

PAX

#1 April 2026

magazine



ONIX

Editor's note

Dear Readers!

We are living in a time where the notion of peace is often overshadowed by the reality of conflict. As students of Peace and Conflict Studies, this is not only something that accompanies us in our workplaces and university matters, but also constitutes a big part of our everyday lives. Because of this, we wanted to create a space to share our experiences, interests, and topics that we believe deserve more attention.

Discussions surrounding conflict, peace and justice are often limited to academic and diplomatic circles. With PAX Magazine, we aim to challenge this tradition and open the conversation to a broader audience, as it is important to us that everyone feels invited to take part in these discussions and see their perspectives represented. In this initial edition, we therefore explore diverse aspects - from mechanisms of conflict and protest to lived experiences, peace in art and pop culture, as well as the power of history, space and remembrance.

As co-editors-in-chief, we are proud to present the first issue of PAX Magazine. We invite you to dive into the stories within and experience this beginning with us. PAX Magazine was a dream of many batches before us, which we carried forward with their inspiration and brought to life with our own unique touch.

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A Nation Held in Terror

How the Taliban Govern Through Fear

Wasil Peroz

I was a child when I first saw a man flogged on screen. It was not an accident - no forbidden video smuggled and passed through a teacher's eye. It was part of the lesson. In the religious school I attended, we were gathered and made to watch recordings of public punishments: floggings, amputations, executions. The teachers did not present these as warnings of what might happen to us. They presented them as demonstrations of what justice looked like. We were being trained not only in theology, but in the aesthetics of violence. We were being taught that cruelty, when performed in God's name, was not cruelty at all - it was order. That early education has stayed with me, not as trauma alone, but as a key. It unlocked something I have spent years trying to name: the way political Islam does not merely punish - it performs. And the audience is always the point.

The Stadium as Theater

Under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, stadiums are not only for sports. They are stages. Anyone the Taliban have accused of some certain crimes is subjected by their courts to public punishment (usually flogging, and in some cases, execution) carried out before crowds of spectators. Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban have flogged hundreds of people, including women, across Afghanistan. Twelve people have been executed publicly in stadiums so far. These are the figures the Taliban themselves have been published. In a country where independent journalism is now effectively banned, the true count is likely far higher.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault, in his landmark work *Discipline and Punish*, opens with a scene of public execution in eighteenth-century Paris and he further argues that one of the purposes of public punishment is to spread fear among the people, to instill in them the feeling that no violation will go unpunished. In this way, public punishment also becomes a spectacle of power: a demonstration not just of authority, but of its reach. The Taliban's stadiums operate on exactly this logic.

The goal is not justice. The goal is the manufacture of fear, and through fear, submission.

Although only a few hundred people may be flogged in stadiums across the country in the last four years, the suffering that follows is collective. A few months ago, people were flogged publicly in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province, and residents of the region remain in shock months later. One man described what it meant for his family: "They beat my son here in front of everyone. Now I no longer have a face to show in public. Neither my son has had a good day since, nor my family. They shouldn't have beaten my son in front of people - better they had killed him."

The aim of the public flogging was not merely to punish a son, but to crush the dignity of a family, and to make an example that would echo through a community and establish their domination through the rule of fear. Hannah Arendt, writing in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, argued that terror is the essence of totalitarian rule. The Taliban do not use fear to achieve other goals. Fear is the goal.

Women as Territory

Ziba was from Nangarhar, an eastern province of Afghanistan. She had completed half of her medical studies when the Taliban took power in August 2021. Because she was a woman, she was barred from continuing her education, though she was permitted to work as a nurse in a local hospital with her incomplete qualifications. After the ban, family pressure mounted, and she was pushed into marriage. Her husband promised he would allow her to work. After the wedding, he broke that promise. She turned to the Taliban court - the same institution that had denied her every right. She applied for a divorce, but the court refused. It dragged out the process, made her situation more dangerous, and left her alone to face the pressure of family, society, and a system that had no interest in protecting her. Eventually, her husband killed her in the name of "honor." And in this way, under

Taliban rule, the life of a doctor and nurse came to an end, as if she had never existed at all. In the ideology of Taliban and in the broader discourse of political Islam, a woman does not exist as an independent human being. She is terrain - a domain in which Islamist groups must demonstrate their authority and impose their vision of social order. The restrictions imposed on women under Taliban rule have further constrained the lives of more than three million Afghan women and girls who have been deprived of the right to education and stripped of many other fundamental human rights. As a result, every woman's daily existence is shaped by fear. The Taliban seek to make their rule permanent through the spreading of fear, stripping people of the courage to question their actions, their governance, or their decrees. At the same time, control of the population is one of their central preoccupations, and in pursuit of that control they have erased half of society from public life. Women have been removed from public space through religious edicts, stripped of their rights, and subjected to relentless surveillance of their movement, their clothing, their relationships, their very identity as women. Through this surveillance, the Taliban have seeded fear both across society at large and among women themselves, threatening them with torture, imprisonment, and public humiliation. Alongside this, they have constructed a system of structural discrimination that operates quietly beneath the more visible violence. Beyond physical coercion, the Taliban weaponize religious propaganda to frighten women in God's name, telling them they must not leave their homes, and that to do so is to invite God's wrath. By every available means, they work to ensure that women are too afraid to challenge their rule or defy their commands. In a conservative society, the price women pay for Taliban punishment is particularly devastating: imprisonment or public flogging does not only hurt the body, it calls a woman's reputation into question before her entire community. The Taliban exploit precisely this fear - the social death that follows punishment - to silence women, and through that silence they have succeeded in depriving half of the population of their most basic human rights. These mechanisms of fear are what allow the Taliban to sustain their authoritarian grip on power. This fear-driven system is at the same time

ideologically fortified by political Islam, and it is here that I am reminded of those videos we were shown as part of our religious education. And I find myself thinking about what it means to show violence to a child and call it justice. The lesson was not only about religious law. It was about the relationship between the self and power. It was teaching us that our bodies, our choices, and our futures were not our own, and that they belonged to a system larger than us, more certain than us, and prepared to hurt us if we forgot that.

The father in Uruzgan whose son was flogged said it best, without meaning to theorize anything. "Better they had killed him," he said. Because public flogging is designed to be worse than death. It destroys not just a body, but a person's place in the world, their family's dignity, their community's sense of safety. It is meant to make everyone who witnesses it, whether in person or by word of mouth, calculate the cost of any defiance.

That is what political Islam, in its Taliban form, has built in Afghanistan. Not a state, not a legal system, not a society, but a sustained lesson in fear, taught to an entire nation, with stadiums instead of classrooms, and bodies instead of screens.

Generational Gap

Difference of Protesting between Generations

Meryem Sultan Genç

Every generation is influenced by many things that establish their upbringing. Those can vary from technological developments to events that shape the domestic or global sphere. Such influences can be seen in many actions the generation takes, and one of those things is what they fight for and how they do it.

Different generations' forms of protest can be seen vividly in the differences between the Gezi Park Protests in 2013 and the March 19 protests in 2025, in Türkiye. However, the reasons for these protests were different; the hope for change and bravery to stand up for what they believe is right were the same.

The Gezi Park protests started out in 2013 as an environmental sit-in against the government's plan to redevelop Gezi Park into a commercial development. Despite starting in İstanbul; the protest quickly spread nationwide as it encouraged people to protest broader issues, including political repression, government outreach, and restrictions on civil liberties. The movement became a symbol of wider discontent with the Turkish government under then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Over time, the Gezi Park protest came to represent a larger struggle for rights and freedoms among many Turks and remained a reference point for later protests.

The Gezi Park Protests very quickly became a movement much broader than what it was planned to be at the start; a spontaneous, pluralistic, youth-led eruption against state overreach, police brutality, and restrictions of freedoms. Many participants of these protests were Millennials (Gen Y), who grew up at a time of significant urban growth, rapid technological adoption and expanding access to higher education. Unlike earlier cohorts shaped by military coups or ideological party politics, many Gezi protesters entered public life with a belief that society was becoming more open and dynamic. They were accustomed to global culture, skilled with digital technologies and used social media not only for posting photos



Source: Photograph by author

but to organize debates and build a community. The Gezi movement was distinct for its ideological breadth and pluralism.

People from feminist, environmental, LGBTQ+, worker, nationalist, and liberal circles all found common cause in resisting what they perceived as authoritarian tendencies by the ruling party. For these millennials, the protest was less about one clear political program and more about claiming social space, defending civil liberties, and practicing a new kind of participatory politics. Many had never protested before but felt compelled to act when the state used heavy police force against peaceful demonstrators. On the other hand, the March 19 protests that happened in 2025 began with the arrest and detention of İstanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, a leading opposition figure with a strong national support. İmamoğlu is a member of CHP (Republican People's Party) and was the opposition's presidential candidate before and after his detention. After his detention, mass protests spread not just in İstanbul but also to many provinces involving students, opposition groups and wider civil society. Authorities detained and arrested thousands of people for participating in these protests. Protesters framed their actions not just around İmamoğlu's arrest but as a resistance to the perceived erosion of democratic norms in Turkey. Unlike the Gezi generation, however, Gen Z in

Turkey was raised in an atmosphere of constant centralization in politics and an increasingly uncertain economic landscape.

The Gen Z does not have any recollection of a more liberal political atmosphere, remembering politics always as increasingly constricted and democratization as stalled. They saw high inflation, failed job opportunities for graduates, and perceptions of corruption combined with nepotism. To them, politics is no longer an arena of possibility, but merely an impediment. Protest by the members of Gen Z is highly digitally embedded. Unlike the Millennials, who, from the time of the Gezi protests, were introduced to a relatively new empowering technology, Gen Z has never existed in a world without social media. Twitter and Discord are not auxiliary spaces for Gen Z activists to engage with others; they are principal domains. Thus, protest by Gen Z is inherently hybrid: online, offline, global, and local. Many of them protest not only against particular issues or grievances but also what they believe to be a systemic erosion of opportunity. Their rhetoric is as much humorous as ironic: a mixture of digital perception and political disillusionment. The major difference between the two generations is related to their perception of risk and authority, especially in comparison to each other. In contrast to Millennials, who during the Gezi Park protests confronted further tendencies toward centralization in spaces where there were also visible areas of negotiation, Generation Z has a much more pronounced perception of repression by the state. Having faced power structures throughout their lives, this generation approaches protests in a much more calculating manner. It is also worth mentioning that this awareness does not make Generation Z more reluctant in their protests, but rather more resolute.

This influence is further elaborated within generational socialization. Gezi's Millennials emphasized horizontal organization and broad coalitions across ideological divides. Protest space became a site of communal identity building and consensus-driven participation. Generation Z, in contrast, often engages in networks around specific, targeted goals. Their protest is an affair of efficiency and rapid coordination, born from a context in which opportunities feel constricted and urgency is high. Inclusivity can be present in this activism,

but one finds effectiveness prioritized.

Psychologically, the two generations show different orientations toward change. The protesters in Gezi engaged in hope mixed with experimentation, taking setbacks as part of democratic learning. The Gen Z protests with a much stronger sense of urgency. The cumulative economic strain, reduced institutional trust, and continuous political centralization create this atmosphere of urgency.

Another area that had a different impact on the two generations is education and globalization. Millennials felt the effect of the expansion of access to higher learning and global connectivity, which led to the development of cosmopolitan civic values. On the other hand, Generation Z is influenced, albeit through connectivity, especially given their digital connectivity. This happens through global democracy and local factors as well.

The difference between the Gezi and March 19 protests, so to speak, ultimately comes down to the extent to which formative environments influence political imagination. The millennials developed as a generation during a time characterized by expansion, at least on a relative level, which meant that they were able to experiment and symbolically assert their presence as a political entity for that space. The Gen Z movement developed within a space characterized by contraction, at least on an economic/political/institutional level, as they were focused on tangible outcomes.



Source: Getty Images

“I Fled in the Middle of the Night”

A Mother’s Story of Displacement and Social Fracture in the Post-Conflict Amhara Region.

Bethelihem Gizachew Yeshitila

In the aftermath of the conflict in Ataye, thousands of civilians continue to navigate the uncertainties of displacement, social stigma, and unmet humanitarian needs. Among them is Halima, a 40-year-old widow and mother of three, whose experience illustrates how violence reshapes not only physical landscapes but also long-standing community relationships. Halima was born in Tebina and moved to Ataye 20 years ago after losing close family members. Today, she is living with advanced breast cancer, which has paralyzed the right side of her body. Before the conflict, she managed a modest vegetable business to support her children. Once the fighting began, her medical treatment stopped, her income disappeared, and her struggle for survival intensified. “I stand in front of anyone who can help just to keep my children alive,” she says, reflecting on the daily humiliation of seeking aid.

When Conflict Turns Neighbors into Enemies

Like many residents of mixed communities in central Ethiopia, Halima once believed coexistence was possible despite ethnic and religious differences. That belief was shattered when neighbors she had known for decades accused her of collaborating with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) simply because she spoke Afaan Oromo. “A boy I raised pointed a gun at me,” she recalls. “They said I exchanged letters with OLA soldiers. God knows I cannot even read or write.” The threats escalated. One neighbor broke into her home and warned her to leave if she wanted to stay alive. That night, Halima fled with her children, carrying nothing.

Displacement, Uncertainty, and the Weight of Loss

Halima now lives in a severely damaged shelter where rain and animals enter freely.

Humanitarian support is minimal, sometimes only two pieces of injera per day.

Her greatest source of pain, however, is the disappearance of her eldest son, who vanished after attempting to withdraw a small compensation payment.

“I don’t know if he is dead or alive,” she says. “I dream every day that he will walk through the door.”

Occasional phone calls claiming to be him offer no proof, leaving her trapped between hope and grief.

Barriers to Return and the Politics of Belonging

Attempts to reclaim her home were unsuccessful. Local leadership had shifted, and once again Halima faced accusations of being an OLA sympathizer. The mayor of Ataye later advised her to leave permanently for her own safety, reflecting a broader pattern in which displaced civilians find themselves excluded from post-conflict reconstruction and community decision-making.

A Mother’s Final Appeal

With her health deteriorating and her resources exhausted, Halima’s priority is securing her children’s future.

“I am not worried for myself anymore,” she says quietly. “I just want my children to be safe and supported when I am gone.”

Her story underscores the urgent need for stronger institutional protection for displaced women, equitable access to reintegration processes, and psychosocial and economic support for families disrupted by conflict. Halima’s voice is one among many, but it is a reminder that the end of armed violence does not mark the end of suffering. For countless civilians, it is only the beginning of a long, uncertain struggle for dignity, belonging and survival.

Islamophobia as an Act of Militarisation

Lina Anuschka Steiner

“Anyone who believes that right-wing extremism is the greatest threat to our free and democratic constitutional order is greatly mistaken. That threat is, in fact, Islamism.” (Welt, 2025).

Generalising statements against Islam and Muslim people, like the quote above, are no novelty. Instead, they are being used strategically to create a specific perception of Muslim people and non-Muslim individuals perceived as Muslim – characterised through prejudice, aversion, and hatred. Although it seems easy to recognise the true character of such statements, the underlying long-term effects and hatred mechanisms go frequently unseen by the masses and are often not discussed (Bauke et al., 2019, p. 4-5, 12).

Against this backdrop, this article aims to discuss different dimensions of Islamophobia as an act of militarisation. It argues that Islamophobia is not merely prejudice but also functions as a subtle form of militarisation within liberal democracies.

Islamophobia can be defined as prejudice, fear, and hatred towards Muslim people and Muslim-perceived non-Muslims that may lead to different forms of hostility, intolerance, and provocation in real life as well as online. It is typically motivated by institutional, political, ideological and religious resentment and can evolve into cultural and structural racism (Awan & Zempi, 2020, p. 3). Militarisation on the other hand is a process that gradually legitimises the ideology or belief in war; the preparations for and the costs of it. It is regularly reduced to images showing weapons and military or police personnel, but can be much more subtle (Åhall, 2015, 66-68). In many North American and European countries, Muslim people and Islam are commonly discussed and portrayed through three images. Firstly, saving Muslim women from the Hijab and their violent and oppressive men (Bauke et al., 2019, p. 4-5). Secondly, equating the Islamic faith and all its believers

with (violent) acts of extremist Islamist terrorist groups and their interpretation of Islam. And lastly, constructing Muslim communities as an invading mass that take people’s jobs and cause a cultural decline. This is often connected to Othering, portraying Muslim people as the others: foreigners that are dangerous and not integrated enough — ironically, integration itself is regularly not wanted by the country’s populations (Abadi et al., 2018, p. 9, 16, 86). In addition to these portrayals, another common framing of Muslim people in the media is through a victim or refugee lens. This narrative highlights individuals who are seen as victims of their own religious or cultural environment — particularly those resisting “oppressive” Islamic practices, advocating for reform, or embracing North American and European values and lifestyles (Gökce & Brüsemeister, 2023, pp. 348, 356).

Although this portrayal might appear empathic, it still reproduces hierarchical assumptions about civilisation, gender, and modernity. Furthermore, these frames reinforce notions of rescue, civilisation and, in doing so, sustain logics of militarisation.

Now how does this connect to militarisation? The framing of saving Muslim women for instance, not only casts women as passive, helpless and mindless victims, but reveals a crucial gendered dimension of militarisation. By constructing women as passive and victims the act of rescue becomes legitimised and framed as inevitable. Since the supposed saviours are imagined protecting women from “violent men” and a “violent religion” the use of force seems justified. Taken further, this framing can over time serve to legitimise military action whenever a threat is perceived.

The media plays a crucial role in constructing these framings. The informative and normative character of media outlets contribute to the production and reinforcement of dominant narratives and identities. Through constant reproductions of the discourse, suspicion and fear are being implemented as omnipresent companions when talking about Islam, Muslim people and Muslim-majority countries. Supported by politicians and publicly perceived legitimate figures, the narratives gain authority and become embedded in political discourses and collective knowledge (Gökce & Brüsemeister, 2023, p. 338-339, 358). Thereby legitimising policing, security-oriented policies, and generalised distrust. On a national level, such narratives can contribute to structural discrimination. Muslim people and individuals perceived as Muslim may experience disproportionate racial profiling, exclusion within institutions (e.g., education, employment, housing), verbal abuse, and the questioning of knowledge and capability (Bauke et al., 2019, p. 57). This can be connected to the introductory statement. The statement is not only factually inaccurate but also reflects the increasing normalisation of these portrayals. For instance, in 2024, Germany recorded 42,788 right-wing motivated offences and 1,515 Islamist-related crimes (Bundesministerium des Innern & Bundeskriminalamt, 2025, p. 4 and Mediendienst Integration, 2025). When such numbers are framed selectively by media and politicians, they reinforce fear-based logics and narratively sustain the cycle of securitisation and militarisation.

Extending the analysis, it becomes important to highlight the overly constructed connection between Muslim people and violence, as well as the supposed incompatibility of Islamic values with the allegedly superior North American and European ideals. It is also crucial to mention the recurring narrative of a collective Muslim mission to forcibly Islamise the world (Gökce & Brüsemeister, 2023, p. 337, 348). The violent perception is tied to two crucial elements. On one hand, the disproportionate focus on extremist Islamist terrorism, which leads to equating all Muslim people with (violent) religious extremists. On the other hand, the persistent Orientalisation of Muslim communities, individuals perceived

as Muslim and people from the WANA region (West Asia and North Africa), who are portrayed as wild, exotic, or threatening. Together, these narratives vilify an entire faith and dehumanise both its followers and those merely perceived as one.

A striking example of these dynamics can be seen in the portrayal of the concept of Jihad. Jihad (translation: struggle or effort) is often divided into the greater/inner and lesser/outer Jihad, which are both tied to the emergence and practice of Islam. The greater or inner Jihad refers to the inner struggle against the evil in oneself in order to achieve moral virtue, as well as non-violent, discursive efforts to promote what is right. The lesser or outer Jihad is associated with godly endeavours and the defence of the Umma against aggression. An offensive war or violent spread of Islam is not part of this definition. North American and European discourses, however, often reduce this complex theological and ethical concept to an overemphasised, extremist notion of a holy war, cherry-picking elements that fit this framing (Afsaruddin, 2019). More importantly this portrayal extends to the broader Muslim population, vilifying and framing them as a potential threat. This contributes to the wider process of militarisation, where Muslim people – and those perceived as Muslim, regardless of their actions – are systematically linked to violence and danger.

A case in point is the phrase War on Terror. Although terrorism encompasses many forms and actors (from eco-terrorism and jihadist extremism to right-wing and state-sponsored violence), it is predominantly associated with Islam and Muslim people. Thus the War on Terror verbalises the militarisation of Muslim people and the ones perceived as such, serving as a discursive and political tool that enacts structural militarisation.

Beyond the effects on individuals, these narratives threaten core democratic values. By framing Muslim people as inherent dangers to society, such discourses undermine pluralism, erode mutual trust, and legitimise exclusionary politics that clash with the very principles of open democratic governance. Ultimately, Islamophobia goes beyond individual prejudice — it operates as a structural and discursive process that connects fear, control, and militarisation.

Through the constant portrayal of Muslim people as potential threats, societies justify surveillance, exclusion, and even violence in the name of security. Recognising these mechanisms is a first step toward de-militarising imaginaries.

Author's note:

It is necessary to reflect on my positionality within this article. As a White, European non-Muslim woman who studied Islamic Studies, I do not claim to have lived experience of being Muslim nor an absolute theological knowledge. While my background provides me with an insight, this article merely tries to highlight different dimensions of militarisation, oppression, and power relations.



Mapping segregation

An Essay on the Potential of Mapping Conflict Spaces and its Application in West Belfast

Lena Merkle

Mapping in Peace and Conflict Studies

Peace and Conflict Studies have undergone a necessary and overdue spatial turn in the last couple of years. Through it, not only has the category of space as a lens for looking at conflict become more important but also has a new appreciation for (political) geography been found (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016). Yet, I argue that much of this spatial turn tends to remain on an abstract level where space is more conceptualised than experienced. This creates a gap in our perspective on space in peace and conflict. I suggest here that to fill that gap we need to look towards methods that allow us to experience spaces. One such approach would be mapping. While the term itself is far from new to peace and conflict researchers and practitioners with conflict and actor maps being common tools of conflict analysis, geographical mapping is less widely used.

The method is, however, well established in disciplines that commonly do field research, meaning first and foremost social and cultural anthropologists but also social geographers and sociologists. It is a flexible and easily adaptable method that can be approached in several ways and yet create complex and multifaceted knowledge.

To state the most important thing first: mapping is not cartography. The idea is not to give an exact rendering of a geographical space in its measured dimensions. Instead, mapping allows for visualisations of geographies of meaning. This is why it is also a great tool to be used in a participatory way. Mappings can be done without the need for literacy or even significant language overlap. Maps are accessible ways of expressing themselves for most people, regardless of ethnicity, age, disability or gender. While in many settings one of the easiest ways to do them is to hand people pen and paper, they can also be scratched in the dirt or built with building blocks or materials found in nature.



City of Belfast shown within Northern Ireland.
Source: Canva

There is no right way to do them as there is no correct answer. When you ask a group of students to draw their school you will likely receive a different version from each one and in that lies the immense potential for interpretation. What individual persons perceive as important enough to include, what they remember and forget to mention and how they do it (e.g. what colours or materials they use, what is made big or small, shown in detail,...), leave ample room for interpretation. Similarly in a group approach, the discussion regarding the outcome will produce that information. In short, mapping visualises places of importance and meaning (Mikkelsen, 2005).

For the researcher, mapping can also be a good starting point for familiarising oneself with the research environment. It can provide orientation or be a self-assessment as to what stands out to oneself at a certain time in the field research (and potentially how that changes over time). It is also a way to note down and investigate what one has been told by research participants.

The Case of Belfast

The Troubles, the conflict fought in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s up to the Good Friday

agreement in 1998, is unique in that – when considering its enormous national and international weight – it happened in a fairly small geographical area. At its centre were two cities, Belfast and Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland. There were a couple of events that also happened in other places such as in various English cities and in Gibraltar but those were comparatively rare.

Belfast itself isn't a particularly large city and housed around 415,000 inhabitants in 1971 at the start of the Troubles. The numbers dropped to less than 300,000 in 1981 as people left the city for the safer countryside when they could. And even within the city, different parts were affected differently. The lines of conflict had long since been inscribed into the layout of the city by British settler politics and discriminatory practices against the Irish Catholic population concerning housing and work opportunities. This left large parts of in particular working-class neighbourhoods de facto segregated. Major parts of East Belfast were considered protestant neighbourhoods and West Belfast was divided along the now infamous Falls and Shankill Roads while North Belfast was the most mixed neighbourhood with smaller communities or streets belonging to one or the other side and some parts even showing no segregation. The latter, however, was to change quickly after tensions arose when civil rights marches in 1968 were met with police force and soon after the fighting started. Now, a good 25 years after the official end of the conflict, many of these demographics still hold true. While the city centre and the often wealthy and international-academic areas of South Belfast seem to have moved on, the conflict still is rather present especially in West and North Belfast.

West Belfast is largely considered the epicentre of the Troubles, where it started and where people are affected most with virtually everyone having lost friends and family members to the conflict. It is also where most of the peace walls are. These walls were initially built as temporary means to keep fighters from both sides separate and thus gain some control over the increasingly violent situation in the city. While there are many different installations ranging from basic fences and sheet metal structures to several-meter-high walls built from brick or concrete they all have become a permanent part of the city and a daily

visual reminder that things are not well (yet). While there is an ultimate goal of deconstructing the peace walls, those plans from the city are usually met with strong resistance by the ones living in its vicinity. In most places the gates in the walls are still closed every evening and the opening of a new gate is an exercise in trust building every single time. Such segregated living circumstances over more than half a century have, of course, shaped the neighbourhoods even further with daily lives and infrastructure adapting to the increase of closed pathways.

Mapping Segregation

My mapping of in particular West Belfast happened first and foremost through car rides. Several members of the organisation I worked with took me on rides around the neighbourhoods to show me important sites and explain to me the intricacies of living on the interface. Additional information was given during car rides to and from events when tips on good fish and chip shops were mixed with stories about what had happened at particular street corners or in front of a certain building. These tours were substituted by my own visits to large parts of the neighbourhoods on foot and via public transport and by the use of various maps and off-site descriptions. Interestingly, on traditional city maps the segregation is almost invisible. Even the infamous peace walls at the Shankill/Falls interface can only be guessed when you know where they are and by a few small side roads ending suddenly.

When looking at other aspects, the divide becomes more obvious. To avoid any semblance of favouring one community, the city has adapted a strategy of double infrastructure where when something is built on one side of the wall a similar structure will be built on the other side as well. This accounts for schools but also for public structures like libraries or swimming pools. Also, bus lines in West Belfast strictly adhere to the divide with one going through loyalist communities and one through nationalist ones and from there to the city centre on their respective sides of the wall. To go from one side to the other by public transport, the only way would be to go all the way to the city hall and change lines there.

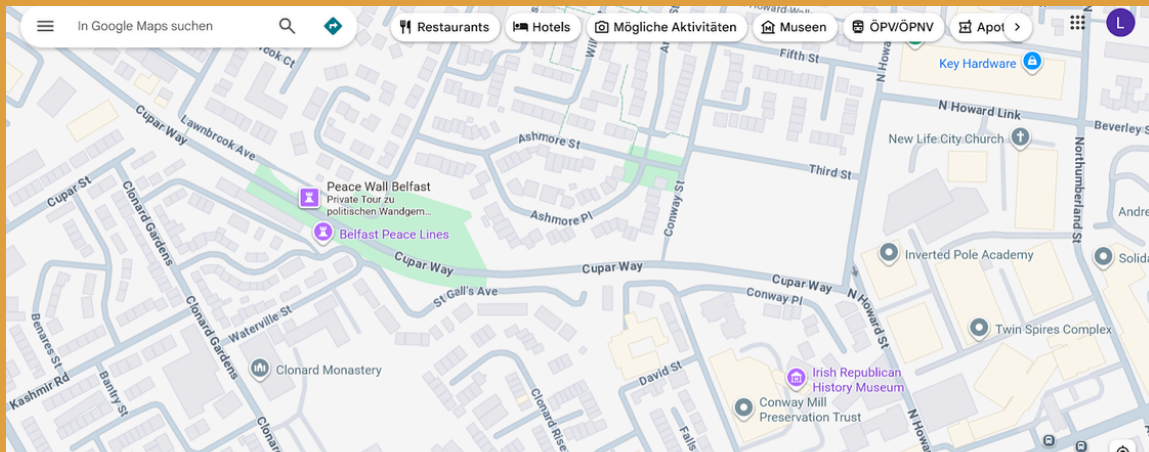


Figure 1: Only that none of the streets South of Cupar Way lead to it, hints at the fact that it is completely fenced off.
Source: Google Maps

Similarly, when the gates are closed at night, the only way is again to go to the city motorway – which has been strategically built to separate West Belfast from the city centre – and cross sides there.

Beyond these infrastructural reinforcements of division, its existence is also clear where there are no peace walls. In parts of West Belfast a street serves as the demarcation between two neighbourhoods and even though this is a far more subtle border, people are very aware of it. As I was told, you can tell community affiliation by the fact on which side of the road people walk. Convenience of infrastructures will sometimes help to cross these divides as was the case with a shopping mall built in North Belfast. One community there had pressured for a permanently closed gate to be opened as it would give them access to a large road and thus spare them a lot of time on their daily commute but the other side had been reluctant. Only when a large shopping centre was built on the side without road access were people more forthcoming about having the gate opened at least during the day. In other cases, fear and mistrust are too great and people choose daily inconveniences to feel safe in their homes.

Concluding Thoughts

West Belfast is a rather productive example for showing the relevance of understanding the geography of conflicts and how mapping can serve that purpose due to the rather obvious infrastructural challenges and the clear impact they have on people's lives.

We shape and are shaped by our surroundings and the segregation in West Belfast can easily be identified as a spiral.

Stories from elderly inhabitants tell a clear narration of how much more common it used to be to have friends from both communities. The increase in walls and segregated housing has led to a further alienation of the communities that now necessitates initiatives where people come together voluntarily to demystify the estranged other.

Yet, this is not to discount people's fears or the very real purpose the walls serve, since they were built higher and higher over the years to prevent the throwing of explosives. They make assassinations significantly harder by hampering the get-away and quite a few had to be closed again, at least temporarily, during the aftermath of Brexit and the tremendous insecurities it caused in Northern Ireland which led to riots and street fights.

What mapping can do, is show us the reality of the people living on the interface. How the divide is inscribed in their lives – and bodies – by how it shapes their day to day. It is thus, despite how we might instinctively associate maps with positivist notions of facts and truths, a means to understand deeply personal stories of living in a not-yet-peace.

Teufelsberg

Grunewald Berlin

Aaron Sturk

Traveling to Berlin and in need of some adventure instead of visiting the Museumsinsel, the Brandenburger Tor, or waiting an insufferable amount of time in a line in the cold just to get turned away at the door of Berghain? If you are a fan of history, art, street culture and hiking, with the desire to get off the beaten path, then the Teufelsberg might just be the perfect place for you.

An eerie yet beautiful relic of the Cold War, the Teufelsberg or the “Devil’s Mountain” has a long and colorful history, just like the various art works that cover its walls. Before there was even a Teufelsberg, there was a Nazi military-technical college in its place. After the Allies defeated the third Reich and Berlin was split in two in the aftermath, they attempted to destroy the former college. When they did not succeed in leveling the entire complex, they decided to bury what was left with the tons of rubble that had accumulated in Berlin during the war. This mountain of rubble, or “Trummerberg” was developed into Berlin’s second largest man-made “Berg”, packed with soil and peppered with trees, overtime turning into a roughly 120m high mountain in the middle of the Grunewald. Perfect for hiking and mountain biking, the ghostly alluring Teufelsberg sits at the crown, looking over the rest of the city beneath it. The Teufelsberg with its four insect-egg like radomes that give it its iconic shape, was used during the Cold War as a spy listening outpost by the Western Bloc to monitor and capture communications from the Soviet controlled Eastern Bloc. Taking place in the outskirts of Berlin - the aptly titled, if outdated, “City of Spies”, the Teufelsberg is an example of the precarious and volatile nature of the Cold War. Its very unique form of indirect conflict relying mostly upon deterrence, proxy wars, and most excitingly-subterfuge, provides peace studies, political science/international relations/history students and adventurous tourists alike the chance to see an individual relic of an important developmental conflict in the Post-WW2



Source: Photograph by author

landscape.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Teufelsberg listening post was slowly abandoned. Without a purpose, and with constantly changing owners, groups of street artists crept in and started to breathe new life into the now vacant and forsaken skeleton of the Cold War, adorning its walls with thought provoking and complex graffiti pieces - an art form that has its own culturally important place in history.

After paying an affordable entry fee of 10€ to access the barbed-wire fenced compound (8€ for discounted individuals), one enters into an open-air art installation paying homage to two different art forms: graffiti and murals. The distinction between the two can be made all the more glaring within the Teufelsberg as they occupy the same space and complement each other's presence, curating a genuine feast for the eye without losing their thought-provoking nature. The former invokes a sense of counter-

culture/ sub-culture in tandem with an image of basic to intricate tags, criminality tied to specific ethnic/class groups, and 'low' art.

The latter is connected more with narrative based, legally permitted and commissioned art, with the goal of creating an "aesthetic environment" which has led this particular artform to be criticized as an agent of gentrification. Although graffiti has ancient roots (i.e., cave paintings, masonic symbols, greco-roman inscriptions), it stems from pop culture during the 1960s in the United States from marginalized social groups in urban metropolitan areas and hip-hop, retaining its air of rebelliousness. Murals share the same historical roots as graffiti, with its origin in cave paintings depicting hunter-gatherer societies, but since then expanding into spiritual arenas (i.e., Egyptian tombs afterlife depictions, Medieval and Renaissance Church frescoes). Murals experienced a resurgence in the 1920s through Mexican artists utilizing them as a way to promote national identity and spread social messages.



Source: Photograph by author

Both art forms serve a purpose: to stamp one's identity onto a surface, but to also convey a message for others to be interpreted - some rather literally. A piece depicting Uncle Sam, a notorious symbolic fictional-figure of American nationalism, riding a missile with the bold and inflammatory statement, "Thank God it's our bomb". Beyond the complementary composition of color and the surface level humor of the image lies the deeper valid critique of the United States as perpetrator of war and as a war machine, responsible for the destabilization of many countries and engaging in ideological

interventionist wars. Political pieces abound here. A subtle image of a fox carrying a dead dove with an olive branch in its mouth. A neon pink, blue, and orange piece of two Vladimir Putins kissing one another with the title "ONE LOVE".

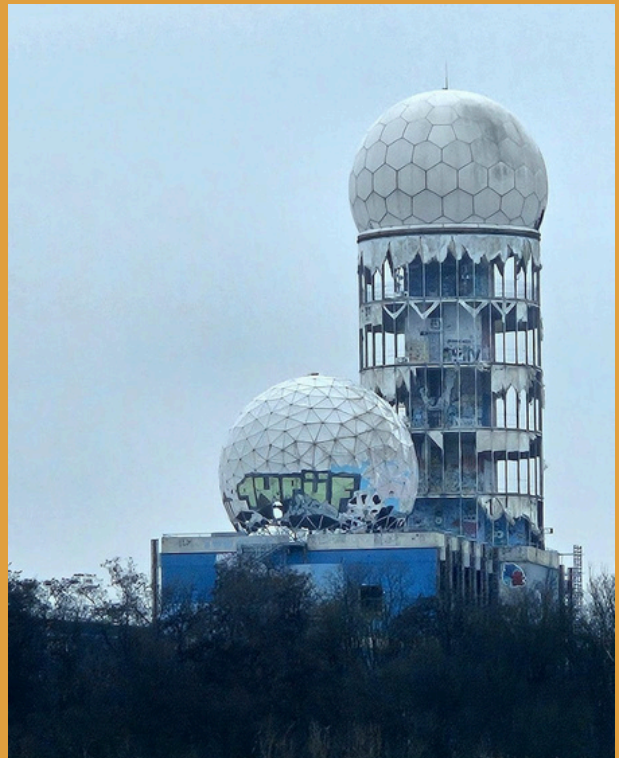
A provocative piece of a young Black boy behind a barbed wire fence shooting his sling-shot painted across a multi-colored background titled, "Fuck Your Borders", openly critiquing the refugee and migration crisis that overwhelmingly affects populations of the so-called Global South struggling with colonial legacy structures.

However, not all the art here is of an explicitly political nature. Many showcase the artistic capabilities of the artist themselves, their history and culture, or celebrate the environment - be it natural or urban. A mural depiction of the Teufelsberg radomes as giant insect eggs, a neon cityscape that gives the impression that you are walking along in the middle of it, an optical illusion of a silver humanoid emerging from the walls it is painted on, a portrait of a joyous black woman with goddess braids and a bucket hat holding a spray paint can, to a young girl celebrating her self-expression through dance. Peppered among these different mural depictions: the political, the natural, the urban, the literal to the abstract, there are also many images and symbols depicting peace. Either through the literal word "peace" or its many symbolic images (i.e., the peace sign, the V-sign, doves with olive branches).

This concept has come up in discussions within the Peace and Conflict Study program at the Otto-von-Guericke University, where students attempt to visualize their own ideas of what an amorphous concept such as peace is due to its own individually contextual and subjective nature.

Besides the abandoned complex exhibit, there is also a small outdoor eating area with a few food trucks serving a variety of beverages and food options for the guests, however depending on the time of year you go, they may or may not be present - so always bring your own snacks just in case! There is a more traditional museum section that goes into detail the story of the Teufelsberg, its history during WWII and its role during the Cold War, culminating in its evolution into the exhibit it is today - gift shop included.

So strap on some good hiking boots or sneakers (it's only a 30 minute hike from the nearest S-Bahn) and take your friends on an illuminating excursion to experience a form of counter-culture / sub-culture art. In contrast to the abandoned spy outpost, a place of utmost secrecy and state confidentiality, the Teufelsberg creates a unique environment to think about the past, reflect on the messages of the artists and how they relate to the various conflicts, and most importantly the hopes our world has today.



Source: Photograph by author



The witnesses around us

Understanding History and Politics through Architecture. Plattenbau Estates in Magdeburg Neue Neustadt.

Majbrit Hüttenhein

Architecture and the buildings around us reflect and affect our lives every day. Our houses, the places we spend our free time, and the way to the bus – all these shape the way we perceive our world and constitute images of the political world we live in. At the same time, the political views held by societies and regimes, their ideals and wishes, shape (city) architecture (Minkenberg, 2014; Barnstone, 2006). This relationship is constantly discussed and re-evaluated; buildings evolve and political priorities change. These dynamics can be observed in the cities we live in, which make them witnesses of history, political change, and contemporary lifestyles. This photo essay gives insights into the architecture of Magdeburg's district Neue Neustadt, which is situated in the northern center towards the city's outskirts. At the end of World War II, Magdeburg, like many other cities in Germany, was almost completely destroyed. Many people were homeless and needed new residences quickly. Magdeburg, located in East Germany, fell under Soviet Rule and was part of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The socialist regime faced a housing crisis while at the same time having a small budget to facilitate new housing and rebuild destroyed cities. "Plattenbau" buildings were built all over the country since the mid-1950s as a cheap way to create many new flats at once (Hofmann, 2024). The rectangular buildings are mainly made out of concrete slabs and characteristically have many stories. They are relatively easy to build since the pre-manufactured concrete slabs only have to be put together on-site, which gives all of them a very similar block-like look. During the time, Plattenbau corresponded to the zeitgeist as well as to the political ideology of the socialist government. The buildings presented something modern and new, different from the destroyed old buildings in the city center that were then abandoned and in need of pricey renovation.

Plattenbau meant embarking on a prosperous future with living space for everyone, including electricity and hot water. The estates featured everyday infrastructure like markets, doctors, as well as childcare facilities, and were an expression of the socialist lifestyle (Richter, 2006). The uniformity of the buildings coincided with the socialist ideals of not being able to derive a person's status from their home. Over time, houses gained more and more stories, and buildings were placed close to one another to accommodate as many people as possible. The many flats and straight passages thus created an almost panoptic way of public surveillance.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Germany's reunification in 1990 zeitgeist and political ideas shifted. People started to seek individuality, and the once novel style of construction was increasingly considered ugly and hostile to life, with its high, uniform facades that do not allow for much sunlight to reach the ground, creating a sometimes even intimidating atmosphere, which was also mocked by West German media (Richter, 2006). In recent years, city administrations and housing cooperatives have renovated many Plattenbau buildings, which are still considered useful and necessary to accommodate the increasing population in cities (Ottersbach, 2023). In Magdeburg, facades began to be renewed and splashed with color and artwork as an attempt to bring change, individuality, and new life to the districts.

Magdeburg Neue Neustadt showcases a fascinating example of tracing (East) Germany's post-war history through architecture. Contrasts abound: renewed Plattenbau buildings stand beside older ones now serving as social housing, small detached houses sit in the shadows of high-rise buildings, and processes of change and renewal coexist with enduring GDR memories. The city's architecture opens a window to its past and present to those who observe curiously.

PART I – LOOKING AROUND



Figure 1: Sundays in Neue Neustadt, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 2: Houses can talk. Older Plattenbau estate, partly Social Housing, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 3: Walking the streets of Neue Neustadt, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 4: Side by side, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 5: The view between houses, contrasting living realities in Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024

PART II – THE DEPARTURE



Figure 6: More color, more individuality?, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 7: Painting the town, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 8: Same but different, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024



Figure 9: Attempts to new life, painted and planted facades, Magdeburg Neue Neustadt, 2024

Art, Power And Politics

Pragya Gautam



Source: Canva

Art has always mirrored the politics and trends of the culture it has been a part of. Kathak: a classical dance form in South Asia was once performed in Hindu temples to depict stories of gods and goddesses. Soon it transformed into a charming form of entertainment with modern gharanas (distinctive dance styles) after the Mughals conquered the Indian states (Pant, 2025). Art pieces as souvenirs and state gifts, exhibitions to hold cultural diplomacy high, and culture as national identity have always made their presence in global geopolitics. But what happens when art must evolve through change in political structure? What happens when art rather than souvenirs acts as a symbol of colonialism? What happens when art theft makes headlines and the global citizens celebrate?

The recent art theft at the Louvre on 19th October 2025, left the world stunned. Michel Guerrin, a communist from Le Monde, declared this jewelry theft or art theft as a cultural matter since he claimed that it wasn't the jewels that were stolen, but rather a French soul. The article claims that the French were robbed of a collective memory of the nation's past. While many people were disheartened, some over social media posted about anti-colonialism, anti-elites or capitalism (Guerrin, 2025).

An article by Belén Fernández on Al Jazeera discusses how people across the globe celebrated the loot as a “symbolic middle finger” to obscene inequality and misplaced priorities. The loot was a classic example of security mismanagement by the museum itself and treasures, as well as artefacts, acquired by such museums were nothing but wealth earned by royals who “built it on the backs of working classes” (Fernandez, 2025). The aforementioned article about stolen relics from colonial possession talks about the exclamation made by Shimrit Lee (curator and scholar) and explains how the term “loot” is derived from the Hindi word “Lut”, meaning stolen property. She explains the word was appropriated by the East India Company during British control of India (Fernandez, 2025).

This brings me to the Met Gala of 2025 when Diljit Dosanjh, a Punjabi Indian singer, who wanted to pay tribute to Sir Bhupinder Singh (Maharaja of Patiala, a city from India) was denied permission to wear a Royal Patiala necklace. The necklace was made in 1928 as per the Maharajas order. The fact that Emma Chamberlain was allowed to wear the same necklace in 2022 triggered outrage about how a white Youtuber was allowed access to a piece of significant cultural history while people of the Maharaja's own culture were denied it. Netizens remarked over the curator's ownership of a colonised jewel since the jewelry had mysteriously disappeared in April 1948 and was seen again in 1982 (amidst the Indian Independence Movement in Britain) at the Sotheby's Patiala Royal Family auction in Geneva (Yeates, 2023; Times of India, 2025).

A similar incident followed in 2026 when famous actress Margot Robbie wore a heart shaped diamond necklace to a premiere event of Wuthering heights and described it as an “Elizabeth Taylor's necklace given to her by Cartier for the event” (Shrivastava, 2026). While she is partly correct, her complete ignorance about its history in India had people fuming. The necklace's origins trace back to the Mughal Empire in India where Mughal Empress Nur Jahan donned the necklace given by her

husband Emperor Jehangir. It was later passed down to her son, Shah Jahan, who gifted it to his beloved wife Mumtaz, whose remembrance led him to build the Taj Mahal. This feign of ignorance by Margot Robbie led to people tracing back its colonial history and accusing Robbie of wearing a stolen necklace (Daily Mail, 2026). The ignorance of not knowing the royal history behind the necklace was termed outrageous and arrogant (Hindustan Times, 2026).

During recent times, however, artifacts have also acted as a form of reconciliation in global geopolitics. Sonia Awale's article from Nepali Times stated that artifacts such as statues and necklaces that had been looted from Nepal mostly during the 1980s were found for sale at different galleries and museums. However, 198 sacred objects have been returned to Nepal. A 400 year old Matrika Necklace was being auctioned in Belgium in June 2025, however after protests from participants at a conference in Kathmandu, the auction was halted by the auctioneer over ethical concerns with the background and origin of the artifact (Awale, 2025).

Nations worldwide are returning and tracing the history of artifacts while addressing historical injustice and colonial legacy. This transparency and repatriation has been serving as a diplomatic bridge between countries. A similar trend was observed in France, Germany, the United States and the Netherlands as well. Based on the reparations agreement signed in 2022, the Dutch government returned artifacts seized by colonial authorities and returned them to Indonesia. This action was heavily influenced by the Netherlands's efforts towards restitution and repatriation (Associated Press, 2025). Similarly, in January 2026 the French Senate approved a draft bill to return colonial era artifacts. President Macron has not only taken accountability in admitting the past abuses done by France against Africa, but has taken restitution of the looted artifacts as a significant turn to establish a new relationship with the African continent (France 24, 2026).

While art is known for its aesthetic and material value, it has also established itself in modern times as a medium for reconciliation and as a peaceful diplomatic relationship tool.



Avatar

Character Analysis From a Constructivist Perspective

Asya Girgin

Constructivism is an International Relations theory in which actors shape the nature of international relations with their actions. In relation to this, movies often reflect international systems or events. James Cameron's Avatar series also falls into this paradigm. This article analyzes the relation of movies to Constructivism, with a focus on how the identities of the actors are changing in line with their interactions and interests, as the concept of identity is an integral part of the constructivist approach.

A prominent example is the character arc of the protagonist, Jake Sully. His initial duty was to befriend and understand the Na'vi and bring this information into the hands of the military. His duty was portrayed as a scientific discovery, but the main aim was to instrumentally aid the military's retrieval of 'unobtainium,' as it was an important resource for energy. In this context, it is a high-value material that is used for high-tech structures. However, after getting to know the Na'vi better and falling in love, Jake felt more connected to the Na'vi people and less to humans. The reason why he felt this way could be explained by several reasons. The first is that he was not perceived as an important part of the military due to being physically disabled. Secondly, he was just a replacement for his twin, who passed away. Since they had the same DNA, he was able to use the avatar's body that was created for his twin. Due to his disability, being in an avatar's body felt like freedom to Jake. Yet, even though Jake liked being in that world with a physically similar body to the Na'vi people, it was not enough for him to get accepted by them. Jake struggled a lot to make his way into the clan. He first strengthened his ties with Neytiri, who taught Jake essential parts of life on Pandora. The turning point was when Jake fought with the Na'vi people against the Sky-people (the name for humans). In this case, it is possible to see that the feeling of belonging is constructed as the main pillar of his character change, thus linking it to the identity part of constructivism.

Despite being a Sky-person, Jake was now accepted as part of the Na'vi people. This character change can be connected to constructivism through the notion that events or interactions may cause a change in behavior. As mentioned above, constructivism is mainly about the changing identities of actors. The main character, Jake Sully, goes through a drastic change in that matter. Firstly, his physical condition and environment take a completely different form. He now lives in a different body and on a different planet with its own societal dynamics. In line with constructivism, Jake undergoes an identity change. Due to his physically restricted life on Earth, he feels free in his new form. Furthermore, he develops a deep understanding of life in Pandora through his interactions with the Na'vi people. For example, as the feeling of belonging increases, Jake sides with the Na'vi people to protect them and the planet, not only because it is the right thing to do but also because the Na'vi people became his people and Pandora became his home. As the story progresses, the Earth becomes less habitable; the reason why Sky-people come to colonize Pandora. In the Sky-People's mission to conquer Pandora, their main enemy became Jake Sully. Jake, now one of the Na'vi, not only fully integrated into the tribe but also became the symbol for their resistance. He led the Na'vi people and brought different clans to fight together against the common enemy. In the second movie, Jake and his family leave their own clan for a safer life and go to live with a different one. At first, this other clan did not want them, as Jake and his family's presence put them at risk, which might lead the Sky-people to find them. These two clans are very different in an important aspect: the latter one has a calmer and more peaceful way of living compared to Jake's clan. However, unlike the rest of the people of this clan, their leader trusts Jake and lets them stay there. The major reason behind his trust is that Jake had acquired the title Toruk Makto. This title holds great importance for the

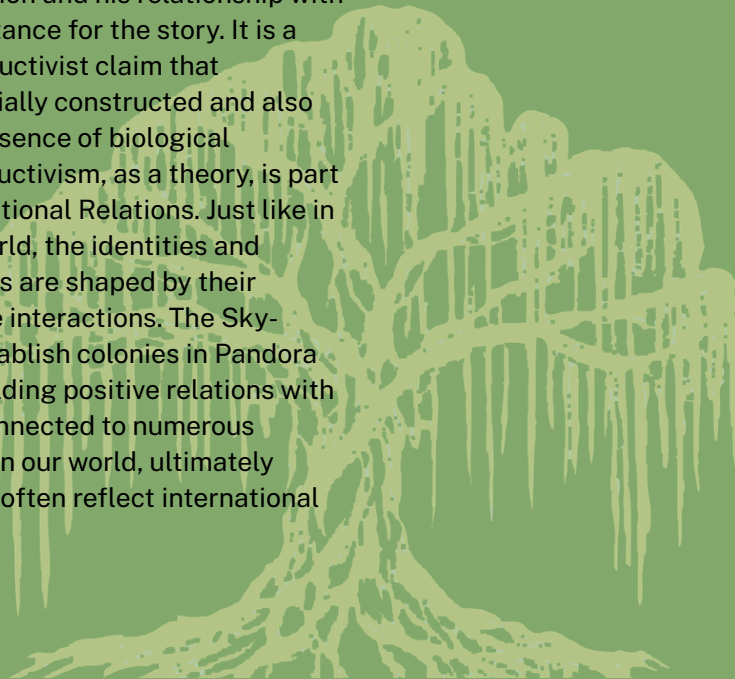
Na'vi people, and it refers to a person who could domesticate the mightiest avian creature of Pandora, with not many people having this title. Slowly but surely, their relations develop over time, even if they have conflicts from time to time. The second movie continues with a large-scale war between the Sky-people and the Na'vi. These circumstances push these two clans to fight together against a common enemy. To further elaborate, it is possible to see elements of constructivism in these events. After living with them and learning their ways, Jake did not care about his initial duty anymore as he felt more connected to the Na'vi people and his new life in Pandora. This is an indicator that his stance had changed after a series of positive social interactions, which is also a part of the constructivist approach. According to constructivism, social relations between the actors are shaped through their interactions. Following the above-mentioned interactions, he feels like he is now one of them, with his main duty being to protect the planet and the people. Another element that might be connected to constructivism is the conflict between the clans. It might also be linked to the same understanding of the approach. These clans live far away from each other and do not have much prior interaction. The lack of interaction and different understanding of life led to a socially constructed mutual distrust between them. That is the reason why the other clans' people were hesitant to welcome Jake and his family. When the Sky-people come, they fight together to protect their planet, which is again a constructed relationship between these two clans, as they have no other choice. In other words, as advocated by constructivism, the social and security circumstances they are in help them to construct a new relationship for a common purpose of protecting their planet. One of the strongest depictions of constructivism is through a character called Spider. Spider is the biological son of the main villain of the series, Colonel Quaritch, who has been leading the campaign against the Na'vi people since the beginning of the first movie. In the first movie, his son, Spider, is born in Pandora. Spider stays on Pandora, and Jake, in a way, adopts him. Spider spends all of his time with Jake's kids. Despite being a human, he fits well with the Na'vi people and the way of life in Pandora. The only thing that created a problem

for him was that he was not able to breathe the fresh air of Pandora, like other humans, and had to use a mask all the time. This breathing problem reminded Jake that Spider is a human being with human traits. Jake and his partner, Neytiri, decided that he should be sent back to where he belongs, to Earth. However, Spider and the other kids reject this idea. Despite being a human biologically, he does not feel like he belongs on Earth. As he was born and spent all his life in Pandora. Later in the movie, he becomes unable to breathe due to a technical problem with his mask, one of Jake's kids, Kiri, magically saves him. Through her special spiritual connection, she connects Spider to Pandora. After that, his biological traits adapt, and he starts to breathe normally without needing a mask. At first, everyone was happy to see his miraculous adaptation. However, the Sky-people intend to make use of this adaptation in an evil way. They catch Spider, examine his body, and try to understand his adaptation to ease their way to establish colonies. Jake dislikes this situation so much that he instinctively wants to kill Spider. He thinks that this is for the best for the Na'vi people and the planet. Nevertheless, in the end, as Jake sees Spider as his son, he cannot bring himself to kill Spider.

To elaborate, in the story of Spider, it is possible to observe a socially constructed relationship. Spider was born in very unusual circumstances. The events of the first film left him orphaned, which led to his being adopted by Jake's family. Jake watched him grow up and cared for him over those years; despite not having a biological relationship and Spider being human, he saw him as a son. In line with constructivism, Spider being an orphan and spending his whole life as a member of Jake's family shapes Jake's stance towards Spider, as the social bonds help to construct identities. Under these circumstances, even if he considered killing him for a moment for the sake of the planet and the Na'vi people, he was unable to do so, due to their relationship. In the end, he decided that they would find another way to protect both Spider and the planet.

Throughout this article, the focus is on the events of James Cameron's movie series Avatar with a constructivist approach. The main character, Jake Sully, is the main symbol of constructivism in this analysis. He undergoes

major changes to become the leader of his clan. His story starts with him being a replacement for his twin, then takes a major turn when he gets into an avatar's body. Getting accepted by the local Na'vi people and fighting on their side against Sky-people due to the feeling of belonging and finally being respected as the leader, are all through social interactions, which link his story to the constructivist approach, as interactions are crucial parts to construct the identities of actors. The negative or positive interactions change the actors' stances toward each other, which can also be observed in the above-mentioned examples. The other major event of the movie series, as mentioned above, is his settling into a new life in the new clan. Despite the prior prejudices and mistrust between the two sides, fighting to protect what they have in common — their people and planet — they develop better relations over time, which are again built through social interactions. And finally, Spider's position and his relationship with Jake also hold importance for the story. It is a reflection of a constructivist claim that relationships are socially constructed and also may outweigh the absence of biological relationships. Constructivism, as a theory, is part of the field of International Relations. Just like in the movies, in our world, the identities and interests of the actors are shaped by their positive and negative interactions. The Sky-people's effort to establish colonies in Pandora and Jake's family building positive relations with a new clan can be connected to numerous international events in our world, ultimately showing that movies often reflect international systems.



A Ten Minute Mission:

The Least Price for Freedom by W. Hundee Hurrissoo

Ababiyaa Ahmed

Memoirs of political imprisonment often provide a disturbing window into the cruelty of particular regimes, but W. Hundee Hurrissoo's 'A Ten Minute Mission: The Least Price for Freedom' goes deeper. In roughly 270 pages, the former Editor-in-Chief of Ethiopia's first Oromo newspaper chronicles not only the physical suffering that the Derg regime inflicted on him and his compatriots but also the moral and political logic that enabled and normalized such suffering. Set during what the author calls the "dwindling" phase of the Red Terror, a period no less horrifying than its peak, Hundee's account exposes how a revolutionary state founded on promises of equality and the end of feudalism turned its violence inward against its own citizens, and most systematically against the Oromo people. The memoir reveals how ordinary bureaucratic acts, such as, a routine meeting at a ministry, or even a polite invitation to join a "short mission," became instruments of terror and part of an administrative machinery that both preceded the Red Terror and continued long after its formal end.

The irony embedded in the book's title frames the entire narrative. The phrase "A Ten Minute Mission," spoken so casually by a Derg security official as Hundee was taken from his office, was meant to reassure him that his detention would be brief. *"We need your help... come with us for a short mission. You'll be back in ten minutes."* These words instead became a metaphor for deception and state cruelty, as the promised ten minutes stretched into nearly twelve years of imprisonment or, as Hundee notes at the end of his memoir, "4,040 days." From his first moments in Derg's custody, Hundee exposes the blurred boundary between the seemingly reassuring language of authority and the reality and inevitability of violence. He achieves this through the narrative's carefully crafted pace that collapses distance in time and space, forcing the reader to feel as though each stage of arrest, interrogation, and torture is unfolding in real time.



Source: Photograph by author

More than a retrospective account of what he was subjected to, his testimony, therefore, is a sustained examination of what occurs when a state turns truth, law, and even time itself into instruments of domination.

A multigenerational exile

W/Yohanes Hundee Hurrissoo was born in Arsii in 1944, but the roots of his family go back to Warra Jarso, Salaalee, in present day North Shewa Zone of Oromia. A member of the Tulama Oromo whose confrontation with the Abyssinian kingdom began in earnest, his fourth great-grandfather, Waaree Obsaa, killed one of the invaders encamped in his village and fled to Ada'aa Bargaa. After a long and arduous battle, his grandfather, Hurriso Boruu, was pushed further South and eventually settled in Arsi, where Hundee was born. This legacy of resistance and displacement would continue to shape Hundee's own trajectory in life.

As a landless shepherd in Arsi, Hundee attributes his entry into elementary school to a matter of mere accident. He completed eighth grade in 1962 and went on to enroll at the Debre Birhan Teacher Training Institute. After graduating in 1966, he began his career as a teacher in Bale.

When he joined Haile Selassie I University in 1971, the campus was, in his words, "a vast sea of anti-oppression movement."

From 1975 to 1976, he participated in the Derg's literacy campaign, Idgat Bahibrat, in Wollo. Equipped with a degree in history and educational administration, he joined Bariisaa, Ethiopia's first Oromo-language newspaper, which by then had been operating for five years. Bariisaa, meaning "Dawn", symbolized an emerging cultural awakening described as "the emergence of freedom's light, marking the end of a century of slavery." That dawn, however, was swiftly extinguished when the junta took several measures to curtail its circulation and eventually confiscate it. Despite being published in the unfamiliar Sabaean alphabet, Bariisaa's daily circulation soon surpassed the more established Amharic weekly, Yezareyitu Ethiopia, prompting the Derg to confiscate and strip it of its editorial independence. In effect, it was turned into a translation service of the other government newspaper, Addis Zemen, into Oromo. This caused the paper's circulation to fall from thirty thousand copies to less than two thousand, but the newspaper did not fully disappear as they had hoped. Repeated attempts were made to either shut it down entirely or at least force it into Amharic. When censorship alone proved insufficient to achieve the desired goal, the state resorted to intimidating the newsboys that sold it, with bulk copies seized and burned publicly. Any remaining copies were redirected to non-Oromo regions such as Gondar and Eritrea, or to Derg offices where, as Hundee notes, "nobody wanted to see them, let alone read them." While the censure of Bariisaa was intended to contain the perceived dangers of an emerging Oromo political expression, the same logic extended to the individual, as the process of attempting to erase the organization necessitated the disappearance of Oromo figures like Hundee, whom the state regarded as a threat to its narrative, hence needing to disappear.

It is no surprise then that his arrest was almost as bureaucratic as the newspaper's censure in its casual cruelty. During a meeting at the Ministry of Information, he questioned the decision to change the broadcasting time of the Oromo language radio program, an act of professional inquiry that immediately aroused suspicion. The sarcastic, condescending response he received was an early sign that the future was not going to be kind to Hundee. And he was not wrong.

When he returned to his office the following day, he found security officers waiting, one of them already sitting in his chair with an attitude that reeked of superiority complex. Within minutes, he was shackled and led away, leaving, as he writes, "my office once and for all." The complete abruptness of this moment matures into the memoir's central tension as the everyday life of a teacher and journalist clashes with the ideological paranoia of a state where simple acts of inquiry and doing one's job were seen as no less than subversion. The nearly twelve years that followed, spent in prison without due process under what Hundee calls the Derg's "Terror Republic," marked the beginning of a new chapter in Ethiopia, one in which the social fabric of the whole country was shaken to its core, until, as he later wrote, "every sense of humanity was reduced to rubble."

The Machineries of Torture

The opening chapters describing imprisonment in the Grand Palace and Maikalawi are among the most disturbing. The Palace, once a symbol of imperial authority, becomes what Hundee calls a "human storehouse." In Maikalawi, the central Revolutionary Investigation Organization, he is assigned to Cell Six, a sixteen square meter space holding forty-two men. Packed tightly together, the prisoners could only breathe one another's air, enduring suffocating heat, hunger, and humiliation.

Hundee's descriptions of torture are restrained yet devastating. His first interrogation unfolds in silence, with seven men staring at him for hours, forcing him to internalize guilt before a single blow is struck. When silence fails, violence follows. He is beaten until he sees "purple stars" and becomes almost deaf. Later, the so-called "Good military punishment" requires him to run, fall, and lift a thirty-kilogram stone a hundred times, a horrific imitation of discipline designed to destroy the body.

Similarly, in a room grotesquely called the "cake room," he encounters Ethiopia's own lexicon of cruelty. The Stalin stick, he explains, involved binding a prisoner's knees between tied hands, suspending the body upside down, and beating the soles of the feet. When his feet went numb, he writes, "they poured cold saltwater to revive the dead cells so that I would feel the pain." His tormentors sang a revolutionary song as they beat him, turning patriotism into ritualized

violence. When this failed to break him, interrogator Getachew Mamo introduced the thumbscrew, which Hundee describes as a European torture device from the fifteenth century, crushing his hands until his fingers felt as though they would explode. Eight toenails were later removed, and his left sole was reduced to raw flesh, the white bone visible each time the bandages were cut away. One of the memoir's most emblematic scenes occurs when Mamo, perhaps testing his will, offers him lunch from the Hilton Hotel. Hundee throws the food back in defiance, declaring, "A pistol is not a stick. It is not for beating. It is for shooting. You are a coward. You know only how to beat donkeys." Mamo's response is chilling in its calm certainty. "We do not waste a bullet on you. We mince you into pieces like this."

Karchallee: A Place of Despair and the Twilight of Hope

Transferred to Karchallee prison in 1984, Hundee encountered marginally improved physical conditions, including more space, sunlight, and occasional visits, but the psychological violence continued. After repeated fainting, he was placed in the Patients' House, which he describes bluntly as "a death cell," a place where prisoners awaited their demise. There, he slept beside corpses, the smell of death ever-present.



W. Hundee Hurrisoo
Source: Photograph by author

Between 1985 and 1987, he was repeatedly misdiagnosed with tuberculosis, a process he bitterly refers to as a "TB cheese play," and was forced to purchase expensive medication himself. Even illness became an instrument of exploitation. In May 1987, a cholera outbreak

swept through the prison.

The government refused Red Cross intervention, and at least four hundred inmates died within four days. "The corpses were being loaded onto lorries and tractors like logs," he recalls, transforming human bodies into anonymous cargo.

The execution of his four comrades in 1986, Muhe Abdo, Gazzaahiny Kasahun, Kabbada Damisseee, and Lieutenant Yiggazuu Waaqee, deepened the atmosphere of despair. When amnesty was announced in 1989, most OLF members were excluded. Hundee's release finally came on May 23, 1991, as the Derg regime collapsed. With quiet irony and having outlived a monstrous regime, he concludes, "Thus, I completed my ten-minute mission in 4,040 days."

Significance of the book

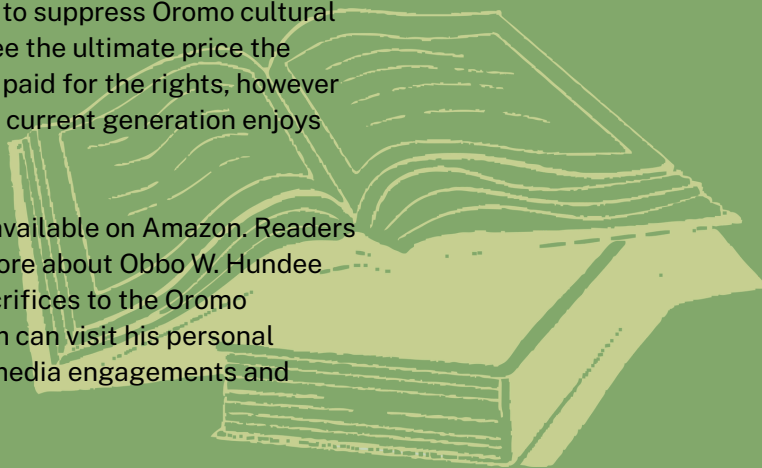
While the central aim of the book is to serve as a memoir, Hundee's personal history of displacement prior to and post-prison becomes emblematic of Ethiopian state building itself. The southward movement of his family, first driven by Abyssinian conquest and later by successive regimes, mirrors the territorial and administrative expansion of the Ethiopian state. What is often described as consolidation appears in the memoir as a continuous process of violence that repeatedly uprooted Oromo communities and redefined belonging through coercion. In this sense, *A Ten Minute Mission* functions not only as the memoir of a prisoner of conscience but also as a narrative of the making of modern Ethiopia. Both processes unfold through violence. The expansion of the former Abyssinian kingdom displaced Oromos further south, including Hundee's own family, while the later modernization of state institutions culminated in his complete exile from the country. State formation, in this reading, corresponds directly to Hundee's gradual removal from political and social life, ending not in reintegration, but in forced exile abroad. Yet the memoir is not only a record of erasure. Running throughout the text is an assertion captured in the Oromo notion of *Jirra*, meaning "we are here, we exist," a claim echoed today by the Qeerroo generation. Despite displacement, torture, and exile, Hundee refuses to disappear. Through his survival, and through the memory of

his comrades, both those who endured and those who perished under the weight of the state's machinery, the struggle persists. The memoir shows that violence, no matter how vast or systematic, cannot erase those who stand for Dhugaa, truth in Oromo. In the end, it is not the victim but the perpetrator who withers. Hundee and his legacy endure, as does the cause for which he suffered, now carried forward by a young generation with even less tolerance for injustice.

After his release, he briefly served as an OLF representative in Ethiopia's Transitional Government and later sought political asylum in Germany, where he continued his advocacy in exile. Now, at eighty-one, he holds the status of Gadaamoojjii, an elder within the Oromo Gadaa system, and occupies a position of moral authority, advocating and writing for the freedom and peace he still longs for.

A Ten-Minute Mission is a book everyone should read to understand how the Derg regime systematically tried to suppress Oromo cultural expression and to see the ultimate price the previous generation paid for the rights, however incomplete, that the current generation enjoys today.

The book is readily available on Amazon. Readers who wish to learn more about Obbo W. Hundee Hurrissoo and his sacrifices to the Oromo struggle for freedom can visit his personal website, where his media engagements and updates are posted.



Board Games for Peace

Decolonising Play

Tenzin Murry

Board Games are often dismissed as relics of a pre-digital era, having been superseded by the far more popular format of video games or simply 'grown out of'. Despite this, they persist not only as a hobby for serious enthusiasts, but also among people of all ages as an analog means of connection, competition and fun - and nowhere more than here in Germany. Board game shops, clubs, cafés and bars can be found in most towns, and every German family will have their own small collection of games at home. So why should a cherished, family-friendly German pastime be critically examined by students of Peace and Conflict Studies? According to BoardGameGeek, the world's largest online board game forum and database, six of the ten highest-ranked board games of all time are explicitly centred on warfare. Of the remaining four, two focus on industrial or extraplanetary expansion, while the remaining two concern scientific and technological advancement. This pattern generally continues among the top one hundred games. Research conducted by Tanya Pobuda in 2018 found that over 93 percent of these games were designed by White men, 2.4 percent by White women, with 4.1 percent by non-White men and 2.6 percent by non-White women, respectively (Pobuda 2018). While perhaps unsurprising, these insights could suggest that the thematic and mechanical tendency towards military and expansionist themes that seem to accompany board games may not be inherent to the format itself, but rather the people designing games. What would a board game designed by a more diverse group of international, peace-conscious students look like? This article will examine some of the conflict dynamics embedded in the format and explore the potential for critical new approaches to board games focused on peace instead of war.

Games invite deeper analysis, and substantial research already exists into the different kinds of political and social narratives embedded in popular video games. But board games are an analog format in which narratives are both emergent through the mechanics of play as well as embedded into the game narrative and aesthetics by the designers. Take *Settlers of Catan* (1995), a beloved German family game from the 1990s. While the game may at first appear more harmonious than the ruthless landlordism of a game like *Monopoly* (1935) (ironically, a game originally designed as a critique of Capitalism), *Catan* is ultimately a game about settler colonial expansion. The island of *Catan* is imagined as an uninhabited, resource-rich frontier, available for extraction, trade, and development.

To win the game, players have to expand settlements and roads across the island as quickly and efficiently as possible. Sharing space is out of the question, and play becomes a scramble for territory. Other games are even less subtle about the attached narratives - *Puerto Rico* (2002), another 'Eurogame' classic (rank #54 in the top one hundred board games of all time), is a game about managing a colonial plantation.



Source: Photograph by author

From the game's description - "The resource cycle of the game is that players grow crops which they exchange for points or doubloons... Buildings and plantations do not work unless they are manned by colonists." Within this mechanical abstraction, the historical realities of forced labour are implicit, but hidden. The system requires a labouring population to keep plantations productive, yet the enslaved peoples upon whom the colonial economy depends are rendered invisible within the narrative framing and the gameplay loop. Games as a medium offer more than just thematic framing; the mechanics of the games themselves dictate how

players must think and interact if they are to win, and the logic of expansion, extraction, and competition runs through the vast majority of modern board games, with even ‘peaceful’ games like *Ticket to Ride* (2004) demanding cutthroat adversarialism and competition in building a rail empire. Board games frequently centre on resource management, land acquisition, wealth accumulation, and competitive victory, and are typically founded on the assumption that play must culminate in a single winner. More recently, a significant number of contemporary board games have begun to adopt ostensibly “neutral” themes. Players arrange mosaic tiles or stained-glass patterns in *Azul* (2017) and *Sagrada* (2017), or cultivate habitats and observe wildlife in *Wingspan* (2019) and *Cascadia* (2021). Yet even these comparatively tranquil settings remain structurally instrumental. The thematic elements (whether wildlife, ecosystems, or artistic production) are operationalised as resources within a competitive framework.



Spirit Island, R. Eric Reuss (Pegasus Games)
Source: Daniel Thurot, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Animals and habitats function as point-generating assets, and artistic creation is reframed as a zero-sum contest. In this way, both the subject matter and the presence of other players are subsumed under a logic of strategic maximisation: the former becomes a means to victory, and the latter obstacles to be managed. Even within ‘softer’ themes, it would appear that the very format of what we understand as a modern board game demands a specific form of encounter: the environment is construed as a field of extractable value, and other players are positioned as rivals within a scarcity-driven system. This raises the question: Are the logics of extraction, expansion,

exploitation and competition simply baked into the format?

This is before we even consider the very large number of games explicitly about war. Among the highest-ranked board games of all time are numerous war games that are thematically reskinned through major popular franchises, including *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Dune*. In these cases, established properties provide a familiar narrative and aesthetic framework, but the underlying mechanical structure remains centred on territorial control, military conflict, and strategic domination. Variations on the types of warfare that can be gamified also exist. For example, *Root* (2018) situates players in a forest battleground of asymmetrical warfare between cats, birds, and woodland creatures. While the game’s unique design is celebrated, with each player aiming for different objectives such as insurgent rebellion or pure expansion, the fundamental narrative framing and mechanical structures of the game demand combat, confrontation, and conflict. *Risk* (1956) is a game of global domination, in which players use conquest, conflict and diplomacy to wipe out their rivals. But the pieces on the board could be anything from bacteria competing for space inside the gut of a sheep to simply abstract symbols without specific meaning, as in *Checkers* or *Backgammon* - and yet, the design of *Risk* is explicitly framed as being about armed conflict. Likewise, *Chess* (600 CE) - one of the oldest games that can still be considered a ‘board game’ - is a scale model of war, with political, military and even religious units fighting for a binary dominance of the board. The ubiquity and timelessness of *Chess* obscures the way in which what is essentially a formal, mathematical, strategic puzzle has been narrativised as a war game. We must therefore ask ourselves why war as a narrative seems to map so neatly onto gameplay.

Games also have a huge potential for social and educational applications. Peace Education is a way of teaching skills, knowledge and values to people in an effort to reduce violence and promote justice and peace.

While this education can take many forms, some games have been used as an experimental form of Peace Education, inviting players to learn and reflect on conflicts and violence through play. The problem is, there simply aren’t many board

games about Peace. Considerable new research exists into designing interactive video games simulating peace processes and conflict resolution activities, and there have even been projects exploring the social effects of bringing together people from different sides of real-life conflicts to play creative and non-competitive games like Minecraft.

But similar efforts in the world of analog games have yet to fully emerge. What about co-operative games? Indeed, there is a growing category of games designed to be played by multiple people working together. But there are glaring conceptual issues with understanding these as ‘peace games’, too. Pandemic (2008), one of the most popular co-operative games of all time, is all about preventing the spread of a deadly virus around the world. All players are working to stop the virus and find the cure before humanity is doomed. But this format has co-operation coded into the setup from the beginning, and, since the game assumes that everyone has the same set of goals and priorities, and is equally willing to contribute individual resources for a collective goal, we can argue there is no real peace at work when players are given no choice but to co-operate. Spirit Island (2017), a more recent game with an anti-colonial theme (described by the box art as a ‘settler-destruction strategy game’), has players working together as elemental spirits to fight back against an invasion of settlers who poison the land with blight. While a clever inversion of the scenario of Catan, the indigenous islanders are still given no voice or agency, and are used as literal pawns to fight back against the scourge of European colonisers. As refreshing as the theme is, the logic of conflict is still at work here, and the structure of the game presumes that the interests of the players and the non-playable indigenous people are all aligned, without representing or exploring any of the interests of subjugated peoples deeper than a superficial subsumption into a category of ‘nature’ fighting back.

Some games are a thematic far cry from any political or international relevance, but are mechanically closer to how a peace game might look. Décorum (2022) is a game about two or more people living together, each with their own specific tastes in interior design. The problem is

communication, as each player can only tell other players whether they like or dislike the current layout, but not what their specific tastes or needs are. Together, you must figure out how to decorate the house in such a way that everybody’s tastes are satisfied. This is a fun co-operative puzzle, and while each player has individual goals, the victory is collective. What’s more, the potential for adapting the game design and replacing furniture with peace negotiations is immediately obvious. But this approach still assumes that there is a correct ‘solution’ to the issue that everybody can be happy with, and presupposes that all parties will be satisfied with a collective rather than individual victory. Games such as these help to underline the critical and problem-solving potentials of co-operative experience, but appear to remain bound by certain structural limits of the format. With all of this in mind, if games structurally demand competition, and war can be seamlessly ‘gamified’, then what about peace? Are we able to flip these logics around and design a game around co-operation and non-zero sum outcomes? What would that look like? Could it be used as an educational tool? And, perhaps most importantly, would it be fun? It was with all of these questions in mind that I designed the ‘Playing Peace’ Workshop in December 2025. Drawing on Game Theory, Peace Education, Ludology, Critical Analysis and my own personal interest in board games, the aim of the workshop was to explore ideas of Peace through board games. We invited two guest speakers from very different contexts to share their insights. The first guest speaker was Jeremiah Bonifasius Manurung, a learning officer at Peace Generation (PeaceGen) Indonesia. PeaceGen had previously delivered workshops on designing and playing board games in their peace education efforts in Indonesia, and Jeremiah shared with us the principles and outcomes of their projects. “The Indonesian context”, he clarified, “is characterised by a number of ethnic and religious tensions. Our work aims to educate young people about peace but also to help bring down these barriers between groups.” It was encouraging to hear that board games could be used as an effective way of helping young people to engage with critical thinking, peace values, and co-operative problem solving. The outcomes were clear - participants left the PeaceGen

workshops with new attitudes and understandings of peace.

The second guest speaker was Sami Laakso, a board game designer from Finland. His game, *Peacemakers* (2024), puts players in the middle of an active conflict between two warring animal species. Using a mixture of sabotage, diplomacy, and manipulation, players must bring the motivation of both sides down to the point where neither side surrenders entirely, but neither wants to continue the conflict. Aiming for this 'sweet spot' is not only an interesting game mechanic, but is also reflected in conflict management's 'Ripeness Theory' - the idea that a conflict needs to reach a point at which a 'mutually hurting stalemate' encourages both sides to end the conflict. However, in the game, as in real-life conflicts, this approach treats conflict as something that can be 'solved' with the correct series of actions - up to and including further violence. As Grace Orao, an experienced peace educator herself, rightfully pointed out during our playthrough, "this is not really a Peace game at all." Indeed, the game is more of a peace-based approach to a war game than a peace game. By dictating the win condition, the game also dictates a limited vision of what peace looks like and how we can get there. Nevertheless, 'Peacemakers' is a fun experience and a fresh take on war games, in which players are not fighting for either side of a war, but rather try to end the conflict entirely. Sami gave us valuable insight into his design process, his philosophy of avoiding conflicts, and the general challenges that accompany creating a board game from scratch.

The workshop generated lively discussion, prompting students to critically examine the intersections between game design, war narratives, and the dynamics of play. One unresolved question that emerged was "Can peace be competitive?" Peace is a complicated and contested concept, so designing a peace game is a considerable design challenge. Aside from the inherent challenges associated with making a game simultaneously coherent, challenging, accessible, and fun, a peace game may also have to subvert some of the fundamentals of the format as a whole. Victory could be both collective and individual, providing players with legitimate reasons to both



Source: PeaceGeneration Indonesia

cooperate with and betray each other, thereby creating opportunities to achieve meaningful peace. But if the designers prescribe what a peaceful victory looks like, they are also deciding what peace looks like. Perhaps, then, the most radical approach is to allow players themselves to determine when peace has been achieved. If a peace game is to be used as a social or pedagogical tool, then such an approach has clear value. But within the constraints of the established market of modern board games, such an experience might be unrecognisable as a board game altogether. Ultimately, the challenge of designing a peace game may not be a structural limit of the format itself, but rather a limit of the imagination of the people who design them. Maybe a truly novel and 'peaceful' form of gaming is possible, and the format can be pushed in critical new directions. Or maybe, as anyone who has ever played a board game with close family has surely learned, the most peaceful strategy may simply be not to play at all.

New Roots for Humanitarian Studies in Germany!

An Interview with PD Dr. Kristina Roepstorff

Dominique Noralez

It is no secret that the state of global humanitarian aid is experiencing a crisis of its own. In 2025 alone, major global donors that covered nearly half of the global humanitarian appeal and even more acutely, 70% in regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025) significantly slashed funding. These cuts marked a shift from partnership-focused development aid to conditional funding often hinged to securitization and hyper-politicized objectives. Yet there is still hope within crises, one where academia within the field of humanitarian action is being prioritized. One point of light is the grants being provided by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung which sees 1 million Euros being granted to expand Humanitarian Studies in Germany led by senior academics from Bochum, Bayreuth, and Magdeburg.

I spoke with PACS lecturer, PD Dr. Kristina Roepstorff - senior lecturer at the Otto Von Guericke University Magdeburg, whose two-decade career as both a researcher and lecturer has been focused on Humanitarian Action, Forced Migration and Peacebuilding.

The initial step of the 3-year funding period will be the community: bringing researchers and professionals together to develop a collective understanding of what is needed to create a stronger, more coordinated direction and space for this work and generate more knowledge.

"The idea is to generate more funding to make it bigger, to get students involved in the conferences and support [students] so that they don't feel isolated and have to fight to justify that this is a relevant field of inquiry."

As we closed our conversation, we spoke about this very relevance which spans across continents, is interdisciplinary and delves into areas of resilience, best practices and policy within crisis response and research about crises. All this, she says, is based on the values of solidarity and humanity, which the project hopes to embody with exchanges across the Global North and Global South spaces.

Dr. Roepstorff shared that at Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg, the research project will be rooted in visibility and narratives of crisis in the Global South and best practices within that space. It is aptly named "Humanitarian Imaginaries: Discourses, Visibility and Practices in the Global South."



For more information, visit the website:
<https://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/>

Further reading:

Gerda Henkel Foundation (2025). Is indifference on the rise? One million euros for humanitarian studies in Germany.

https://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/en/press-release?page_id=128870

In Memory of our Colleague

ELIVIA I'ANATI

Tribute and Foreword Grace Orao

If you have ever come across a genuinely creative and passionate soul, we want you to meet someone we knew through many encounters as our colleague, friend, opinion-mate, roommate, classmate, and food mate. It is with deep sorrow that, even though she left us last year, we still remember her for so many great things.

El — sometimes L or Elle, as she would say it didn't matter, was a Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) student in the Winter Semester 2024 and a DAAD scholar from Indonesia. She passed away on the 18th of June 2025 in Germany. As we continue to come to terms with this immense loss, we want to extend our heartfelt condolences to her family and all who knew and loved her.

This is how we remember El.

Prof. Dr. Alexander Spencer

We receive around 300–400 applications each year for the DAAD Helmut Schmidt Scholarships. Out of this pile, El stood out. Her application was different due to her illustrations and her work on children's books focused on narratives of conflict and trauma.

We felt she would fit perfectly with our interest in narratives, art, conflict, and peace — and she did. I remember El for her interest in combining art, storytelling, and peace, and for the fact that she never raised her hand to speak in class, but felt the urge to spontaneously communicate her thoughts to others.

PD Dr. rer. pol. habil. Kristina Roepstorff

It is with deep sadness that I remember El, who passed away suddenly last year, far too young. She came to our MA Programme in Peace and Conflict Studies as a DAAD Helmut Schmidt Scholar, a recognition of her talent and dedication. From the start, she stood out. I will always remember her for being the first to speak up in every seminar, eager to ask questions and engage deeply. Her curiosity and thoughtful contributions enriched our discussions and reminded all of us that studying peace and conflict requires courage, critical thinking, and genuine engagement. During her brief illness, it was heartbreaking to see someone so full of energy and promise gradually weakened. Yet even then, her determination and spirit shone



Source: Young Southeast Asia, via Instagram

through. Her sudden loss leaves a deep void, but we will always remember the light and energy she brought to our community.

Jonathan

One memory that keeps coming back to me: once, we were sitting next to each other in class and had to paint a picture as a task. Before we started, El confidently told me how good she was at painting. But when she finished, the picture turned out surprisingly bad. We looked at it, then at each other, and burst out laughing. Not in a mean way, but just pure, honest laughter. That moment says so much about her. I miss how easy it was to laugh with El, how even little things could turn into something joyful.

I miss how easy it was to laugh with El, how even little things could turn into something joyful. Being around her always felt light. No matter when or where you met her, there was always something warm, funny, or beautiful about the moment.

Marta

There's a girl in our class during my exchange semester here in Thailand who looks and speaks just like El. At first, I felt like I saw a ghost every time I spoke to her. I didn't want to attach a ghost to a person, but at the same time I didn't want to lose the sudden memory of El.

What made her unique? What tone of voice was only hers? Even though we weren't close, I realised she left a mark in me. In all of us. Sometimes I see a picture of her and have to remind myself she's not actually here anymore. I remember once we cooked together and we were talking about uni assignments, all the projects that excited us. I remember thinking that she saw a world in the smallest things, and the beauty and hope where others would not even pay attention. Sometimes she would just sit back and sketch the ordinary scenes she saw, making art from everyday life. I remember that I was so impressed by her cleverness, and when we were in class I would wait for the moment she would speak up because she always had something interesting to say.

Isabella

I remember El for the kindness of her spirit: the light and joyful tone of her voice, or her excitement when telling a story about something she liked. I remember how firm she was when sharing an opinion in class, never shy about bringing her point of view.

Her drawings were, of course, a strong trait of hers. In my opinion, she had a beautiful way of expressing herself through them. I still can't forget the moment when she sat silently at the welcoming party, observing us from a distance, drawing her new colleagues and friends. I hope she felt welcomed and cherished by us, then and now.

Tenzin

The first day we met El, she sat with us at the welcome picnic and quietly observed, sketching the strangers around her. She captured the excitement of those moments and was able to

express the unique joy of being in this new place, with new friends.

Despite her often quiet and reserved manner, Elivia was always overflowing with ideas and creativity. It was El who, despite our initial hesitation to contribute to class discussions, would offer some intelligent insight and begin an interesting new tangent that would break the ice and start a lively discussion. I remember her for her artwork, her passion for children's books, and her infinite love for animals. It was creativity and passion like El's that inspired us to create this magazine, and the lives of everyone in PACS are richer for having known her.

Derya

I have one vivid memory of her. We were in a class, just Elivia, myself, and one or two other people. We were talking about the latest news, and at some point I mentioned that my birthday had been a few days earlier. Without hesitation, she started singing "Happy Birthday" out loud and encouraged the others to join in.

I had joined the batch quite late, and at the time I felt a bit lost, unsure how to integrate or where I belonged. In that moment, she made me feel seen. She made me feel like I belonged. I will always be grateful to her for that.

I believe that no one is truly gone as long as their name and soul are remembered, because their spirit continues to live through us. That is what I choose to believe. She wanted to travel, to explore, and to be free like a leaf carried by the wind. As long as I carry her memories with me, she will continue travelling and exploring the world alongside me.

Morteza

Sometimes you don't need to spend much time with people for their memories to be etched in your mind forever. We had just a few small chats, but she remembered everything that I had mentioned, and that alone said so much about the kind of person she was.

She listened with genuine care, the kind that makes even brief conversations feel important. She was deeply fascinated by children's literature. I still remember how she once asked me about a Persian book, *The Little Black Fish* by Samad Behrangi. I was genuinely surprised, not only that she knew the book, but that she was so aware of its deeper meaning and the background of its author.

In many ways, the story of the little black fish reflected her own spirit: curious, brave, and determined to explore beyond the boundaries set before her. Her presence was quiet but thoughtful, gentle yet profound. Even in short encounters, she showed how attentive and kind a person can be. Though we did not share much time, she left behind a memory that feels rich and enduring.

David

El, how do you put into words sentiments that are hardly describable? Her inner, latent child, her constant genuine laugh accompanied by that wonder-filled gaze at the world around her, was something so unique that the most expressive way to depict it was through her eloquent drawings.

There were days of silence and introspection. There were days of interpreting children's books in different languages and rediscovering emotions through spontaneity of being there, at that time, in that place. There were days of sharing cold strawberry ice cream or hot pumpkin soup with bananas (because bananas can only be in sweet soups), talking about favourite animes, and fantasising between our experiences and the things we watched, later captured in vivid drawings.

There were days when, despite difficulties, she was there to draw a smile on my face. She was a master in this adventure that was coming to Germany. Thanks to her, this new world was discovered with more joy and gratitude than ever imagined. It seems cats are not the only ones capable of doing this.

Her invaluable legacy prevails through all of us



Source: Photograph by author

blessed to have shared our paths with her. Her story is an inspiration for children and adults alike, going far beyond any of the books envisioned in her projects. Admiration falls short of what she evokes when remembered.

Thank you so much, El.

With love, one privileged person who had the fortune to coincide in this life with you.

Grace

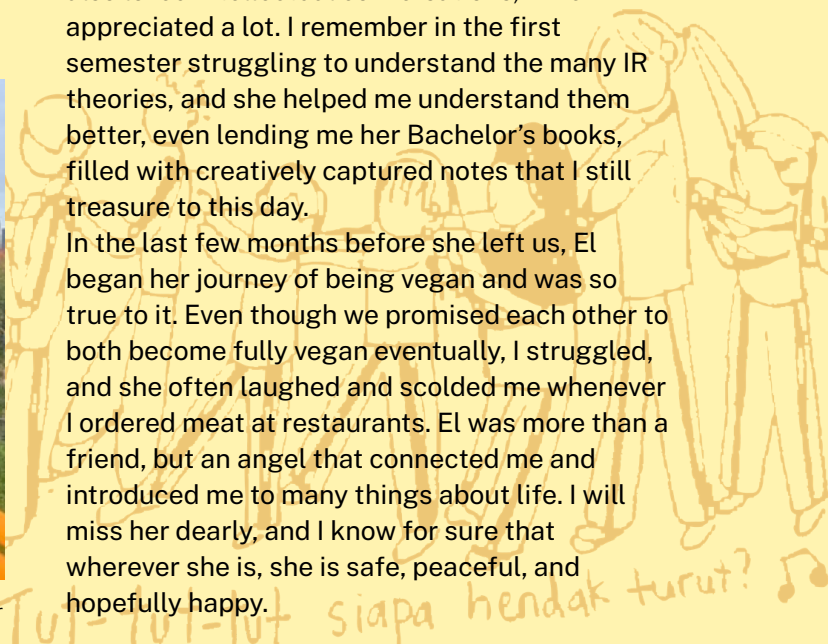
I first met El in May 2024 as language students in Berlin. As huge and chaotic as the city is, we somehow connected on our way to the language school, without knowing that we would later go to the same university and pursue the same course: Peace and Conflict Studies.

That moment on the train, when we realized that we had those commonalities, we clicked right away. I remember El saying, "Everyone talks about violence and war and this and that, but no one talks more about peace, let alone studies it, are we the only ones who crave for world peace?" and we laughed.

Since then, we became friends, from looking for apartments together in Magdeburg, to missing trains together and figuring out the transport system during our first months in Berlin. El enjoyed good food and alone time, and so whenever we had dinner dates - both virtually and sometimes in fancy restaurants, we rated the quality of meals in a whole 10 minutes conversation while eating - a routine she knew that I did not enjoy as much as she did.

El loved alone time to reflect and connect with her spirituality, and I admired that deeply. She also loved intellectual conversations, which I appreciated a lot. I remember in the first semester struggling to understand the many IR theories, and she helped me understand them better, even lending me her Bachelor's books, filled with creatively captured notes that I still treasure to this day.

In the last few months before she left us, El began her journey of being vegan and was so true to it. Even though we promised each other to both become fully vegan eventually, I struggled, and she often laughed and scolded me whenever I ordered meat at restaurants. El was more than a friend, but an angel that connected me and introduced me to many things about life. I will miss her dearly, and I know for sure that wherever she is, she is safe, peaceful, and hopefully happy.



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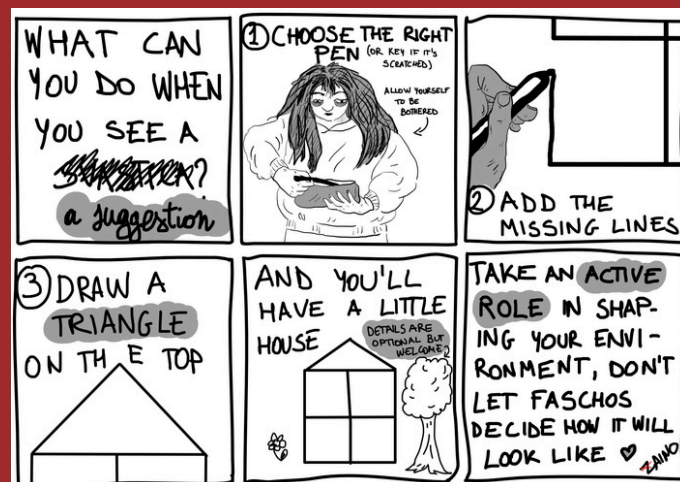
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And to the PACS Student Council and the Faculty for Humanities' Fachschaftsrat for their continuous support in the efforts to make this magazine a reality!

Check out all the references
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