreds of thousands of people internally in addition to causing outwards migration as a means to escape this violence and seek security in the United States, even with the knowledge that they may not be allowed entry (Hiskey et. al 2016, s. 9-11). Other types of security migrants stem from people fleeing from persecution, armed conflict or other causes under the refugee umbrella, requiring extensive evidence of a credible threat to obtain asylum (8 USC 1101(a)(42)).

On top of that, U.S. immigration laws include an annual cap of refugees, which has hovered around 70-80,000 refugees per year over the past decade, and is set at 125,000 since 2022 (Migration Policy Institute, 2023). These factors, whilst on the one hand establishing a framework for granting asylum to those who seek, also serves as a purpose to exclude certain migrants seeing as the criteria of receiving asylum demands rigid evidence for a well grounded fear of persecution, requiring a high threshold of evidence that may be hard to obtain. Additionally, the limited number of annual legal refugees in the country also serves as a factor in limiting legal migration. In essence, U.S. immigration law allows for a small amount of legal ways to gain permanent residency. This, coupled with other factors, has led to millions of people seeking entrance through extralegal measures.



## ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The main causes behind illegal immigration in the United States seem to be the restrictive nature of American immigration laws, only allowing a small number of channels for legal migration, creating a discrepancy between people showing up at the border, and people being allowed entry.

According to U.S. immigration law, a migrant becomes illegal when they violate 8 U.S. Code § 1325 regarding entrance to the United States without proper inspection and examination or if the person presents false or misleading information about themselves when attempting to enter the country, punished by a fine, maximum 6 months in prison, or both for first offenders (8 U.S. Code § 1325).

Further, 8 U.S. Code § 1326 criminalizes successful and unsuccessful attempts to reenter the country after having been denied admission, excluded, deported or removed, punished by a fine, a maximum of 2 years in prison, or both for first offenders, however if the person was previously convicted of crimes connected to their removal, their punishment could be up to 20 years in prison depending on the previous crime committed (8 U.S. Code § 1326). In 2019, the American Department of Justice prosecuted around 80,000 people under 8 U.S. Code § 1325 and around 25,000 people under 8 U.S. Code § 1326, the highest numbers since record keeping began in the 1990s (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). This is a moderate increase compared to numbers from previous years. As of 2021 statistics, there are around 10.5 million illegal immigrants living in the U.S (Pew Research Center, 2023). This number has been relatively stable since 2004, although is likely on the increase. The two largest demographic categories of undocumented immigrants in the United States are people born in neighboring countries south of the United States. Around 4.05 million are estimated to have been born in Mexico and 2.15 million in a Central American country. Further, around 1.65 million people are estimated to be born in an Asian country, around 825,000 in South America, 575,000 in a Caribbean country, whereas the remaining around 1.2 million undocumented immigrants are made up of people born in Europe, Canada, Africa, Oceania or the Middle East (Ibid.).

#### ILLEGAL MIGRATION – A GLOBAL SOUTH PHENOMENON?

These statistics detail a process which may be explained by postcolonial theory arguing that modern borders are still affected by colonial structures regarding race and class. Going back in history, Achiume describes U.S. immigration law as historically favouring whiteness on the basis of excluding non-white ethnic groups and nationalities, a practice in line with other immigration laws in First World countries in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Achiume 2022, s. 459-460). Going further, she argues that contemporary systems of immigration still effectively have a hierarchical structure partly based on race in a neocolonial manner, where certain groups are favoured over others (Achiume 2022, s. 448-449). She classifies this phenomenon as “racial borders”, describing borders and immigration laws that restrict mobility and treat migration as a privilege based on racial group membership, designed in a way that results in an unequal treatment of non-white people (Achiume 2022, s. 449). Through this view, race is understood as a border in itself (Achiume 2022, s. 450). This perspective may be relevant when examining how a clear majority of undocumented or illegal immigrants in the United States can be categorized as “non-white”, and how these people are at a disadvantage in being granted permanent residency in the country. As stated earlier, the largest reason for migration to the United States is economic related (USAFacts, 2023).

In addition to that, the largest migrating groups this past decade – legally and illegally – come from countries in the Global South (Office of Homeland Security Statistics 2023, p. 12-16; Pew Research Center, 2023). Despite this, U.S. immigration laws seem to disadvantage economic migrants from these places, instead favouring for example European economic migrants. Official data from Homeland Security published in 2023 show that around 23,000 people from Europe were granted a Lawful Permanent Resident status (LPR) for “Employment-based preferences” compared to ca 27,000 from North America and roughly 21,000 from South America (Office of Homeland Security Statistics 2023, p. 27). This disproportionately grants European economic immigrants permanent residency at a much higher rate than North- and South American citizens in relation to the absolute number of people applying for LPRs for economic reasons, likely due to the category of “skilled workers” being prioritized by current immigration laws as discussed earlier. This prioritization leads to a disproportionate amount of European economic migrants receiving LPRs due to a large part of them classifying under this category (Migration Policy Institute, 2024). On the other hand, migrants from particularly the Global South who are less likely to fall under this category and instead be placed in the “unskilled worker” category, have a much lower admission rate. In other causes of immigration, similar systems serve to exclude immigrants, such as the annual refugee cap discussed earlier.

Through a neocolonial perspective, this may be understood as old colonial policies still having an effect in contemporary times (Achiume 2022, 448-449). The colonial system along with globalization has exacerbated Global North contra South inequalities that in certain ways trap the latter in conflicts and wealth inequality in comparison to the Global North (Ibid.; Magalhães Teixeira 2021, p. 22) . This has established barriers for citizens of the Global South in becoming “skilled workers” and subsequently being granted LPRs at a higher rate, yet simultaneously created a situation where economic opportunities in the Global North are more lucrative than the Global South, leading to a large influx of Global South citizens seeking migration in Global North countries for work related reasons as a means to provide a better life for themselves and their families in economic terms. The result of this is that mobility becomes a privilege for certain people, whilst large groups of non-white people from the Global South are being denied mobility in the United States on a structural level (Pécoud & de Guchteneire 2006, p. 75). As Sheller argues, the ability to exercise mobility and gain access to spaces and goods is unevenly distributed as a result of reproduced identity based formations such as race, class, sex etc. (Sheller 2018, p. 20). These structures may thereby reproduce outcomes and phenomena at the border, and while it may not be intended to, it may potentially reinforce race as a border (Achiume 2022, p. 480; Mbembe 2018).

## VIOLENCE

These outcomes could be seen as a case of structural violence towards immigrants from the Global South attempting to enter the United States. Galtung defined structural violence as systematic structures, often enforced by law, that prevent people from equal access to opportunities, goods or other needs (Galtung 1969). Further, True argues that victims of displacement can fit into the category of structural violence (True 2020, p. 86). The inability for citizens of the Global South, particularly people born in Mexico and Central America to exercise mobility in the United States compared to what Achiume labels the “hypermobility” of the First World, where several First World countries have Visa-free access to visit the United States, may be understood as a case of unequal access to mobility on the basis of U.S. immigration law - a structure that puts Global South citizens at a disadvantage (Achiume 2022, p. 474-475). The narrow channels of legal immigration presented in U.S. immigration law effectively exclude non-white people of the Global South from permanent residency and thereby access to spaces and goods that people of the Global North have broader and easier access to. The limited number of green cards and refugee spaces allotted annually leads to people resorting to extralegal measures to exercise mobility in the United States.

Further, the conditions at the U.S.-Mexico border may also be ground for structural violence, for example how migrant deaths at the U.S.-Mexico border due to inadequate access to water or protection against excessive heat or cold may be a daily occurrence (Pécoud & de Guchteneire 2006, p. 73; True 2020, p. 86). In addition to that, the high level of surveillance from U.S. border patrols and other enforcement agencies before, during and after legal and illegal Global South migrants have crossed the border could be seen as the migrants being treated as a threat needed to be neutralize through and rigid background checks compared to more privileged immigrants, serving to depersonalize these people and treating them differently on the basis of identity (Bauder 2012, p. 24; 76; Pécoud & de Guchteneire 2006, p. 70). Further, the criminalization of illegally entering the country per 8 U.S. Code § 1325 and 8 U.S. Code § 1326 can be seen as laws codified to purposefully restrict and penalize mobility for particularly Global South citizens, who under very few legal channels are allowed to exercise mobility in the United States on a permanent basis. This could be understood as a way to criminalize movement based on a certain group of people’s mobility being framed as posing a threat to the security of others, including themselves (Mbembe 2018).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exclusionary nature of U.S. immigration law effectively hinders a large portion of citizens from the Global South seeking permanent residency in the United States from exercising mobility and gaining access to territories and goods within the country. Over time, this has led to millions of people attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border through illegal means, resulting in tens of thousands of prosecutions annually. This shines light on how colonial era legislation and policies may live on in current day practices, such as immigration processes that result in outcomes partly affected by race, nationality, class and other identities effectively leading to an impeding of mobility for Global South citizens. These disproportionate outcomes also raises questions on how structural violence may be present in the migration process, from a systemic level such as legislation to a human level such as border patrol inspections and extensive background checks.



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# A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE NEW VIEW OF PREPAREDNESS POLICY IN SWEDEN

BY JOHAN WICKSTRÖM

## BACKGROUND

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Swedish view of security has undergone a radical change with the ongoing NATO entry as a clear concrete example. At the same time, issues such as internal security and preparedness have taken an increasingly larger place in Swedish society, both in the political, media and everyday debate.

The latest example of this is the statements and messages that many of Sweden's ministers, including Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the Minister for Civil Defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin, gave during People and Defence National Conference in January 2024. (SVT, 2024) It was clearly described that there is a concrete risk that there could be war in Sweden. In a historically war-free society like Sweden, which during the last hundred years has been largely influenced by the principle of neutrality in terms of foreign policy, this had a great impact. This even though the public debate has become increasingly focused on security policy issues as mentioned above. This is not unique to Sweden, but it has been seen how Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 meant that the global trend towards rearmament and militarization escalated further. (Ericson et al, 2023, p 497-500)

In addition, other issues of importance to human security have taken an increasingly important place in society, including the climate crisis and its consequences, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, which highlighted the security threat of global pandemics.

BASED ON THIS BACKGROUND, THE GOAL OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO DISCUSS AND REFLECT WITH A CRITICAL APPROACH ON THE CURRENT VIEW OF PREPAREDNESS, WHICH IS TAKING AN INCREASINGLY CENTRAL PLACE IN SWEDEN.

Preparedness and above all household preparedness are relatively broad concepts that can have different meanings and definitions depending on the context in which they are used. On the website of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), it is defined as something material that you can possess. You should have preparedness so that in the event of a crisis you can manage without the help of society for at least a week. Another central aspect of the Swedish preparedness debate rather concerns psychological preparedness and being prepared on an individual level when a crisis occurs. (MSB, 2024) In this article, I use the more material definition in order to more clearly discuss the topic based on the course's content and central ideas.

In order to understand the reason for the preparedness debate itself, one needs to look at the fundamental reason, which can be described as the issue of national security. Security has historically been something that had a national focus, namely that it is national security that is the primary thing. However, the general trend since the 1990s and the end of the Cold War has been that this focus has increasingly shifted to prioritizing the safety of the individual. In the current security policy debate in Sweden, one can see that even though the security of the individual is still central, the national focus has increased significantly, and they are often described as interconnected and interdependent. (Larsson, 2021, p 311-313) (Kvarnlöf, 2020, p 6-10)

A common method for states to legitimize increased investment and new priorities is to describe various political issues as security issues. In Sweden, it can be argued that the new security political climate has changed a lot over a short period of time, which has made it possible to see how the majority of political issues have become the subject of a security issue, among other things you can see agricultural/rural issues, electricity prices, digitization and more nowadays can be seen as important for national security. (Ericson et al, 2023, p 499- 500) Moreover, this securitization of these issues has happened very quickly and in parallel with each other. One aspect of violence and its role in society that has become very clear in Sweden since the war in Ukraine began is the increased militarization. that has taken place in society.

WHAT THEN IS MEANT BY INCREASED MILITARIZATION IN SOCIETY?

Militarization can be defined as a gradual process where people, institutions and organizations become increasingly oriented towards military aspects, which leads to them gradually starting to see violence and weapons as something natural. Militarization is not the same as war, but by promoting rearmament, creating threat and enemy images, in and out groups and normalizing violence, the risk of war/armed conflict breaking out increases. To give another concrete example of how the increased militarization in Sweden can manifest itself and what are common characteristics of this are, among other things, increased acceptance of using violence, redistributing resources from the civilian to the military sphere and activities, an increased concern and uncertainty in society and a downgrading of democratically based decisions. (IKFF, 2024)

#### DISCUSSION ON WHETHER IT IS POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY FORMS OF INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITY IN THE MATTER OF PREPAREDNESS POLICY .

In the national debate, there is a consensus that Sweden's crisis/war preparedness is insufficient and underdeveloped. If you look at what the Swedish authorities describe as necessary measures for households, you can read, among other things, the following. In a proposition on the total defence 2021–2025, the government writes: “Individuals who do not have an immediate need for help in the event of a serious incident and who have the conditions and resources to fend for themselves should be able to take responsibility for their own livelihood for a week and in solidarity and cooperation with others assist each other to the extent possible”. (MSB, 2024)

Today, the idea of the total defence is largely based on the fact that everyone should be included and that everyone faces the same rights/obligations to common security. Through, among other things, the psychological aspect of preparedness and the goal of creating a form of civil resistance against external attacks/threats, this leads to individual citizens gaining greater importance for the national preparedness and security. (Ericson et al, 2023, p 498) (Kvarnlöf, 2020, p 6–11)

As a concrete example of this, one can look at the statement by several of the Swedish ministers about linking citizenship to the obligation to defend the country militarily, which was noticed after the national conference of people and defence in 2024. (SVD, 2024) It can be seen as a form of shifting in responsibility between the state and the individual, where the state tries to convince the population that individual preparedness jointly creates common national security. (Larsson, 2021, p 306–315)

It is also possible to see problematic effects of this requirement and view of individual crisis preparedness as it can be linked from a political/national perspective to how one is a "good" citizen who does one's duty (even if it is only based on recommendations and voluntariness).

In addition, it is important to bear in mind the various conditions and inequalities that exist in society, which affect people's opportunities to create preparedness and thus contribute to national security. (Larsson, 2021, p 310–311)

Economic structures in society have a major impact on what opportunities people have to be able to create a home preparedness for a week's time. If you look at MSB's list of what every household should have at home, you can clearly see that it is a long list and many products that may need to be purchased, both when it comes to one-time purchases such as for example a camping stove and food that must be continuously purchased. (rödakorset, 2024). This relatively simple view of preparedness as something one can own automatically creates an inequality depending on their financial situation as people with greater wealth can more easily spend money on products linked to preparedness than others. Another important aspect that to some extent touches on the question of economic inequality is what people's living/housing situation looks like. This can also be seen not only to affect the conditions for home preparation, but also the interest in it. Just like the overall concept of "survivalism or prepping", the view of self-sufficient households requires access to a concrete space/a larger area. This means that it is automatically easier to have good preparedness for, for example, a smaller household living in a villa compared to larger households containing more individuals living in an apartment or smaller residence. It is also possible to identify a large difference between the attitude to preparedness among residents in rural areas and residents in urban environments. MSB describes, among other things, that households in rural areas with actual experience of living with deficiencies in community services and the state's presence are more motivated and prepared to cope without society's help in the event of a crisis. In addition, the difference between people who own or rent their homes is described. (Kvarnlöf, 2020, p 24)

All in all, it is possible to see how different economic conditions can affect people's ability to material preparedness and their prioritization of their own household's preparedness. Regardless of whether it is a matter of geographic vulnerability, living situation, access to necessary community services and the possibility of both acquiring the necessary resources and storing them. Although these aspects are not solely influenced by one's financial possibilities, it is relevant as a lack of financial resources can make it more difficult to obtain a household preparedness as it is defined by the state.

Another important aspect of the preparedness debate is who in society is primarily affected by the increased demands on households' own preparedness. If you want to look at this, it is interesting to look at it from a feminist perspective as it highlights structural inequalities on an individual level and within households. These consequences can be identified both on a societal level and on a more individual level. In step with a militarization in a society and that more and more influence and decisions are transferred from the civilian to the military, it happens at the expense of women as the military can basically be described as a patriarchal institution. (Cockburn, 2013, p 434-438) (Elveren et al, 2022, p 427-430)

How then can one look at the issue of preparedness from a feminist perspective? To begin with, there are big differences between women's and men's attitudes to crisis preparedness. Women are to a greater degree positive about preventive preparedness efforts, while men generally consider themselves to have greater confidence in their own abilities in various crisis situations. This can, among other things, cause women to carry a greater concern about the preparedness of the home, which can affect the psychological well-being. (Kvarnlöf, 2020, p 25-26)

Today, women account for a majority of the unpaid work that concerns the household and the care of the family. According to the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, women in particular take greater responsibility for more time-consuming tasks such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children, while men in turn stick to tasks that are not as time-consuming. These structures and unequal distribution of labour have negative consequences for several different aspects such as women's health, economy and social life. (Swedish gender equality agency, 2023) If you look at the increased demands on household preparedness, there is a risk that these tasks end up on women, as they already generally spend more time than men on taking care of the home, both as actual work but also as a form of psychological burden or worry.

However, an alternative consequence of the increased militarization and its connection to household preparedness could have been that the men take greater responsibility in unpaid tasks connected to the home. If you can incorporate political issues that have historically been seen as "male" into a sphere where women have taken on greater responsibility, this could possibly spill over into greater equality in the household's division of labour.

To sum up, in this article I have tried to reflect on the increasingly militarized preparedness debate and the view of preparedness that exists in Sweden. Since the militarization in Sweden has gone very quickly, this has also affected the view of preparedness as you can see that there has been a shift in responsibility between the state and the individual. This has contributed to an increased demand for the individual's preparedness. For this reason, I think it has been interesting to reflect on how a more individual and liberal view of preparedness and national security can make structural inequalities in society more visible.

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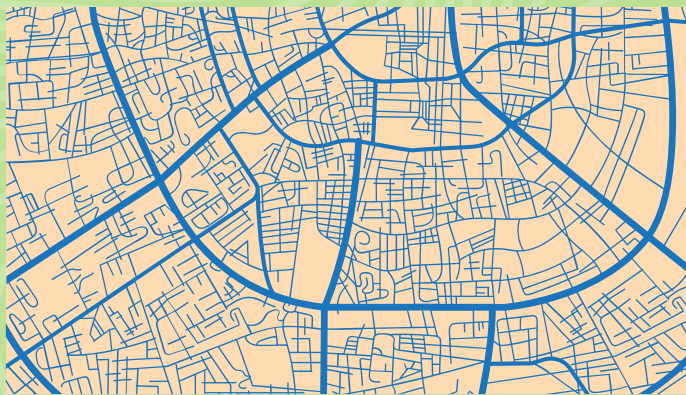
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# MOBILITY JUSTICE

## AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR PEACE & CONFLICT STUDIES

This piece offers a reflexive account of what it means to study mobility within the realm of peace and conflict studies, underscoring its significance in shaping our conceptions of a more equal and just world. As a PhD student in Political Science, I find myself navigating being the sole researcher focused on mobility within a department specialised in various subdisciplines, none of which seems to consider mobility to be especially relevant. However, I've recently found a welcoming space within Peace & Conflict studies, thanks to the support of fellow PhD female colleagues who have extended invitations for engagement and teaching opportunities. This brief, although fruitful experience of teaching in Peace & Conflict has compelled me to think about the place of mobility in this broad subfield. When tasked with leading a discussion on "mobility and migration" within the course "Peace in the 21st century: Critical Debates on Violence, Justice and Peace" I felt a sense of surprise and disconnect, as I believed discussions around mobility had no place within the realm of peace and conflict studies. Questions flooded my mind: What insights could I possibly offer? How could my research be relevant to a field that I felt so disconnected and distant from?



Upon delving into the course description, which outlined its focus on violence, justice, and peace, I began to see how mobility actually intersected with each and every of these aspects. Recollections of conversations with individuals constrained by unequal mobility systems during my time in Senegal came to mind. Their experiences vividly illustrated the concepts of violence, justice, and peace, offering a compelling link to the discourse on mobility. Indeed, during my interactions, a recurring theme emerged: the disparity between African nations abundant in natural resources and human capital, yet impoverished, and European countries, lacking in natural resources and with an ageing population, yet prosperous. People often attributed this disparity to historical and ongoing exploitation facilitated by unequal commercial agreements, financial systems, international relations and barriers to movement imposed by European nations in complicity with African governments.

This realisation struck me deeply – mobility encompasses not only the movement of people but also the forces that restrict or favour movement and the conditions under which movement occurs (or does not occur). Moreover, people's mobility (or lack thereof) is interconnected with global flows of money, resources and labour.

This is most starkly illustrated by the neo-colonial global economic chain, where resources and cheap labour are extracted from the Global South in conditions often akin to slavery, while the benefits accrue predominantly go to the Global North. A poignant example of this dynamic is the cocoa trade: harvested at low cost in countries like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Cameroon, cocoa seeds are then transported to Europe where they are transformed into chocolate, and marketed internationally under labels such as "Swiss" or "Belgian" chocolate, obscuring its origins and the exploitative processes involved. Simultaneously, the extraction of resources and heedless production practices lead to environmental degradation, primarily impacting the Global South. Viewed through this lens, the narrative unfolds as one of mobility and immobility: the (exploitative) movement of capital and goods from South to North goes hand in hand with the immobility of people that wish to move in the same direction (unless they agree to occupy roles as cheap laborers within the global value chain). At the same time, the the worst impacts of the climate crisis are outsourced from North to South, as the Global North often offloads pollution and climate degradation onto the South in its hypocrite and incoherent effort to mitigate its effects in the North. Against this backdrop, forcing people in the South to stay in their places and actively impeding them to move freely, is even more striking as, for some, the reason for this movement lies in centuries of exploitation for the so-called "development" of the North.

Furthermore, these patterns of (im)mobilities echo those of capitalist production during colonial times, when the South served as a source of resources to enrich the North. Similarly, the mobility of people was dictated by capitalist imperatives, with Africans forcibly displaced to the Americas to fuel the wealth accumulation of Northern powers, and indigenous populations either eradicated or immobilized in their territories. Meanwhile, commercial goods and white Europeans enjoyed largely unrestricted mobility. At the core of these histories of mobility and immobility lies the question of violence, manifested through expropriation and killings, as well as peace – or rather, the establishment of a false sense of pacification built upon the oppression and domination of subjugated subjects and territories. Against this backdrop, the concept of justice emerges as pivotal. What can these patterns of mobility and immobility tell us about justice? Can there be justice without free and safe mobility for all? And what is even peace without mobility justice as a premise?

## MOBILITY JUSTICE AND KINOPOLITICS

The emerging concept of "mobility justice" (Sheller, 2018) offers me an entry point in bridging the gap between mobility and peace & conflict studies. This concept prompts us to consider "how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information" (Sheller, 2018: 14). By interrogating the relationships between various forms of mobility and immobility – encompassing people, goods, and resources – mobility justice delves into the role of justice and injustice within these dynamics. It highlights how mobility and immobility are deeply entwined with power relations, capable of reinforcing or challenging regimes of domination, violence, and oppression. Indeed, mobility is inherently political, as encapsulated by the concept of "kinopolitics" (Nail, 2015), which invites us to examine how violence, power, oppression, and resistance are structured around notions of mobility and immobility. Concepts such as "mobility justice" and "kinopolitics" allow us to connect struggles for mobility and mobility rights to broader quests for justice worldwide, encompassing issues like land, territory, and existence, all of which are intricately linked to mobility and immobility.

We can take, for instance, the Israel-Palestine conflict, a longstanding struggle for peace and justice by an oppressed population. At its core, this conflict revolves around questions of mobility and immobility – who can move where, and who has the right to settle and live where. The carceral geographies that confine Palestinians to specific territories echo historical restrictions on movement for indigenous and colonized populations, as well as contemporary carceral geographies on a global scale, where only a minority enjoys the freedom to move freely and safely. Thus, mobility holds profound significance to make sense of a just peace, as movement is essential for reclaiming existence, agency, space, and power. In the absence of these conditions, where mobility is central, peace could easily become a tool for oppression, legitimising and even encouraging dominance in its name. As Sheller (2018) suggests, present-day systems of (im)mobility distort human relations and hinder access to rights, freedom, resources, and territory. The ongoing genocide in Palestine, characterized by the daily advances of the Israeli army, resulting in the killing and confinement of Palestinians to ever-diminishing parcels of land, serves as a poignant illustration of this reality.

Much of the world's violence revolves around the inability to move – whether to relocate, exercise rights within one's territory, or simply exist without oppression. In this light, (im)mobility – both domestic and international – becomes the ultimate barrier to justice and peace, rendering it fundamentally impossible for marginalized populations like colonized peoples, stateless individuals, migrants, and indigenous communities to access rights, freedom, and existence. Essentially, (im)mobility obstructs justice by preventing some individuals from residing where they choose without oppression, while denying others the opportunity to pursue a better life where they aspire. In this light, any notion of peace that fails to incorporate mobility justice merely scratches the surface of addressing systemic issues, ultimately preserving the oppressive status quo. If Peace & Conflict Studies are predicated on the pursuit of justice, then mobility justice must be an integral component of this pursuit.

BY AGNESE PACCIARDI



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GHASSAN KANAFANI  
TALK ABOUT WHAT?  
1970





# ON PEACE



CHAPTER III. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON PEACE

LIBERATION





# LIBERATION

BY SOFIA BACHMAN



This painting was inspired by the following quote:

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

–Lilla Watson

Our liberty is bound together.

I don't know why really, but this quote just stuck with me from the moment I saw it during one of our lectures, in the course we were attending at the time – namely, *Peace in the 21st century: Critical debates on violence, justice, and peace*. To me, it conveys strength and determination. Perhaps even hope – which can be difficult to come by during these often dark and fearful times. I set out not wanting to create something that was simply naively colorful – but to create an art piece that would instill a sense of hope in the beholder. Just as it is important to acknowledge the horrors – it is also necessary to remember all the wonders, kind actions and hope that this world has to offer. We live in a world of multitudes, and there can never be only darkness. My aim is that this painting can provide people with the opportunity to create their own kind of meaning. To become hopeful in their own subjective way, while also feeling less alone and more connected to the people, nature and animals around them.

The painting itself is made up of two people sitting down together, and from their unity rises a phoenix as a symbol of transformation, resilience, and rebirth. Fire has been the subject for many different metaphorical meanings throughout history – but for me it represents strength. However, fire is not necessarily good or bad. It can be destructive and dangerous, but if handled with intentional care it can be something that brings light and warmth. The plants at the bottom represent the earth, growth and diversity. The sky at the top is light blue to signify the hopeful thought that there is space for us all to expand and soar into. Or perhaps that there will be, through the joint fight for liberation. I quite reject the notion that all of this is only good for philosophical reflection on paper – and not for the “real world”. Sure, our world is incredibly complex – and violent in more ways than I can count – but that shouldn't mean that we should lose hope and resilience in the face of this often-daunting complexity.

Tying together the quote and my art – I simply wish to convey that the painting came fourth through inspiration from the quote. It is the underlying context for my artwork, which I have chosen to name: Liberation. According to my interpretation of Lilla Watson's quote, I believe that liberation requires the intersectional knowledge that the fate of people of all colors, genders and nationalities are connected, albeit in different ways. No two people are alike, and yet our liberty is indeed bound together.

Freire (1996, p. 133) writes that “(...) we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other.” This connects quite well to what Lilla Watson says, which is that you cannot help someone else to liberation. Liberation must be a common effort, a common fight or quest. Talking about coloniality and neoliberal peace from a critical perspective enables the inclusion of a broader range of stories to be brought forth and made visible. Our narratives shape our view on who has a legitimate claim to negotiations, peace and liberty. It matters who is telling a story, and whose voices are not being heard (Santen, 2021, p. 364–365; Vale & Thakur, 2020, p. 70).

How can we liberate each other, together, without listening to each other's stories and experiences? And liberation goes deeper than simply going to the place where there is violence and helping to achieve peace. As Magalhães Teixeira (2024, p. 23–26) points out in her article – liberation and peace should also be centered around the practices of marginalized groups outside the periphery of progress, development and modernity. This means reframing the ways we think about peace, violence and conflict. Reframing the ways in which we approach liberation. A rebirth. I cannot give liberation to someone else because I have not lived their experiences. But I can sit down with them and realize that my liberation is bound together with theirs. So, do not help me. Fight alongside me with the knowledge that our complex lives are bound together. Let us give each other hope. Let us liberate each other – not because it is possible, but because it is necessary.

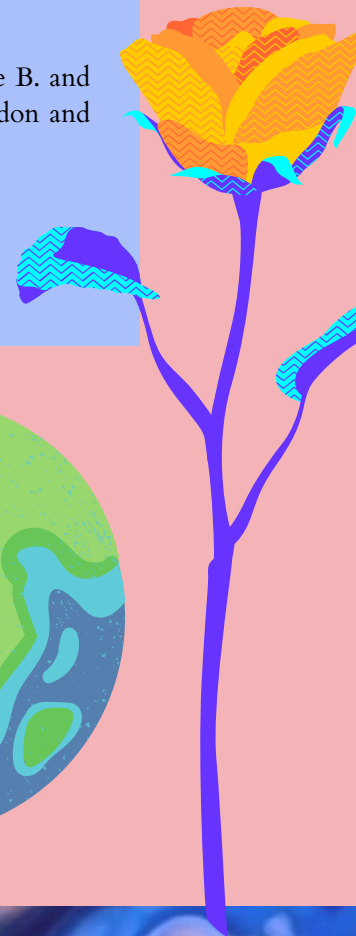
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# EVERYDAY PEACE

BY LÉANE DARTOIS



# EVERYDAY PEACE

BY LÉANE DARTOIS

This box is a representation of everyday peace within conflicts. The surrounding of it screams violence and injustices as well as sadness. But when you open it, every layer shows examples of what happens when people start opening to each other and overcoming a conflict, either religious or ethnic. It reflects that a conflict is never entirely totalising, and brave actors stand up against it (Mac Ginty, 2021: 53, 98). Some quotes are also related to the concept of peace. Sometimes, simple words explain a lot, and other times, they make you think and the message is deeper than what it appeared to be at first.

For instance, “Peace begins with a smile” is a quote from Mother Teresa and first seems like a simple sentence a bit silly and obvious but then, it made me think of the concept of everyday peace developed deeply by Roger Mac Ginty in his book *Everyday Peace: How So-called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict* (2021). Indeed, if you need to make peace it's because of a conflict, so there are resentments and separations between people, tensions between groups. For the author, everyday peace is about small acts of peace “that have the capacity to disrupt conflict and possibly grow into something more substantial” (Mac Ginty, 2021: 2), as a transformation of the conflict or its resolution (Mac Ginty, 2021: 2).

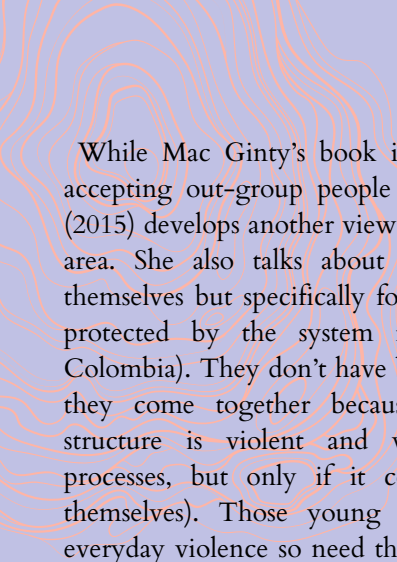
Moreover, if our idea of peace is the one of the “big peace,” or the institutionalised and formal peace established through top-down recognized actions (accords), Mac Ginty argues that this “elite peace” (2021: 212) does not correspond to the lived realities of people and what they need. Instead, establishing a “small peace” (2021: 212) would be more adapted to the needs of people as it would come from them. This is highly connected to everyday peace, even if it happens after a conflict, because the people are at the centre of the projects of peace for their environment. For instance, the religious conflict in Northern Ireland is not just a matter of policies, contracts or agreements between governments. It is more about how people can live with their neighbours despite their differences, and how they overcome it to live at peace together. It is how Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness became friends and built an example for the people. This is represented in one of the pictures on the box.

What I find important about the concept of everyday peace is that every act is worthy, every act is a step towards the ‘Other’ and towards change. As Mac Ginty argued, everyday peace can be the first and last acts of peace, everyday peace can be the act that opens possibilities and the act that shows that the group can survive even during the worsening of tensions (2021: 12, 214). In the end, everyday peace depicts “ordinary people as skilled diplomats who are adaptable and alert of a changing environment” (Mac Ginty, 2021: 11). It is all about the people, hope and the actions taken to fulfil hopes, which is an important message.

Another central aspect of everyday peace is the circuitry that Mac Ginty also develops in his book. Indeed, even if acts of everyday peace are implemented at the local level (he even talks of hyperlocality (2021: 5)), they are implemented in interconnected circuits, which means that they can inspire other people, change behaviours, and have wider contributions (Mac Ginty, 2021: 7). In the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide, villages were left destroyed but still inhabited by both Hutus and Tutsis. One picture of the box shows a woman, becoming friends again with a man who killed her brother, his wife and their children. Even after a traumatic event, they managed to start being a community again and showed it was possible to the inhabitants of their village who could have also faced similar situations.

Everyday peace is intrinsically social, about the people living together, are they in-group or out-group but still having relations with people of the in-group (Mac Ginty, 2021, p.59). It relies on emotional intelligence, the ability to analyse a situation, to find the right time to do something. Everyday peace is about actions but also modes of thinking implemented and even embodied in the everyday life of people (Mac Ginty, 2021: 8-9, 51). It is adaptable to every situation because it comes from the people themselves, while top-down peace considers groups and people as homogenous. Moreover, people are not passive victims of conflicts or of peace processes, they don't need external forces to shape their lives from far away: they make their own peace thanks to emotional intelligence, empathy, and their own calculations (Mac Ginty, 2014: 551). Thus, everyday peace is valuable and more efficient, it gives power to the people to decide for themselves.

Everyday peace is highly dependent on the context. This is because going against the norms holds risks because it is a deviant behaviour. It can also be limited by physical barriers (like the apartheid wall around Gaza) (Mac Ginty, 2021: 9, 68, 75). It requires bravery because of in-group critiques if someone reaches out to someone in the out-group. Reaching out disrupts the hegemonic narrative of separation between people (Mac Ginty, 2021: 191, 199) and because of circuitry, it can be hoped that it will help to stop the conflict through the intertwined circuits if one is disrupted and then spread to others and so on (Mac Ginty, 2021: 207).



While Mac Ginty's book is more about integrating and accepting out-group people within the in-group, Berents (2015) develops another view of outsiders from a stigmatised area. She also talks about everyday peace from people themselves but specifically focuses on the youth that is not protected by the system in a stigmatised area (here, Colombia). They don't have basic needs or opportunities, so they come together because they understand that the structure is violent and won't change by top-down processes, but only if it comes from them (the youth themselves). Those young people live in a context of everyday violence so need this everyday peace embodied in everyone, in the youth that want to emancipate from the violent structure and have an opportunity to do so thanks to strong relationships within the community. This approach shows what it is like when you are part of the stigmatised and rejected out-group. Once again, we can use the box. The black-and-white picture of two men shows a friendship between two Yugoslav men, one of Serbian origin and the other an Albanian man (from the majority of the country). They became friends while part of the communist party when they fought against Italian fascist occupation in 1941. They were captured, tortured and later killed. After the war, they became national heroes and symbols of brotherhood between an ethnic minority and the Albanian majority of today's Kosovo. This story can be understood by some as a gesture towards a stigmatised group and the ignorance of differences because they were linked by greater things than their different ethnicity.

Another parallel that can be made is with Freire's book *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1996). Indeed, he claims throughout his book that education usually faces a dichotomy between the students and the teacher. He explains that teachers are considered as the only ones able to give knowledge to students who just receive it as objects (Freire, 1996: 71-72). This is also true for peace organisations that, even if they act with genuine intentions and good will, they participate in the epistemic violence and the system of oppression implemented by the Global North after colonisation and reproduce it. Instead, Freire (1996) argues for a more pedagogical approach where teachers and students learn from each other. In our context, the teacher would be a peace actor and the students (also called the oppressed in his examples) would be people living in a conflict or in a post-conflict society.

If Mac Ginty (2021) argued that formal peace processes support structures of oppression and violence even if they act with genuine concern for people and good will, here, Freire (1996) says that if people want to help, they must work with the people, be taught by them what the situation is and listen to what they want to do (Freire, 1996: 93). This is a bottom-up process of peace, maybe not everyday peace because it is not small acts anymore, but genuine common reflection (Freire, 1996: 90) and discussion on peace leading to a "true solidarity" (Freire, 1996: 77), still at local level and with the possibility of being extended, inspiring others. Even if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is by many considered intractable, the friendship between the Palestinian Raymonda Tawil (mother-in-law of Arafat) and the Israeli Ruth Dayan (wife of Moshe Dayan) can be considered a starting point. Indeed, they are both from different peoples in conflict for decades, but by becoming friends, they learned about each other, and their sides of the story. It was common work because being friends with one considered the enemy is not easy. And even though the conflict is lasting and maybe even worsening, this is the idea of working together that everyday peace shares. It can be working as a community against an oppressor, or working together as two groups in conflict with each other.

To conclude, peace processes are too elitist, top-down and maybe thinking of Freire's (1996) conceptions of education and peace could help implementing a peace that actually correspond to the people and their living conditions, that comes from the people who are subjects of transformation of their everyday lives (Freire, 1996: 127). And even if everyday peace has the capability to, but does not disrupt the conflict, it has an impact in people's lives to make them easier, and that is important enough to be studied and acknowledged. What this box attempted to show was that it is easier to focus on the negative aspects of a conflict, to see the war, the blood and the sadness. But if you just do the effort of opening it, of looking further, you can see the possibility of peace, of everyday peace. People don't stand in a conflict waiting for it to pass, they act for their own peace and most importantly, they can find it in their everyday lives to live instead of surviving, and I believe this is strength.



## THE EVERYDAY PEACE BOX



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# WHAT ARE WE LEARNING AND TEACHING PEACE FOR?

BY BARBARA MAGALHÃES TEIXEIRA

As I reflect on what is the point of learning and teaching peace, students around the world have been tirelessly mobilizing in solidarity with Palestine and against the ongoing genocide. They have been calling on their universities to speak out against the atrocities being committed in Gaza and beyond, as they understand that silence in situations of injustice is complicity. Universities have responded with generic statements affirming that it is not their role to “take a stand” or pursue “political issues” and, in more severe cases, have sanctioned and reprimanded staff from speaking up on the subject. This reaction reflects a cognitive dissonance between the aims and goals of education at the university and how they should be practiced in the “real world”: we will teach you how to develop critical thinking skills, but you should not use it to question the university's motives and lack of action.

The idea for the course Peace in the 21st Century: Critical Debates on Violence, Justice, and Peace was born as a reaction to transformational events happening around the world in 2020 – the Black Lives Matter movement, the protests in Latin America, the mobilization against the occupation of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem – in a time where we were losing at least 3 million people globally to Covid-19, a preventable disease. At that time, I was frustrated by the silence of peace and conflict scholarship in explaining what was happening in the world. It seemed that the field of study that is supposed to understand different and multifaceted types and versions of violence and to design strategies and mechanisms for building peace was unable to comment and reflect on what was happening in the world then. I felt like we had dedicated our lives and careers to studying how dynamic, unpredictable, and complex violence can be in contexts of civil wars and armed conflicts in the Global South. Still, we could not produce interesting and relevant analyses of violence and conflict in our own “civilized” societies in the Global North.

Based on this, the aim of the course Peace in the 21st century has been to “bring peace closer to home” in a way to help students understand and explain everyday phenomena that happen around them - in their homes and their communities (Nicoson, Magalhães Teixeira, and Mårtensson 2023).

This is clear when you look at the diversity of topics and themes that students have chosen to write and illustrate in their contributions to this volume – all of them are personal and reflect the students’ engagement and motivations in their peace and conflict education. They have been creative, ambitious, and bold in selecting topics and how they carry out their discussion. They challenge and instigate us to rethink the boundaries of peace and conflict studies, inject fresh and careful perspectives into their analyses, and provide new applications for peace and conflict approaches and knowledge.

“ THE CLASSROOM REMAINS THE MOST RADICAL SPACE OF POSSIBILITY IN THE ACADEMY bell hooks

In my personal experience as a peace student and now as a teacher, most of the time the classrooms do not unlock this revolutionary potential described by hooks – why?

I believe that, as teachers, the way we structure our courses and our classes is directly tied to how we carry out research and how we develop theory. If our theoretical and methodological practices are not being used to address real-world issues in a liberatory way then our pedagogical practices will constrain students’ ability to envision and engage in transformative processes in our societies. If, through our research, we do not believe that change (peace) is possible, then we will not work toward it, and we will not teach our students about the possibilities either.

Despite such arguments and critiques already existing within and in parallel fields of peace research, as well as rich currents of decolonial scholarship, these remain marginal, and the state of peace research and pedagogy remains trapped in a logic of nationalist and neoliberal problem-solving.

I join existing voices in PCS that critique imperialist logics through localized and decolonial peace frameworks by here focusing on the role of pedagogy as transformational.



I believe we need to break with Western and Eurocentric traditions within peace and conflict studies in order to capture the global complexities of these phenomena fully. As hooks (1994) asserted, “theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary” (61). In fact, most of the time, the use of theory is instrumental in setting up “unnecessary and competing hierarchies of thought which reinscribe the politics of domination” (64). However, theory has a strong potential of being liberatory and revolutionary when we direct our theorizing towards this end – towards practices of knowledge production that legitimize and designate as important theoretical work that is carried out in the everyday struggles of the people in connection with their lived experiences. It is only by assigning “the people a fundamental role in the transformation process” that theory can serve the purpose of liberation (Freire 2005, 126). When this is the case, when theory is informed by the lived experiences of people to change their realities of oppression, there are no longer gaps between theory and practice (hooks 1994).

#### WHAT IS THE POINT OF PEACE?

From my experience discussing ideas of peace with environmental defenders, Indigenous leaders, and campesino activists at the frontline of climate and environmental justice, as well as anti-colonial/decolonial struggles in Brazil and Guatemala, the hegemonic idea of peace in its neoliberal terms is not only useless for their own organization and strategies, but it is also seen as politically nonprogressive and obedient to neoliberal and neocolonial processes. Indeed, going back to the geopolitical site of the university in the Global North after a long period of immensely rich, colorful, and creative discussions about radical transformations toward peace with people in the field, it has been incredibly difficult for me to adapt back into the structures and hierarchies of knowledge and to theoretical discussions that are highly abstract, jargonistic, and difficult to relate to the experiences from the field.

This gap created between the lived experiences of peace (or the lack of it) of the peoples in the Global South to the theorizations of peace by the ivory tower in the Global North is also felt within the classroom. Students of PCS have shared their frustration in not being able to envision peace beyond the constraints of Western categorizations. In one example from the classroom during the Peace in the 21st century course, when students were presented with this understanding of peace, and of the deep structural transformation it entails, they felt hopelessness in the prospect of this peace being made possible. In other words, when presented with a liberatory understanding of peace, students were initially paralyzed by its **utopic nature**.

Throughout my own career, it is not only students who are not able to see peace beyond the Western categorizations and Eurocentric constraints, but academic colleagues too have questioned the motives of whether theorizing peace from such a decolonial perspective was a good use of my time, since it would be impossible to ever be achieved. In this context, my theoretical investigations are made to feel silly and out of place in academia, like a childish dream that I will eventually grow out of once I mature into my academic profession and realize how the world really works. This difficulty of both peace and conflict scholars and students in envisioning peace that is transformative and that is cultivated in a world free of the determinism of conflict and violence for communities in the Global South is a symptom of a deep crisis of imagination, and I would even call it a crisis of hope, within the field.

Existing literature has shown that while the field of peace and conflict studies (PCS) emerged from a deep connection between political peace activism and research, it has moved away from a focus on radical transformation of society and towards promoting liberal ideals of peace that sustain the status quo (Krause 2019). PCS has suffered from a process of depoliticization of the issue(s) of peace based on structural foundations of oppression and inequality globally, towards an explanation of manifestations of violence and treating symptoms of conflict domestically (Magalhães Teixeira 2021).







In this context, peace has stopped being an issue of colonization and imperialism (Galtung 1971) and has become an indicator of the (in)ability of different countries and societies (mostly in the Global South) to adapt to and incorporate Western ideals of modernization and progress, mostly through projects of resource extraction and economic growth in the name of peace and development (Hettne 2001; Jaime-Salas et al. 2020; Selby and Hoffman 2014; Magalhães Teixeira 2024).

More than that, as Ragandang (2021) reports, the field of peace research has become an ‘impermeable metropole’ in which knowledge production is created in a closed circuit which is not accessible to either practitioners or by the ‘distressed communities’ in the field. The idea of ‘peace’ as it is currently advanced by mainstream peace and conflict literature fails to comprehend the diversity of lived experiences of peoples of the Global South that shape their understandings of peace and their strategy towards it.

From a decolonial perspective, it is impossible to build peace over the extremely violent and oppressive structures of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Peace is also not understood as something that happens within the constraints of these structures by the international authorities but is necessarily built by the groups and communities of the peoples of the Global South that have resisted the expansion of capitalism and colonialism for centuries and that already create alternatives way of being and relating to each other and the world, as is the case in many Indigenous, campesino, and traditional societies across the Global South (Magalhães Teixeira 2024).

If neither scholars nor students from peace and conflict studies in the Global North believe, and work for, radical transformation of our societies towards peace, why are we studying and teaching peace if we do not believe it to be possible? Echoing the question posed by Ragandang (2021): what, then, are we writing for?

Is it to advance solutions to real-world problems faced by real-world people, or is it to conceptualize and re-conceptualize definitions of peace that are useless for people at the frontline of these struggles? If knowledge production is to be constrained “merely for the purposes of community description, and not intervention,” (Ragandang 2021, 270) then academia is sealing its fate as the place where knowledge is legitimized but also where hierarchical structures prevent the realization of transformative processes (Todd 2016). This context illustrates a **deep crisis of praxis**, where theorization and knowledge production are completely detached from direct action to change the world (Freire 2005).

#### RECLAIMING THE LIBERATORY POWER OF PEACE STUDIES

Based on this critical reading of the state of both research and practice in peace and conflict studies, the design of the course Peace in the 21st century has been heavily inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks. Their approach to critical and engaged pedagogy has helped transform how we as teachers engage with ideas of peace, violence, and justice and how we wish to direct our theorizing, explanations, and methodological approaches in the classroom. Through designing and teaching this course, we have learned from Freire, hooks, and together with our students that to teach peace as a possibility, we need to open avenues for transformation that make peace possible. This stands in stark contrast to reproducing fatalist scenarios of intensified conflicts, violence, and injustice.

To transform our pedagogical approach, we have built on Freire’s different models of education. Freire (2005) describes the ‘banking concept of education’ as when education is descriptive and not transformative, so people are understood to be merely in the world as spectators, not with the world or other people as co-creators of this reality. However, **when education is used as a practice of freedom**, it is imperative to deny that people are “abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached” from the world and that the world “exists as a reality apart from people.” In PCS, when conflict is understood as inevitable and as something to be ‘managed’, and peace something to be ‘kept’, it makes it impossible for scholars and students to have any agency in changing this material reality. Implied in this view is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world – in which human beings live in the world but have no power whatsoever to transform it, so we should just accept that the world is ridden with conflict, and peace is impossible.

Freire (2005) calls this the ‘ideology of oppression’, which negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry, which are necessary to change the world. The expectation put on students to adapt to how the world works and to leave behind any childlike dreams of building peace that is disruptive and transformative turns them into passive receptacles of knowledge that are integrated into structures of oppression and further perpetuate them. However, when education is taken as a practice of freedom and is focused on posing questions, it does not accept a ‘well-behaved’ version of the present nor a

predetermined future. Instead, critical education is imperatively rooted in revolutionary futurity, which asserts the dynamic nature of the present and its ability to be revolutionized. As Freire (2005, 84) shown, **revolutionary futurity**

“AFFIRMS WOMEN AND MEN AS BEINGS WHO TRANSCEND THEMSELVES, WHO MOVE FORWARD AND LOOK AHEAD, FOR WHOM IMMOBILITY REPRESENTS A FATAL THREAT, FOR WHOM LOOKING AT THE PAST MUST ONLY BE A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING MORE CLEARLY WHAT AND WHO THEY ARE SO THAT THEY CAN MORE WISELY BUILD THE FUTURE

While the ‘banking model of education’ directly or indirectly reinforces a fatalistic perception of the world’s situation as doomed to conflict and violence, a ‘problem-posing model of education’ presents the situation as a problem – a problem that can be transformed. As David Graeber affirmed, the world “is something we make and could just as easily make different”. This way of understanding the possibilities of the future is tied to an understanding that people are tied to the world, and it is through their relationships with each other and the world, a deep process of transformation is made possible. This deep level of consciousness of transformation is something I have felt very present in the environmental defenders, Indigenous leaders, and campesino activists I have talked to in Latin America. While learning with them, I have felt nothing but their strong sense of hope and their ability to envision and work towards a different future – which stands in stark contrast to the peace and conflict students in the classroom.

To change this reality, it becomes imperative to theorize the power of people in changing their own oppressive and violent conditions. As Freire (2005, 74) showed, “the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, but not the situation which oppresses them” and when education is not a practice of freedom, these material realities are kept unchanged. When the academic discussion around peace is deprived of a dimension that targets action, peace stays as an abstract idea that is nothing but alienating to the people in the field that it is supposed to talk to. In this sense, theories of peace have become empty words, which are unable to neither denounce the horrors of war, neither to create a commitment to transformation.

**WHAT, THEN, IS THE ROLE OF THEORY, IF NOT TO CHANGE THE OPPRESSIVE REALITY OF THE OPPRESSED?**


Thus, to reclaim the liberatory power of peace studies – which is rooted in the commitment to the radical transformation of our societies – it becomes necessary to “think face-to-face with the world”, to address real issues. This entails not only knowing the problems of violence and challenges to peace but also understanding the reasons why it is so.

## SEEDS OF HOPE FOR PEACE STUDIES

After three years of teaching and learning peace, violence, and justice in the Peace in the 21st Century course, I can honestly say that I see hope in the future of peace studies through the inspiring and creative work of the students. I am filled with immense pride in the students who embarked on this transformative journey with us and were open and vulnerable to feel and share their own experiences and visions of peace. Their unwavering engagement, boundless creativity, and relentless motivation to learn have been nothing short of inspiring and have given me hope and energy to keep going when the world feels hopeless.

Even if at the beginning, students might have been sceptical of the critical pedagogy approach and the intense use of art and other mediums to active knowledge, they have shown immense intellectual maturity and agency in shaping their own educational experience. Instead of merely absorbing information, they approached each lecture and seminar with curiosity and a desire for deeper understanding. Their willingness to dive into challenging topics and engage in critical dialogue speaks volumes about their commitment to personal and intellectual growth.





The students in the Peace in the 21st century course have refused to be passive bystanders in a world plagued by injustice; instead, they have been determined to be agents of positive transformation and to use creative tools that connect theory, reflection, and action in order to change the world through a truly revolutionary praxis. Following their journey, I have learned that the students are hungry for doing things differently: they want to challenge the status quo and envision a world that is more just, more equitable, and more caring. They understand that real change requires bold action and a willingness to challenge entrenched systems of oppression. And so, they dare to dream of a future where peace is not just a distant ideal but a tangible reality.

As I reflect on the incredible journey we've shared in three years convening the course, I am filled with hope and optimism for the future. These students are not just peacemakers of tomorrow, but they are already making changes today in their own communities for alternative futures in favor of people and planet. I am honored to have been a part of their journey as they continue to inspire, challenge, and ultimately, change the world. bell hooks said that the classroom is the space for the most radical possibility in the academy; when I look at the incredible work from the students of the Peace in the 21st Century course and students worldwide mobilizing in solidarity with Palestine and beyond, I understand what she means.

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IT HAPPENS THAT PEACE CANNOT BE BOUGHT; PEACE IS EXPERIENCED IN SOLIDARITY AND LOVING ACTS, WHICH CANNOT BE INCARCERATED IN OPPRESSION

PAULO FREIRE



KWAME TURE  
ON PEACE VS.  
LIBERATION  
1968



WE HAVE COME TO  
UNDERSTAND THAT  
PEACE IS NOT AN  
ABSTRACT AND  
UNTOUCHABLE  
CONCEPT

PEACE IS  
SOMETHING THAT IS  
MADE AND REMADE  
EVERYDAY – EVEN  
IN THE SMALLEST  
OF ACTIONS

WHAT  
FUTURE  
OF PEACE  
ARE WE  
BUILDING  
TODAY?

“FOR APART FROM INQUIRY, APART  
FROM THE **PRAXIS**, INDIVIDUALS  
CANNOT BE TRULY HUMAN. KNOWLEDGE  
EMERGES ONLY THROUGH INVENTION AND  
RE-INVENTION, THROUGH THE  
RESTLESS, IMPATIENT, CONTINUING,  
HOPEFUL INQUIRY HUMAN BEINGS  
PURSUE IN THE WORLD, WITH THE  
WORLD, AND WITH EACH OTHER”

PAULO FREIRE, *PEDAGOGY OF THE  
OPPRESSED*, 1970

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