

# Peace Research

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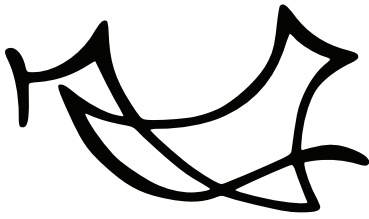
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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES  
FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY PEACE COMMITTEES  
IN POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

*Norman Chivasa*

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Civil society in post-colonial Zimbabwe has long been involved in forming informal peace committees to prevent violence and sustain peace and development initiatives at the community level. This study is based on the experiences of three civic organizations, namely, the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust, Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum, and Heal Zimbabwe Trust, that have spearheaded the formation of informal peace committees in Zimbabwe. To complement reports by these civic societies, the study conducted twenty interviews with key informants with experience in setting up informal peace committees in both urban and communal areas across Zimbabwe. Results showed that even though informal peace committees are part of the normal life of communities, they face a myriad of challenges. One challenge is that they lack the political and social clout needed to engage with government actors and political leaders. Despite the experience they bring to conflict situations, informal peace committees remain sidelined by formal peace committees with constitutional mandates. This study recommends that where informal peace committees exist at district, ward, and village levels, mainstream infrastructures for peace

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should facilitate the harmonization of formal committees with informal ones.

**Keywords:** informal peace committees, National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Zimbabwe

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## INTRODUCTION

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, conflict of a political nature has long been running from the top down to people at the grassroots level. For example, in every district and village, politicization of communities is centred on issues relating to political affiliation. As of 2023, three main political parties, namely the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance, and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) have remained the most visible after the 2018 elections, despite there being eleven political parties that contested the 2023 harmonized elections. Since communities whose values have been disrupted need trust-building and relationship-enhancing initiatives, informal peace committees (IPCs) have, in the past two decades, become a viable infrastructure for peace because of their inclusive nature, encompassing all constituencies found in the community: civil servants, church leaders, traditional leaders, state security personnel, diverse political party leaders, women, youth, and other stakeholders such as organizations operating at the community level.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from their inclusivity, IPCs demonstrate agency, self-reliance, resilience, and resistance to elitist infiltration and insulation by local people against practices considered subversive to local peace aspirations. Moreover, IPCs embrace dialogue and consensus building as primary approaches to conflict.<sup>2</sup> By implication, they have the capacity to mitigate polarization in communities and therefore can potentially contribute to peace and reconciliation among groups that are divided. In essence, IPCs can only be effective if initiated at the community level, because they involve the collective life of people born and living in the community.

The concept of IPCs has been extensively researched, and it has been defined from various points of view. This study is closely aligned with two perspectives. The first of these is held by Mohamud Adan and Ruto Pkalya, who came up with three definitions that go beyond a minimalist role for IPCs in which addressing violence is viewed as the primary role. They posit a maximalist role for IPCs, which envisions this formation as

- a conflict-intervention structure that prevents, manages, or transforms social conflict;
- a conflict-mitigation and peacebuilding structure that integrates traditional and contemporary conflict-intervention models to address social conflict; and
- a community-based structure and initiative to prevent, manage, and transform intra- and inter-community conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

The three characterizations, not so different in terms of focus and function, present three different perspectives. The first is that the creation of IPCs represents the view that peace and violence are antithetical, but conflict is perceived as a positive force that requires intervention. The second description suggests that IPCs are hybrid formations on account of their propensity to embrace both contemporary and customary social norms and values. This is so because methods of addressing conflict by IPCs employ a combination of both indigenous and contemporary strategies. One of the contemporary values that gives IPCs a strong niche in peacebuilding is gender equality, so that a woman can be a chairperson or hold a strategic position in the peace structure, which is often not the case in indigenous committees, particularly in Africa. The third view, similar to the first, is that IPCs are created primarily to prevent violence and to manage ongoing conflict from further escalation to violence and to transform conflict so that it does not harm people.

The second perspective is that of Andries Odendaal, who views the IPC as “an inclusive forum operating at district, town or village in which stakeholders take a joint responsibility to build peace within their community.” From his perspective, this committee is typically a “forum, space for dialogue and consensus building.”<sup>4</sup> Consensus building is a well-known guiding principle that sustains the operation of IPCs. To achieve consensus, the committee gets involved in decision-making processes and is thereby

bound to arrive at an agreement, which should be the result of concerted efforts by all relevant stakeholders.

By and large, IPCs are formed to intervene, support, and promote cohesion through consensus building at the community level. The important role of IPCs lies in the use of nonviolent means to address conflict. Compared to peacebuilding projects run directly by an external agency, IPCs are relatively less expensive. Even with respect to meeting venues, IPCs can secure free venues, or at least low-cost or discounted ones, by virtue of the fact that they are a community-based organization rather than an NGO (nongovernmental organization), which is usually perceived as an outsider and as having funds to finance its programs. In addition, IPCs can easily use other existing community infrastructure because they are considered a community-owned initiative.<sup>5</sup> In Zimbabwe, communities in collaboration with civic organizations were the first to put IPCs in place in 2002, prior to the establishment of formal peace committees in 2019.

At the national level, Zimbabwe instituted the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) through Section 250 of the Constitution (Amendment No. 20 of 2013). The commission's goal is to address the legacy of post-independence violence and achieve healing, reconciliation, and social cohesion. In pursuit of its goals, in 2019 the NPRC put in place provincial peace committees throughout Zimbabwe's ten provinces, after IPCs had already been in existence for one and half decades. Because provincial peace committees are an institution apart from the normal life of the community, they are faced with legitimacy issues, as they rarely blend organically into the community. By contrast, IPCs, since they are formed by ordinary members of the community in collaboration with civic organizations, organically blend into the community because they are part of the everyday life of the community, even though they do not have a constitutional mandate.<sup>6</sup>

This study reflects on the opportunities and problems confronted by civic society-led IPCs in post-colonial Zimbabwe over the two decades since their inception in 2002. The article is structured as follows: the following section discusses the research approach used in this study. The third section explains the origins and progression of IPCs in post-colonial Zimbabwe, in particular the involvement of three civil organizations in the formation of IPCs. The fourth section is an evaluative discussion on the opportunities

and challenges facing civil society-led IPCs in Zimbabwe. The last section concludes the study with recommendations.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, involving key informant narratives from twenty stakeholders—five females and fifteen males—who had been involved in setting up IPCs in both urban and communal areas across Zimbabwe. The respondents were purposively selected from a pool of civic organizations and individuals involved in peacebuilding work across Zimbabwe. These included the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) Archdiocese of Harare, the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum (ECLF), Holistic Peace and Development Zimbabwe, Southern Institute of Peacebuilding and Development, Bindura University of Science, and Emthonjeni Women's Forum, to mention but a few. Respondents' narratives were complemented by reports from three civic organizations, namely, the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET), ECLF, and Heal Zimbabwe Trust (HZT), also purposively selected for this study because of their different roles in forming IPCs in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Not all civic organizations and communities involved in setting up peace committees in Zimbabwe are covered in this study, but insights from the three case studies discussed below provide a basis upon which the contributions of IPCs to peace in Zimbabwe can be understood.

Regarding the sampling criteria, the purposive technique was used to select stakeholders considered to be information-rich sources. At the time of this study, Zimbabwe already had dozens of civic organizations, individuals, and educational institutions that were involved in setting up IPCs at community levels. In the subsequent section ("The Origins and Progression of IPCs in Zimbabwe"), civic organizations as well as individual researchers involved in the establishment of IPCs are documented. Because the study targeted stakeholders with experience in setting up IPCs in Zimbabwe, the purposive technique proved helpful in that the researcher was at liberty to identify stakeholders that he considered to have data relating to opportunities and challenges faced by IPCs in post-colonial Zimbabwe. However, during fieldwork the researcher found himself switching between purposive and snowball sampling techniques, in the latter giving some informants the prerogative to refer him to like-minded information-rich sources. Using

existing networks, stakeholders with experience in setting up peace committees in Zimbabwe linked the researcher with other informants making it possible to access twenty stakeholders who participated in the study.

Prior to addressing the question of opportunities and problems faced by IPCs over the period of two decades with attendant election violence, it is important to understand how IPCs originated and then evolved in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

## THE ORIGINS AND PROGRESSION OF INFORMAL PEACE COMMITTEES IN ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe, the inception of IPCs was a result of the work of a number of actors, including local and international civic organizations as well as individual peace researchers. A large number of IPCs have been, and are still, initiated by civic organizations, sometimes at the request of communities and in other cases after a civic organization has secured buy-in from representatives of communities. While the work of these civic organizations in post-colonial Zimbabwe suggests significant and important milestones in charting for a peaceful future, the researcher chose to examine the work of IPCs from 2002 onward, since the 2002 national election was the first where Zimbabwe fully adopted a multi-party democratic election, which was accompanied by election violence. Some of the civic organizations that have been involved in setting up peace committees include the Emthonjeni Women's Forum in Matabeleland South province, Southern Institute of Peacebuilding and Development in Harare province, the American Friends Service Committee in Harare district, Envision Zimbabwe Women's Trust in Mashonaland West province, Holistic Peace and Development Zimbabwe in Manicaland province, and the CCJP Archdiocese of Harare, to mention but a few examples. However, although several civic organizations facilitated the formation of IPCs prior to and after independence, for purposes of this study, three civic organizations, namely ZIMCET, ECLF, and HZT, were selected because of the different roles they played in forming peace committees following the 2002 election.

### **Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust–Led Peace Committees**

The first appearance of peace committees in post-colonial Zimbabwe is attributed to the work of ZIMCET, a grassroots organization founded in

2000 following electoral- and farm invasion–related violence. IPCs established by ZIMCET were the first formations tailored to accommodate victims of the 2002 election violence as well as members of diverse political parties throughout the ten provinces in Zimbabwe.

ZIMCET defines a peace committee as a liaison group that seeks to promote peace and tolerance between individuals and groups. This liaison group consists of individuals representing various constituencies in a community.<sup>7</sup> For example, a peace committee may be made up of political leaders, traditional leaders, church leaders, war veterans, women, and youths. The thinking behind the inclusion of various constituencies is that the committee should represent multiple perspectives, voices, and interests to help mitigate polarization.

In terms of coverage, ZIMCET established an estimated nine IPCs in the Harare-Chitungwiza region. It also established eleven peace committees in Mashonaland West and Central. Thirteen more peace committees were established in Masvingo, Manicaland and Mashonaland East, and as if that was not enough, sixteen peace committees were established in Bulawayo, Matabeleland South, North, and Midlands provinces.<sup>8</sup>

The rationale behind the establishment of peace committees was to foster a culture of tolerance at the community level in Zimbabwe. This objective is captured in the following narrative:

The idea of forming and using peace committees as a means of cultivating and fostering a culture of peace and tolerance among grassroots communities was born out of the realization that violence, particularly that of a politically [sic] nature as was experienced during the 2000 general election and the preceding ones, was mainly carried out by marginalized groups like the youth and the unemployed.<sup>9</sup>

As the foregoing excerpt seems to suggest, IPCs created spaces for people to accommodate each other, even during election time.

The procedures for forming IPCs involved broad-based consultations with grassroots communities in targeted provinces, as was the case in Masvingo, Manicaland, Harare-Chitungwiza, and Mashonaland. These consultations involved securing buy-in from the targeted communities to set up the

peace committees. Consultations were facilitated by a task force consisting of religious and traditional leaders drawn from targeted communities. In Zimbabwe, religious leaders are considered to be apolitical because of the nature of their role in the community. The Christian church in particular is considered as a space that accommodates every member of the community from the smallest to the greatest, the vulnerable, rich and poor, or members of different political parties. The general perception is that when people come for Christian worship, they are expected to put their personal interests aside and focus on worship. Such an attitude is considered noble and acceptable, and any person considered working against such an attitude is considered an imposter bent on sowing seeds of hatred and animosity in the community. For that reason, a church is considered a sacred place that should not be used to perpetuate personal vendettas, as this is considered as acting against Christian values and norms. Following from this reasoning, religious and traditional leaders are considered as bridges that bring together people from different political allegiances. The use of local leaders in consultation processes was not a coincidence but one of the critical success factors for the acceptance of IPCs in communities as expressed here:

The use of local leaders in the promotion of peace brings a certain level of continuity to the programme in that even when funds run out, the chances are that the knowledge imparted on members of the committees will continue to be taken advantage of by the community as it will be for the benefit of the entire community.<sup>10</sup>

For that reason, the task force became a buffer between different political parties as its role involved ensuring that there was peaceful coexistence, social harmony, and tolerance between people of different political persuasions. A case in point was the diffusion of tension between formerly antagonistic people in Chipinge, Mutasa, Buhera, and Chiendambuya districts, who after joining the peace committee were able to tolerate and work together for the betterment of their society. Also, in some of Harare's high-density suburbs such as Kuwadza, Budiriro, and Glenview where peace committees were created, a higher level of peaceful coexistence and tolerance was noticeable during the 2013 elections.<sup>11</sup> For that reason, the peace committees paid off because politically volatile communities were reached with peace messages. These peace messages translated into tolerance, coexistence, and

accommodation between members of different political affiliations in the 2013 election, a trend that was unheard of during the 2002 elections.<sup>12</sup>

However, even though local communities affected by violence were receptive to the call to establish peace committees, one of the hurdles faced was the lack of political will on the part of some political leaders. This lack of political will resulted in the escalation of election violence in 2008, in spite of the fact that peace committees had already been established by the time elections were held. This trend, in which communities that have established peace committees continue to experience politically motivated violence, does not suggest that these formations are incapable of promoting peace. In response to this dynamic, one respondent commented:

peace committees often do not have the capacity to deal directly with political level conflicts. This limitation is especially noticeable during election time when political polarisation in communities takes centre stage. Even peace committees formed mainly of members of different political parties are often found wanting during these times. This paralysis is mainly due to the fact that these types of conflicts are usually instigated from outside of the community by people at a higher level within the political formations involved, such that the local political functionaries merely follow orders.<sup>13</sup>

This comment highlights that IPCs are faced with the challenge of mitigating conflicts beyond their capacities, in particular politically motivated conflicts. Van Tongeren asserts that formal peace committees with a national mandate “have more impact and legitimacy” as compared to IPCs. This impact has more to do with official recognition than sustainability.<sup>14</sup> However, in terms of sustainability, IPCs have greater potential than formal peace committees, because IPCs are owned and driven by communities themselves and therefore have more chances of achieving their aspirations. The efficacy of IPCs was evident in that the inclusive peace committees comprising members of ZANU-PF and MDC political parties in Chivi, Nkai, and Mudzi districts and other parts of the country helped to break down the polarization between members of different political parties in Zimbabwe.<sup>15</sup>

### **Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum–Led Peace Committees**

ECLF was founded in 2008 by major ecumenical bodies in response to the

2008 upsurge of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. As a religious grouping, ECLF contributed toward peacebuilding at the grassroots level through the workshop model. ECLF is mainly focused on healing and reconciliation, good governance and accountability, and constitution making. Good governance and constitution making have fed into peacebuilding initiatives, which have turned out to become the major program area for ECLF over the years.<sup>16</sup>

At the national level, ECLF partnered with the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) between 2009 and 2013. During that period, ECLF collaborated with ONHRI, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) in conducting peacebuilding outreach initiatives in all ten provinces in Zimbabwe under the auspices of Support for Peacebuilding and Increased Access to Sustainable Livelihoods (SPIASL). The objectives of SPIASL were (1) to support national capacities for dialogue, peacebuilding, prevention, management, and strengthening conflict resolution; and (2) to support community capacities (women and youth) for recovery and increase conflict-sensitive sustainable livelihoods at local levels. In its partnership with ONHRI, ECLF conducted capacity-building workshops under a program called Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Transformation (CPMRT). Its target groups included church leadership, traditional leadership, youth, and women across Zimbabwe. Government representatives that benefited from these CPMRT workshops included the Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenization and Empowerment, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development.<sup>17</sup>

Thanks to these workshops, 35,000 people have participated in CPMRT throughout Zimbabwe, with 60 percent being female adults.<sup>18</sup> A total of 2,179 females and 1,815 males have benefited from CPMRT sensitization workshops. In seventy-nine communities spread out in eighteen districts across Zimbabwe, ECLF established IPCs.<sup>19</sup> ECLF defines peace committees as "structures established by communities after a three-day CPMRT training workshop."<sup>20</sup> The establishment of IPCs is the responsibility of communities, who after attending the workshop may request workshop facilitators to assist them with procedures on setting up such a peace formation. At the community level, ECLF established IPCs in Chivi district of Masvingo province, Nkai district in Matabeleland province, Mudzi district

in Mashonaland East province, and other parts of Zimbabwe. In Chivi district, for example, an estimated twenty-three ward-level peace committees established were involved in interventions targeting the improvement of livelihoods. These included poultry projects, establishing village banks where community members borrow and pay back money, goat projects, assisting orphaned children with payment of school fees and purchasing school requisites, repairing roads and boreholes, organizing various religious prayer meetings for rain, and training people in conservation farming. In the same district, peace committees have contributed significantly by empowering local community members with skills on how to handle conflicts constructively. Many local people in the Chivi district seem to have changed the way they address conflict in their local traditional courts in which conciliation, as opposed to expulsion of offenders, became almost the primary method of dealing with conflict. In Mutasa district of Manicaland province, incidences of election violence were reduced during the 2013 elections owing to the work of IPCs.<sup>21</sup>

### **Heal Zimbabwe Trust–Led Peace Committees**

HZT is a local NGO that works with traumatized victims of state violence. It was founded in 2009 in response to the 2008 political violence. Transitional justice, particularly memorialization of the past, is one of HZT's core functions in communities, as well as formation of IPCs, which HZT calls peace clubs.<sup>22</sup> HZT has over the years established peace clubs in Birchenough Bridge, Buhera West and South in Manicaland province, Gokwe in Midlands province, Muzarabani in Mashonaland Central province, Zaka in Masvingo province, and in wards 1, 3, 5 and 8 of Tsholotsho North, Matabeleland province.<sup>23</sup>

To help victims and survivors of state in ward 28 of Makoni central district, HZT organized public memorials by providing tombstones and groceries for traumatized families.<sup>24</sup> Tombstones are public memorials in the sense that they are visible to members of the community and continue to serve as reminders of the victims of political violence. During the 2008 political violence, Makoni was one of the most affected districts, and communities were locked in trauma and polarization along political lines. One of the most heinous things that happened to the people of Makoni district was that the relatives of some individuals killed during the wave of political violence were unable to bury their deceased family members because of the

volatile political environment at the time.<sup>25</sup> The failure of family members to bury their deceased loved ones violated traditional Zimbabwean funeral rites. In Zimbabwe, some rituals are performed immediately after death to acknowledge the reality of the deceased's separation from the community, in which case, if proper burial rites have been performed, the spirit will not find its way back to trouble surviving family members.<sup>26</sup> There are also other rituals that can be performed twelve months after a person has died, in which the spirit is reintroduced into the family as an ancestor and given new responsibilities, such as guardianship and protection from enemies.<sup>27</sup> Thus the provision and erection of tombstones implied that funeral rites were performed, bringing closure for families.

These initiatives by HZT are worthy of emulation because the erection of tombstones has the potential to serve as a reminder of human rights violations committed in the Makoni district. As physical memorials that function as reminders to the community, victims, and survivors of violence, tombstones can also work as a deterrent to potentially violent perpetrators and as a public acknowledgement of crimes against humanity.<sup>28</sup> These memorial services were significant because they drew community members such as survivors, victims, their families, traditional leaders, church leaders, as well as perpetrators of violence together. There is a greater chance that erecting tombstones at victims' burial sites could aid in bringing victims closer to family members and the community at large. While more rehabilitative work is required to address traumatic issues related to violence, it is important to recognize that people in Makoni central district's ward 28 have had an opportunity to engage with the past in a way that potentially brought them closure.

While the erection of tombstones in the Makoni district brought the possibility of opening healed wounds and threatening the eruption of violence, the act also had the potential to promote discussion about the past among those who attended the ceremonies, thereby assisting them to reflect and devise ways to avoid future violence. These memorial activities serve as a challenge to Government of Zimbabwe to prioritize historical remembrance and healing processes through non-judicial measures. These initiatives create opportunities for engagement and education in affected communities about the importance of human rights in the future.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY-LED IPCS: AN EVALUATIVE DISCUSSION

First and foremost, it is important to note that IPCs are an approach to peacebuilding at both macro and micro levels. One of the major contributions of IPCs to peacebuilding is that these formations bring together stakeholders from conflicting parties to jointly create a committee that explores ways to address peace challenges. In Zimbabwe, the setting up of an inclusive peace committee comprising ZANU PF and MDC members represented a fundamental breakthrough of the polarization that had existed from 2002 onward. In high-density suburbs such as Kuwadzana, Mbare, Budiriro, and Glenview in Harare, where these peace committees were put in place in 2002, the inclusive committees paid off, making it possible for local people to coexist and tolerate each other despite the polarization that marked the political history of Zimbabwe from 2002 onwards. ZIMCET echoed this in stating that “the [peace committee] approach has managed to secure participation of political leaders from all parties at the same level, which is necessary to ensure the political will to promote peace, denounce violence and foster tolerance in districts.”<sup>29</sup> By their very nature, peace committees have contributed significantly to peacebuilding in that they created space for conflicting parties to work in unison toward a common goal characterized by accommodation, coexistence, and tolerance. Typically,

parties such as United Parties and ZANU were included in the matrix. Such a multi-sectoral approach paid dividends resulting in politicians failing to pin ZIMCET down, on allegations of being partisan, as people from different political persuasions were freely participating in the peace programmes.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, peace committees established by ZIMCET in Mashonaland West province contributed to sensitizing community members on conflict management and gender issues relating to violence against women and children. In the same province, an estimated seventy-two workshops were conducted by ZIMCET to educate communities on conflict issues. These workshops drew an estimated 3,804 participants. Similarly, in Mashonaland Central ZIMCET hosted fifty-four workshops which pulled about 3,982 participants. These workshops targeted both men and women.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, peace committees have contributed significantly to the

dissemination of peace messages and in equipping local communities with peacebuilding skills. For example, in Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North, “conflict resolution workshops are conducted to equip the committees with the necessary information and skills to carry out peacebuilding activities in their districts. The content of the conflict resolution workshops for peace committees is primarily meant to make them own the process of peacebuilding.”<sup>32</sup> As this suggests, peace committees have helped open up opportunities for communities to take responsibility for their own peace.

ECLF-led peace committees have also significantly contributed to peace in Zimbabwe. At a site visit involving ECLF stakeholders, the Zimbabwe Republic Police deputy assistant commissioner commended peace committees for contributing to the reduction of crime rates in Mutasa district:

The Mutasa for peace committee has made our policing work easier. In the run up to the elections last year (2013) we hardly got any serious cases of politically motivated violence as compared to previous elections due to the peace work of this committee. The more common cases these days are domestic violence, boundary disputes and public nuisance cases. I think we have reached a point where we can refer some cases to the committee to address and I urge them to set up a reference desk in a public area. We work very well with them and they never do anything without the involvement of the police.<sup>33</sup>

This comment shows how peace committees contributed to mutual policing in Mutasa district of Manicaland province.

In the same vein, the district medical director, who also gave a speech during a site visit in Mutasa district, made similar observations:

At the hospitals in the district, we had become accustomed to treating people with axes in their heads and we have seen some ugliest wounds caused by all sorts of dangerous weapons mainly due to politically motivated violence towards the 2008 elections. This has changed drastically in the community as we have been having fewer cases of politically motivated violence. People say that this committee, with members from various parties, has played a role in bringing down the violence.<sup>34</sup>

Again, this excerpt gives credit to the role played by peace committees in Mutasa district in helping to reduce electoral violence in 2008 and 2013, respectively. Commenting on the contributions of Mutasa district peace committees, the UNDP country director at the same event said:

We are encouraged by the testimonies we have heard here today. Politics should not be a negative source of tension. I think you people are turning that wrong notion around. You have a unique model that others can only learn from and adapt to their circumstances. Even the NPRC will have to draw from your experience. You can be the beginning of the peace architecture of this country.<sup>35</sup>

The above responses suggest that IPCs can feed into the NPRC. This notion was also mentioned by Ambrose Moyo when he said that IPCs have the capacity to contribute to the NPRC.<sup>36</sup> This shows how IPCs are increasingly becoming a force to reckon in post-independence Zimbabwe.

On another front, peace interventions by HZT involved healing interventions targeting survivors of violence after the 2008 election violence. For example, HZT convened memorial services in Muzarabani district, one of the districts in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Central province that saw political violence during the June 2008 presidential run-off election, in which twenty-two people were killed, 106 allegedly assaulted, and 125 families were displaced.<sup>37</sup> The majority of those killed in this outbreak of violence were breadwinners who left behind spouses and children in desperate situations. The memorial services were held after HZT responded to calls from survivors, friends, and relatives of the Muzarabani violence victims in 2008. Seven victims were given memorial services: Toas Gatsi, Master Kachuwaire, Tendai Chizengeya, Zondai Chipendeko, Givemore Kanodeweta, Charles Mutendebvure, and Fan Dlamini.<sup>38</sup> The services provided a space for family members to mourn these seven and other victims of violence. Although HZT provided resources as needed, the memorial services were organized by the bereaved families, friends, and relatives. Services were held in each of the seven victims' villages between 7 and 11 June 2010.<sup>39</sup> The community as a whole, including victims and perpetrators, relatives, survivors, and traditional and religious leaders, attended the services.<sup>40</sup>

The practice of holding a memorial service should be replicated because the

gathering of victims and perpetrators at these events could be a starting point for reducing tensions between perpetrators and victims, survivors and their families. Such initiatives have a positive impact on future reconciliation between victims' families and the perpetrators of political violence. The chances of reconciliation and healing are very high, because memorial services offer space for survivors and victims to learn what happened, thereby helping to bring closure to unresolved issues. In a news report, Tichaona Sibanda considers villagers holding memorial services an opportunity for restoring justice and healing, explaining that villagers took responsibility for their healing after the ONHRI failed them.<sup>41</sup> Because of political sensitivities associated with such matters, family members of the victims were unable to bury or remember their departed loved ones during the 2008 political violence.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the 2010 memorial services gave traumatized communities a chance to mourn and remember their loved ones, which is critical if survivors, family members of victims, and friends are to heal from the trauma of violence.

Other communities can learn from such initiatives, as memorials have the potential to help communities take initiative in addressing their own healing needs. Such local agency by villagers can assist victims, survivors, and perpetrators in reconnecting with the violent past, thereby assisting in the restoration of previously damaged relationships. The coming together of people from various social groups, including traditional and religious leaders, is indicative of restored social cohesion and collective efficacy at the community level.

### **Factors Enabling the Efficacy of IPCs**

One notable reason for the success of IPCs in Zimbabwe is that politically volatile communities have been reached with peace messages, and these communities have been responsive to the establishment of IPCs. Another contributing factor has been workshops on peacebuilding, which have created an enabling environment for the formation of IPCs. The workshops aim at sensitizing local communities to conflict issues and methods of resolving conflict without the use of violence. The training workshops are participatory in nature in that participants are at liberty to share their life experiences of conflict and violence with peers. As stated already, the majority of respondents confirmed that IPCs were formed either during, shortly after, or several weeks after a conflict resolution workshop was held by civic organizations.<sup>43</sup>

Another contributing factor has been that IPCs were organically designed, with community members participating in the design, and formation, and day-to-day operations of these structures. By self-initiating interventions, local people were in fact empowering themselves by taking responsibility for their own peace and development aspirations. Civic society organizations have provided support ranging from funding conflict resolution workshops, providing training, and facilitating the formation of peace and development structures.

Another factor enabling the success of IPCs is their composition, being made up of individuals of diverse political persuasions, and including both victims and perpetrators of violence. These formations also contain individuals representing various constituencies in a community. As noted already, the inclusive nature of peace committees helps to bring together multiple perspectives, voices, and interests, thereby mitigating conflict as all social groups are represented including socially marginalized groups such as women and the youth.

### **Contradictions and Tensions between IPCs and Formal Peace Committees**

While IPCs and formal peace committees should be able to unite in a hybrid formation, creating a formidable peace architecture, there seems to be competition between the two types of organizations. The tension is in the perception of challenges to peace held by communities, which conflicts with the perception held by the NPRC's formal peace committees. This tension is captured by Mee, a respondent, who explains:

The problem is that community perceptions of peace and violence and that of the NPRC are conflicted. The NPRC underestimate IPCs' peace efforts, operating on the assumption that IPCs' efforts are weak and fragmented. Of course, fragility and fragmentation has an impact but local people are taking responsibility for their own peace and development in spite of these realities.<sup>44</sup>

All respondents in this study reported that the work of IPCs to reduce violence and crime at the community level receives no acknowledgement from the NPRC's formal peace committees, which were established seventeen years after IPCs were already in existence and operational.<sup>45</sup> As one respondent said:

“We thought the NPRC’s formal peace committees were going to adopt existing peace structure namely IPCs. However, they created their own structures. Committees were there already but they did not adopt our local structures.”<sup>46</sup> This remark suggests a lack of political will by members of the national peace architecture, the NPRC, to collaborate with existing IPCs as well as provide funding to sustain the work of grassroots institutions. Another respondent remarked that “the NPRC believe the state brings peace to people. In spite of the capacity by communities to cascade the work of formal peace committees to districts and wards, the NPRC seems to frown upon IPCs.”<sup>47</sup> While the general sentiments of respondents seemed to confirm that there are some contradictions and tensions between IPCs and the NPRC’s formal peace committees, a contrasting view from one respondent revealed that the NPRC is working with some IPCs in other places in Zimbabwe.<sup>48</sup> As IPCs are hybrid formations in themselves, the NPRC, which is informed by cosmopolitan values, should count on IPCs rather than continue to frown at these formations because it will exacerbate divisions rather than mitigate them.

Overall, IPCs are working on a myriad of peacemaking initiatives to build peace and sustain development and security, regardless of structural factors such as ongoing economic doldrums and community polarization along political lines. Despite this, the role of IPCs is being undervalued by the NPRC’s formal peace committees. As noted earlier, pursuant to its constitutional mandate, the NPRC established ten provincial peace committees throughout Zimbabwe in May 2019, with a view to cascade these peace structures to districts and village levels. It is ironic, then, that even though the establishment of district and village peace committees is a noble development, the NPRC has not made any efforts to date to collaborate with IPCs at the district and village level, even though these have existed since 2002.<sup>49</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to reflect on opportunities and problems faced by civil society–led IPCs in Zimbabwe over a two-decade period. One of the opportunities is for mainstream infrastructures for peace in Zimbabwe to make use of civil society–led peace institutions for implementing the objectives of the NPRC at ward and village levels. In doing so, the NPRC should avoid creating parallel structures or separate village and

ward peace committees. Where IPCs exist at district, ward and village level, the NPRC should facilitate harmonization of formal peace committees with IPCs. In respect of peacebuilding activities by communities, the NPRC should retain the mandate to set standards as well as monitor the performance of these local initiatives to ensure that the objectives of the NPRC are achieved across Zimbabwe. This means that IPCs, in executing their peacebuilding activities, should align them to those of the NPRC, and vice versa, to avoid current contradictions and tensions between the NPRC and IPCs. In implementing its mandate, the NPRC should consider strengthening human and material resource capacities of IPCs to make them more effective through the provision of financial and capacity-building services for sustainable peace in Zimbabwe. In the Zimbabwean context, the most significant impediment to sustainable peace is the absence of political will, as electoral processes are frequently characterized by the strategic use of violence by political actors. The theory of change informing civil society-led peace committees posits that informal peace committees can contribute to the reduction of violent incidents while simultaneously fostering peace education within communities. In practice, however, the persistence of political violence, even in areas where peace committees are operational, highlights the limitations of this approach.

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THE SYNERGY OF INTERNATIONAL  
ENDEAVOURS AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP:  
EXAMINING THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE  
FOR ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

*Hakob Gabrielyan*

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The relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated into a new war over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, with frequent subsequent outbreaks. Unlike most contemporary socio-political and historical scholarship aimed at analysis, interpretation, and assessment of past developments, this article builds upon analyses of the previous Armenian-Azerbaijani record to project possibilities of reconciliation and examines the road toward peace between the two states and their societies. The article combines content and actor analyses, united by an overarching theoretical framework of multidimensional liberal peacebuilding and the concept of hybrid-consensual, liberal-local peace. Following a historical overview of the conflict, as well as academic and analytical approaches that decipher the possibilities of peace in the evolving regional context, further steps in bilateral normalization between Armenia and Azerbaijan are suggested, with the aim of replacing dominant narratives of limited retrospective analysis in favour of particularly contextualized peace strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship has a historically deep and highly debatable record. Ethno-territorial tensions and conflict, which have been evolving, transforming, and mutating throughout the entire twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-first, continue to permeate and define the relationship between these two peoples. Despite the lack of consensus on interpreting the bilateral relationship, scholars have produced a substantial amount of historical research on the conflict. This is not the case where the most recent phase in the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship is concerned, particularly after outbreak of war in 2020, which changed the entire geopolitical landscape of the region.<sup>1</sup> Addressed rather in media and public analytical discourse, the current developments and their projections are missing a thorough academic scrutiny directed toward presenting a conceptually holistic, calibrated, and constructive approach aiming at a positive agenda of seeking negotiated peace rather than refuelling old narratives of war.

The purpose of this article is to consider if (the conditions) and how (the scenario) international peacebuilding mechanisms and local participation can bring peace to the long-lasting conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The overarching research question is, What dominates the Armenian-Azerbaijani formal narrative, and what are the missing elements in each side's position that would make it possible to reach peace? To answer this question, I examine international (institutional) and local (community-level) political mechanisms that could be utilized to overcome the current stalemate between the two sides.

The next section, "Research Approach," identifies the methodological and theoretical approach used to explore the article's stated objective, followed by a survey of the relevant literature. The third section, "Dominant Narratives

in the Armenian-Azerbaijani Relationship,” begins with a brief overview of the historical background of the conflict, essential for understanding the current debates and existing research. It then discusses academic and analytical views on the contemporary phase of the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship. The fourth section, “In Pursuit of Instrumentalized Peace,” considers what could be taken from the present moment to move both sides and their societies forward, initially toward less violence and less ethnic intolerance, and then to gradual reconciliation that can be preserved systemically and institutionally. This section returns to the central research theme and proposes several peace-supporting elements that would minimize xenophobia, reduce the risk of violence, be mutually acceptable, and possibly allow Armenian and Azerbaijani communities to coexist in tolerance. This is followed by a conclusion, summarizing the main arguments and findings presented here.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

### **Methodological and Theoretical Frameworks**

Given the need to find a rational balance between descriptive narration, examination of theoretical academic literature, desk research on empirical developments, and fresh insights, this study draws on and adapts content analysis to trace Armenian-Azerbaijani relations before and after the 2020 war, and uses actor analysis to identify the main stakeholders of the conflict and their contribution to peace efforts. Both content and actor analyses are essential to frame developments in the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations and normalization and the actors behind them. The interconnectedness of these two methods, one scrutinizing the context while the other one the driving forces that shape the dimensions of the conflict and peace, allows us to trace how change of a power engaged in the normalization directs the trajectory of Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue and, correspondingly, local dynamics.

These methods are united by the overarching theoretical framework of third- and fourth-generation conflict management and peacebuilding approaches: the school of large-scale, multidimensional liberal peacebuilding; and the generation of consensual, liberal-local emancipatory hybridity. Summarized by Oliver P. Richmond in *Palgrave Advances in Peacebuilding*,<sup>2</sup> these two

approaches are most relevant to the design and objective of this study, as well as closely matching present-day developments in the Armenian-Azerbaijani context. The third generation of peacebuilding theory stresses the importance of consensual endeavours by local actors who drive bottom-up efforts, and international/supranational institutions like the United Nations or the European Union, which jointly coordinate and support local peacebuilding practices. At the same time, this generation of peacebuilding theory assumes that a strong liberal peace cannot be reached until the role and needs of civil societies are recognized. The fourth generation of conflict management and peacebuilding theory, although critical of some aspects of the previous tradition, does not neglect it but rather systematically complements and builds on it. This approach defends the multidimensionality of peace efforts but shifts the ultimate goal of peace toward the defence and common respect of differences in order to shape a tolerant living environment. This in turn is only attainable, according to the fourth-generation approach, if international actors reject the ideas and practices of one-directional emancipation and embrace peace on the basis of hybridity: a consensual system beyond traditional liberalism that is “self-sustaining” and “sensitised to the local as well as the state, regional, and global.”<sup>3</sup>

These two generations of conflict management and peacebuilding theory suggest a new look at the current context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship, both demanding cooperation of the global and the local, and both, especially the fourth-generation approach, seeking inclusion of local stakeholders even if they are not classically liberal. The recommendations of these two generations are not taken up in this study merely as models of what should be: this saves the author from the fallacy of substituting actors as they are with their idealized versions, without attention to their (il)liberal peculiarities and practices, a typical mistake where future projections and conflict solutions are concerned. Instead, these approaches are juxtaposed with the reality of normalized use-of-force practices in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, thus considering the latter as they genuinely are, without falling into a trap of wishful exaggeration. At the same time, it is exactly the approach suggested by those two generations of conflict management and peacebuilding theory, particularly the instrumental possibility of shaping peace between liberal and illiberal and a compilation of international and local, that makes rethinking perspectives of peace under the conditions of Armenian-Azerbaijani imbalance complicated, because of the outcomes

of the 2020 war, differences in their respective political regimes, military capabilities, alliances, and local interpretations of normalization, as will be presented in the following sections.

### **Literature Review**

The research draws on the latest generations of peacebuilding theory,<sup>4</sup> as outlined in the previous section, particularly those works that emphasize the role of mediation,<sup>5</sup> track II diplomacy and local ownership,<sup>6</sup> the importance of political will,<sup>7</sup> and a critical hybrid approach toward conflict settlement and peace construction.<sup>8</sup>

As noted above, the current developments between Armenia and Azerbaijan have not received much international academic scrutiny, especially compared to other contemporary or historical international conflicts and crises. There are several analytical op-eds aimed at defining the new regional juncture and the tendencies between the sides, written by specialists in the subject.<sup>9</sup> However, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and international scholarly work examining the post-2020 situation are scarce, and mostly explain preceding eras or focus on a retrospective analysis of the 2020 war and its triggers.<sup>10</sup>

As far as media reports on the topic are concerned, it was important to preserve the principle of academic impartiality, balancing between Armenian and Azerbaijani sources and critically assessing information they conveyed. Given that the recent war and hostilities, the land blockade and subsequent mass exodus of the Armenian population from Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh, the Armenian name of the region) still within living memory, and the danger of new escalation, local media are very often driven by sentiments of ethnic intolerance and explicit xenophobia, manifested in the terminology used when describing the opposite side and in transmitting propagandistic outlook.<sup>11</sup> To counter these effects, only evidence-proven and, where possible, primary sources are quoted in what follows; when accessible, credible international media sources, free of offensive language, are preferred to local news sources, including state-sponsored ones.

## DOMINANT NARRATIVES IN THE ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONSHIP

### **The Historical Background of the Conflict**

Although the assessments vary, the early years of the Soviet Union, for the sake of conciseness, can be considered as the beginning of the modern relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Earlier periods are highly debatable, even when only ethno-linguistic, cultural, and demographic aspects are considered,<sup>12</sup> and one can barely trace a direct causal effect on the events of later centuries. However, the early years of Soviet rule significantly impacted all subsequent developments, as the Soviet leadership decided to gift the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, predominantly occupied by ethnic Armenians,<sup>13</sup> to the jurisdiction of the Azerbaijani SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1921.<sup>14</sup> As Sergey Lantsov states, it was a “time bomb” decision.<sup>15</sup> For sixty-eight years after that, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh was maintained as an autonomous oblast (administrative unit), which de jure presumed wider autonomy and human rights but de facto, under the Soviet political regime meant strict vertical subordination to the authorities in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan. The people of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, facing “cultural de-Armenization in the region,”<sup>16</sup> organized a referendum and voted for withdrawal from the Azerbaijani SSR, as legally permissible according to Soviet law from 1990.<sup>17</sup> The First Nagorno-Karabakh War, in 1988–94, was a result of Azerbaijani willingness to maintain territorial integrity inherited from the Soviet Union on the one side, and Armenian aspirations to form an independent and self-determined Nagorno-Karabakh, separate from Azerbaijan, on the other.<sup>18</sup> The ceasefire declaration of 1994, wherein Nagorno-Karabakh was formally represented and recognized as a party at the negotiating table,<sup>19</sup> ended the phase of full-scale hostilities and transformed the conflict into a “frozen” configuration, interrupted several times since then.

Recognized by neither the international community nor Armenia, which heavily backed it during the war and years after, Nagorno-Karabakh still managed to maintain its self-proclaimed independence for almost thirty years. The forty-four-day war in 2020, initiated by Azerbaijan to “end the occupation,”<sup>20</sup> shook the very foundation of the ceasefire as well as the pillars of regional geopolitics. The previous ceasefire of 1994–2020 had been brokered by Russia, France, and the United States within the framework of

joint co-chairmanship in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group and created to encourage final resolution. A deepening threat of confrontation coupled with global geopolitical rivalry between the co-chairs and the resulting uncertainties, spilling over from a global scale to the local level, gradually reduced the impact of mediation and peacebuilding efforts and the likelihood of a peaceful solution. In this respect, the 2020 war was a culmination of uncertainties emerging from the change of tactical and strategic dispositions of states in regional geopolitics. European and international institutions, although calling for immediate end of hostilities, showed a lack of “internationalism and solidarity”<sup>21</sup> and were rather vocally but inactively observing the evolving situation on the ground as the forty-four-day war shifted the balance of regional powers dramatically. Ultimately Azerbaijan, openly and proactively backed by Türkiye,<sup>22</sup> gained full control over the territories surrounding the core of Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas Armenia miscalculated the risk and showed “political incompetence.”<sup>23</sup> A formal ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan was mediated by Russia through the Trilateral Statement of 9 November 2020.<sup>24</sup>

The 9 November statement, although being only a ceasefire agreement and not a final peace guarantee, contained elements of peacebuilding. The statement expected all hostilities to be terminated and that negative peace, that is, protection of physical safety and security from physical violence, be secured by the Russian peacekeepers; that the Agdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin districts of Karabakh be returned to Azerbaijan while Armenia would maintain direct land connection with Karabakh through the Lachin Corridor, controlled by Russians; that prisoners of war (POWs) be exchanged and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from both sides returned to their homes under Azerbaijan’s guarantees of their security and fundamental rights; and finally, that all transport communications from and through the region be unblocked.<sup>25</sup> The statement, although “binding to both its parties”<sup>26</sup> and stopping full-scale war between the sides, by and large thanks to the Russian peacekeepers, did not prevent further hostilities, which frequently ended with new fatalities, military and civilian prisoners, and a rising toll of refugees, forced to either stay and tolerate insecurities or leave their homes.<sup>27</sup>

The 9 November statement was supposed to be further underpinned by another trilateral decision, ratified on 11 January 2021. The 11 January statement, again mediated by Russia, reiterated the parties’ willingness to

unblock all regional communications and to establish a joint working group to “draw up a list of the main directions of activities” on the track of economic and transport routes.<sup>28</sup> However, real peace was still far from being reached, as Azerbaijan repeatedly launched additional military incursions from May 2021 through the year, this time occupying the sovereign territories of the Republic of Armenia and refusing to cease occupation.<sup>29</sup> The offensive activities continued in 2022, escalating in September.<sup>30</sup> Armenia, seeking further international military assistance, appealed to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in hopes of being backed under the charter of the organization, which the country had been a member of since the inauguration of the Collective Security Treaty in 1992. However, other than declarative appeals, no substantial support was received.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, Armenia and Azerbaijan were actively challenging each other through international legal platforms such as the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights to protest racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, the destruction of cultural heritage, and the retention of POWs.<sup>32</sup>

As the situation was not significantly improving, the two countries began to seek alternative means of international mediation and accepted the European Union’s brokerage, simultaneously recognizing mutual territorial integrity and sovereignty in the borders defined by the Alma-Ata 1991 Declaration. The October 2022 statement provided, according to UN Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča, a “glimmer of hope”<sup>33</sup> by establishing the EU monitoring mission on the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these efforts, the situation on the ground remains tough: since December 2022, in addition to continuing its occupation of the sovereign territories of the Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijan began a land blockade of the only remaining road that connects Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh, the Lachin Corridor (or as Armenians refer to it, the Road of Life), thus causing a violation of fundamental human rights of the people of the region, including their starvation.<sup>35</sup> In September 2023, the last president of Nagorno-Karabakh, Samvel Shahramanyan, signed a decree to dissolve the republic as of 1 January 2024, following a full-scale land operation initiated by Azerbaijan and a spontaneous total exodus of the Armenian population from the region, de facto making them forcibly migrated refugees. The following section will analyse how this voluminous and complex set of issues

has carried over into the most recent phase of the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship, and how different stakeholders treat them now.

### **The Contemporary Phase of Armenian-Azerbaijani Relationship**

The substance of the current negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be consolidated around six components, the interpretation of which causes huge discontent among the two populations and still keeps both sides far from implementing a comprehensive agreement. These components are

- an exchange of enclaves belonging to Armenia and Azerbaijan, demarcation and delimitation of state borders, and recognition of mutual territorial integrity between two republics;
- a solution regarding the final legal status for Nagorno-Karabakh, through a legally binding expression of will, with verifiable and executable guarantees of security and self-governance of its people;
- a land territory that would permanently link Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh;
- the right of all IDPs and refugees to return to their original places of residence, and the return of all POWs;
- steps to unlock all regional logistics; and
- international security guarantees to monitor and support implementation of all aforementioned points on the ground.

This list is not exhaustive, as there are questions barely discussed among stakeholders that nevertheless have a direct relevance to the conflict and to peacebuilding. A vivid example is the impact of the conflict on the mental health of the populations and particularly on displaced persons. Sheikh Shoib and his colleagues have studied the subject among Azerbaijani IDPs, suggesting particular steps to decrease trauma and stigma.<sup>36</sup> These recommendations are equally applicable to the Armenian IDPs, servicepersons, and civilians impacted by the conflict in any form.

Armenian experts like Sossi Tatikyan have proposed to cluster the issues and order them in a way that would minimize the intensity and likelihood of new hostilities. As such, Tatikyan finds it “reasonable and pragmatic” to discuss the formal status of Nagorno-Karabakh only after clarifying the human

rights and security of people living there.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the jurisdiction over deciding this status belongs neither to the Republic of Armenia nor to Azerbaijan, according to Tatikyan, but to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, who are entitled to self-determination following the fundamentals of international human rights law.<sup>38</sup> Tatikyan echoes the statement made by Toivo Klaar, Designated EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, who sees no settlement “without a process in which these people’s opinions and views are taken into account.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, former US ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy claimed that “the United States, as a co-chair country of the OSCE Minsk Group, recognizes the role of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh in deciding its future.”<sup>40</sup> This right of self-determination, Tatikyan continues, should be preserved through the support of the international peacekeeping mission to Karabakh, following the precedent of Kosovo. This expert believes that implementing such a mission is feasible, and even Russia, already having a military presence there, would agree to it, be willing to “find a niche” of possible normalization with the EU and to “share the burden of peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh, especially in light of the ongoing Ukrainian crisis that is stretching its military and economic resources.”<sup>41</sup>

The first step in introducing an international presence, even if unarmed, has been already completed with the EU establishing civilian observers on the Armenian side of Armenian-Azerbaijani border under the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy. This was a follow-up to the October 2022 statement and extended the EU’s two-year mandate for “promoting peace,” “building confidence,” and “contributing to human security in conflict-affected areas.”<sup>42</sup> Similar to Tatikyan, Azerbaijani researcher Mahammad Mammadov argues that “the deployment of the EU mission to Armenia can play a vital role in diminishing the possibility of military escalation along the undemarcated borders,” and that “the EU presence on the border will establish a relatively more permissive environment where Azerbaijan and Armenia will find it easier to engage in peace talks.”<sup>43</sup> The Azerbaijani scholar juxtaposes his view with that of the official Azerbaijani government, which, according to him, treats the mission rather as leverage for Armenia to “gain time for the emergence of a regional balance of power amenable to its interests.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, if the EU’s presence is not validated by both sides, according to Mammadov, it will experience the same fate as that of the OSCE Minsk Group, which Azerbaijan perceived “as an institutional

framework manipulated by biased countries to score geopolitical points rather than contribute to peace and stability in the South Caucasus.”<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, Mammadov believes that the deployment of the EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA), although it advances normalization, does not seem to have a clearly defined long-term goal. Anna Ayvazyan, sharing a similar sentiment, argues that the European assistance advances mediation but does not promise “reaching concrete results.”<sup>46</sup> Ayvazyan concludes that the EU “is not able to fully compensate for the deficit of the peace-building institutions” and will not be able to stop another military escalation, should that occur.<sup>47</sup> Mustafayev advances this argument but to an extreme level, asserting that the EU’s position on the conflict is “ambiguous,” as the EU did not “materialize its single voice in times of escalating tensions.”<sup>48</sup> The Azerbaijan-based scholar particularly accuses France, as this EU member state and permanent member of the OSCE Minsk Group was “in favor of Armenia, thus in violation of the mediator’s commitment to neutrality.”<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, Yerevan-based scholar Benyamin Poghosyan argues that it is the Armenian government that should use better communications, both externally and domestically, to explain “its position on the EU mission capacities and capabilities.”<sup>50</sup> Poghosyan asserts that Armenia and Azerbaijan should not just diversify their pool of potential mediators, increasing the quantity of global powers engaged, but act carefully to ensure that normalization is not “trapped in Russia–West or US–Iran confrontation.”<sup>51</sup> This opinion partially contradicts the views of British specialists on the topic, Thomas de Waal and Laurence Broers, who claim that Armenia and Azerbaijan should be more decisive regarding international institutions they seek support from. De Waal names the CSTO a “paper tiger” on account of its persistent failure to mobilize internal defensive mechanisms and act in accordance with its charter, when member states like Armenia or Kyrgyzstan have required its support.<sup>52</sup> Broers doubts the relevance of the OSCE Minsk Group, as the latter “has struggled to reassert itself after being sidelined during the 2020 war.”<sup>53</sup> Yet none of the local or international experts claim that Armenia and Azerbaijan should be left to their own. Their opinions are consonant in following the logic of the third and fourth generations of peacebuilding theories and assume the need to improve the coherence between global and local while supporting local ownership over normalization.<sup>54</sup>

Another tough challenge, according to experts, is the dichotomy between

the signals transmitted by the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments when meeting at international platforms, and the messages conveyed to their respective domestic populations. Armenians are very sensitive toward any news that presumes Azerbaijan's restoration of control over Nagorno-Karabakh or any unilateral concessions. This was particularly vivid after the November 2020 statement, when protesters stormed government buildings, and the year after, when the country's prime minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that a substantial document was to be signed but provided the population with no hint about the content of the document. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani government, as seen in its public announcements,<sup>55</sup> was aiming to display itself internationally as a state capable of peaceful settlement. This projection contrasted with the government's decision to offer its own people a highly racist depiction of Armenian soldiers in a "trophy park."<sup>56</sup> Installed to commemorate the war, the park portrayed wax-mannequin Armenians in caricatured positions and remained on display for almost a year, up until the International Court of Justice began hearings on ethnic discrimination. As Broers writes, this proves that in the Azerbaijani mainstream, "Armenians are still presented as a monolithic mythologized enemy to be dominated."<sup>57</sup>

Policies similarly raise not only criticism but also concern over the genuine capability of Azerbaijan to dialogue with Karabakh Armenians and, should the peace agreement recognize Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan, re-integrate them non-coercively.<sup>58</sup> Tatikyan describes and compares these policies with a "Sarajevo-like siege, Holodomor Scenario, [and] a scenario combining elements of the Srebrenica massacre,"<sup>59</sup> while the first prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno Ocampo, characterized Azerbaijan's policy as nothing but "a genocide," referring to the Article II(c) of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>60</sup> This deplorable verdict has been additionally proven not only through the reports of the Armenian ombudsperson in 2020–23,<sup>61</sup> but also by two fact-finding missions organized by the University Network for Human Rights, which collected a massive record of human rights violations committed by Azerbaijan against ethnic Armenians during and after the war.<sup>62</sup> Needless to say, this makes it difficult for any normalization, not only between the peoples of Armenia and Azerbaijan but equally between the government of Azerbaijan and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

## IN PURSUIT OF INSTRUMENTALIZED PEACE

### **The Elements of Peace**

The first necessary condition to establishing peace is a strong political will in the parties concerned. Political will can be shaped by personal qualities of the leaders who, as William Zartman puts it, seize upon “a ripe moment to produce the agreement.”<sup>63</sup> Zartman refers to the Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy in the early 1990s, and defines ripeness as either a “mutually enticing opportunity” or “mutually hurting stalemate,” when perception of events pulls the parties to exercise enough will to seek dialogue.<sup>64</sup> Based on this definition, one can state that political will is the ability to commit, even under unfavourable circumstances.

The political will to establish peace can survive even when there is a seemingly strong asynchrony of powers. The international history of conflicts proves that peace can happen while none of the parties feels it has formally conceded or surrendered. This was evident in post-colonial South Africa,<sup>65</sup> in Israel and Palestine’s clandestine diplomacy in the Middle East,<sup>66</sup> and in the British-Irish peace processes.<sup>67</sup> Here is where traditional peacebuilding is complemented by new approaches, presuming that the political will of elites alone does not suffice but requires bottom-up driving forces, including civilian demands, mobilization of non-state actors, and empowerment of local communities.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani ceasefires, although declaring the need to prepare their societies for peace, did not have the political will to instill a local “culture of peace” to accompany, accelerate, and refine normalization. For almost thirty years, Armenian and Azerbaijani societies have experienced no significant progress in reaching each other through non-coercive and non-toxic forms of communication. Neorealism is insufficient to explain how this progress could be made and what exactly the theory of peacebuilding should apply to ensure, at least on an informational level, a communication hygiene that is free of dehumanizing language. The problem is that degrading and offensive language is often demanded from within: radicalized societies behave intolerantly, being fed with hatred, and transmit intolerance back into the upper echelons of power. This has been clear during flag-burning instances in Armenia,<sup>68</sup> but particularly evident in Azerbaijan.<sup>69</sup> However, the post-war realities suggest that internal pacification plays into the hands

of both Armenian and Azerbaijani governments, even if for different reasons.

Being obliged to deal with the painful aftermath of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Karabakh conflict, and return of the territories became a *raison d'être* for the Azerbaijani ruling elite, which has been thus justifying its incumbency since the first ceasefire. Formally, this elite can further consolidate its influence by referring to the favourable results of the 2020 war. However, fulfilling this *raison d'être* means that the elite is now deprived of the traditional mandate to monopolize the political field. This factor is the one that can prompt Azerbaijan to realize that its domestic audience needs to be calmed as the conflict ceases. Additionally, it can make Azerbaijan more flexible and accommodating in terms of its political will to negotiate, aimed at gaining more political weight and credibility domestically and from external actors. In turn, the unsuccessful aftermath of the 2020 War for Armenia and the new geopolitical configuration in the region suggest that it is vital for the country's government to rationalize public expectations, proving that no revengeful reciprocity is feasible, rational, or beneficial. Rationalizing the need to deviate from a traditional offensive style of communication capitalizes on more recent peacebuilding approaches and supports diversification of the elements and actors involved in reconciliation.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are far from exhausting the resources of track II diplomacy, understood as an informal but consistent exchange between non-state actors, such as scholars, NGOs, and religious figures, aimed at fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, and trust outside official government channels, that paves the way for future normalisation. One believes that the representatives of academia and scholars specializing in conflict studies may reach each other and be mobilized for setting the initial bridge of public communication. As the environment is still tense, this can be done as a form of clandestine diplomacy. Such dialogue may further set the tone for informal and then open meetings between academic communities, the frequency of which will directly depend on the success of previous events.

The positive experience of track II communications can spill over into or proceed in parallel track III efforts as the latter augments peacemaking through grassroots exchanges and (re)established commercial ties. The freedom to exercise different formats, settings, and modalities of peacebuilding is vast. For example, the incentivized trade and economic interaction in Nigeria mitigated ethnicity-driven suspicions, diffused tensions,

and reinstated peaceful coexistence through traditional market trading practices.<sup>70</sup> The latter could be coupled with “indigenous principles of dispute settlement” such as reaffirming the local authority of elders, which, similar to Nigeria and Ghana,<sup>71</sup> is very relevant in Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. As another example, attempts to address ethnically driven conflict through de-masculinized lenses were practised in Cyprus.<sup>72</sup> Even though the meetings organized there did not lead to significant progress, the very fact of regular interactions and mobilization of women’s peacebuilding potential had no tangible shortcomings but instead a positive effect, valued by all parties in the conflict. Empowering women’s voices has already proven to be an effective technique in reducing the likelihood of a (re)emergence of violent conflicts<sup>73</sup> and “sobering up” masculine myopia of glorifying war and bloodshed.<sup>74</sup> The impact increases when women’s participation is institutionalized and formally levelled up.<sup>75</sup> Finally, Armenia and Azerbaijan could practise art-based peacebuilding, unprecedented for them but exercised in Bosnia-Herzegovina,<sup>76</sup> Northern Ireland,<sup>77</sup> and other ethnically-heated contexts.<sup>78</sup> Such practices do not require prior vocational training; ultimately, peace aesthetics has proven to enrich societies with a more inclusive, non-conventional and dynamic worldview, reducing stigmas and public censure. As Frank Möller ably notes, reconciliatory aesthetics helps in forming peace “mentally as a concept ... [*even*] if peace is absent in fact.”<sup>79</sup>

To unite all these examples and enrich them, one should advocate for the inclusion of (a) women, elders, youth, and diasporas as bearers of conflict trauma and post-conflict reconciliatory potential; (b) media representatives, who should channel pacification for mass audiences; (c) business entities interested in economic dividends that long-term peace may promise; (d) academicians and experts keen to provide further scholarly outlook on post-conflict reconciliatory practices; (e) religious leaders, although their participation could run the risk of colouring the conflict with religious overtones in the social consciousness. At the same time, religious organizations could support activities aimed at minimizing extremist sentiments among groups practising fundamentalism or possessing religiously intolerant views.

Overall, the more Armenia and Azerbaijan diversify the carriers of peacebuilding and invite grassroots participation, the higher the likelihood of the peace agenda reaching a wider audience and shifting the current egregious

trends will be. The following section will discuss the role of these elements in pursuit of setting a long-term peace plan.

### **Maintaining a Long-Term Peace**

The new ceasefire has been established relatively recently but judging from the current developments and trajectories of the bilateral relationship, it promises little if any room for optimism. What has become evident during the last years, including through the constantly renewing hostilities, total toxification of national discourses, discriminatory activities, and rising uncertainties, is that the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship has reached the point where only locally installed international peacekeeping forces can maintain the physical security of the population in disputed Nagorno-Karabakh. Before the September 2023 decision to dissolve the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Russian peacekeepers had indeed provided protection to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh on an overall level, as their deployment *de facto* stopped the bigger war. However, resuming crossfires, incidents of kidnapping, humiliation of civilians, and the subsequent exodus of the Armenian population are all evidence that the peacekeepers carried out only the strategic-level mission of saving population from the threat of total physical extermination, while the tactical maintenance of peace, let alone any peacebuilding or reconciliatory missions, was practically obliterated. On the other hand, Armenia introduced European observers who consistently monitored and reported border incidents between Armenia and Azerbaijan, not interacting with the Russian peacekeepers or taking care of the incidents in Nagorno-Karabakh so far. *Ceteris paribus*, these tools are directed exclusively to maintain negative peace and will not (or possibly, *are not designed to*) lead the conflicting sides to the next phase of the peace process that points to social emancipation from hatred, healing of memory traumas, and ultimate reconciliation.

Sossi Tatikyan and Karena Avedissian see the solution in the replication of the Kosovo scenario for Nagorno-Karabakh. Avedissian argues that an international peacekeeping mission, designed similarly to the ones in Kosovo, Timor-Leste, or South Sudan, is required to guarantee the maintenance of long-term peace under the mandate and mechanisms of collective security rather than only Russian peacekeeping. Avedissian sees the protection of Karabakh's sovereignty by international peacekeepers as a counterbalance to the otherwise "abused" concept of territorial integrity, which in the light of

the current physical insecurities for Karabakh Armenians would only mean their ethnic cleansing and genocide—this is, according to the Armenian scholar, the driving force that should convince international actors to follow mentioned precedents and re-install tested mechanisms of peacekeeping in the South Caucasus.<sup>80</sup>

For his part, Azerbaijani researcher Shujaat Ahmadzada believes that the Israeli-Palestinian case offers a workable solution, as the Middle Eastern conflict highly resembles the Armenian-Azerbaijani situation. The author sees the root cause of the conflict in the entrenched policies of continuous mutual denial.<sup>81</sup> Following the precedent of the Oslo Accords of 1993, Ahmadzada proposes that Nagorno-Karabakh be divided into three zones according to the demographic composition recorded in the late Soviet archives. Interactions between the zones, as the author suggests, are initially minimized for security reasons, but monetary currencies of both groups are used along with weekend markets “to improve trust”; logistical centres and trade and supply chains are freed. The maintenance of strategic security in all zones would still be kept by the Russian peacekeeping contingent, complemented by the European civilian mission. Ahmadzada believes that such a plan would take “a period of 10–15 years” to primarily guarantee a strengthening of negative peace, “prevent the game of politics from undermining the regional peace processes,” and “test the coexistence model while averting the third war.”<sup>82</sup> The later future of Karabakh as a whole and Karabakh Armenians in particular Ahmadzada sees within Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.

The approaches of both Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars are not without logic. Remarkably, they even share common elements, such as the format of negative peacekeeping. However, where the question of status is concerned, the conflict becomes a camera obscura where each side, after entering the dark room and looking at the contemporary reflection of their common history, sees and reports a completely different picture of the same reality and fiercely fights over whose report is valid.

The first and obvious obstacle is that neither Avedissian’s nor Ahmadzada’s proposition explains why official Azerbaijan should agree on weighted international peacekeeping, especially after the total depopulation of Karabakh from ethnic Armenians.<sup>83</sup> After all, the strictly limited Russian contingent in Karabakh, deployed until 2025 with the possibility of a five-year extension

only under mutual consent, and the two-year mission of EU observers on the Armenian part of the border are excessive for Azerbaijan, which rather sees the situation as the finest hour in which to demonstrate full and uncompromised supremacy over regional developments.

The Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars also do not touch upon the fact that, in contrast to idealized views, peacekeeping could entrench a neocolonial dependency and false emancipation, thus deepening the crisis.<sup>84</sup> Peacekeeping must not be mythologized,<sup>85</sup> idealized, or idolized<sup>86</sup>; the analysis of peacekeeping and then peacebuilding missions in Mali, Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Timor-Leste suggests that all of them suffered from “top-down, elite-led, official processes.”<sup>87</sup> In all these countries, peacekeeping secured basic physical safety for those who requested it and attempted to go further by ensuring more stability and coordination of efforts for state building, but it lacked two fundamentals: inclusivity and sufficient self-sustaining local ownership. To overcome this obstacle, local stakeholders, including Armenian and Azerbaijani civil societies, intellectuals, and authorities should not consider their ownership and responsibility over local incidents as currency for bargaining with foreign actors, simultaneously prompting peacekeepers and institutions behind them to address rigorously even micro incidents of violence.

It is true that wisely organized peacekeeping may contain elements of peacebuilding; however, one should not rely solely on external support to transform negative peace into a positive one. The peacekeepers are not mandated *per se* to carry the weight of a state-building mission and manufacture the institutions of self-sustained governance. In other words, international missions should support but never replace local ownership: doing so would be detrimental for the latter. This argument leads researchers like Vadim Romashov to promote the idea of peace-supporting rather than peace-building missions.<sup>88</sup> The transformation of negative peace into a new phase, in the context of the highly volatile environment of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, should rather occur while the carriers of negative peace are there, who act as a buffer against sudden outbursts of radicalization. If peacekeepers preserve a negative peace but depart with no self-sustaining institutions established by local owners, the crisis will spawn again. Therefore, if the formal status of Karabakh implemented through the 1991 independence referendum does not reflect the current stance and can be held no longer, the new status must

be defined strictly within the period of the international military-civilian mission deployed in the region, but preferably at the stages when track II and III communications are already bearing fruit. The exact temporal window is secondary here. More importantly, it should surpass the period of merely negative peace. Leaving the question of Karabakh's status to later periods will only be a short-term solution for a long-term sacrifice, as it is pregnant with more instabilities, heated uncertainties, and consequently, a new loop of radicalization. Deciding the ultimate status of Karabakh only within the limits of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity will lead to the same consequences. Therefore, it would be wisest not to demand each side to agree on what they saw inside the camera obscura, but to agree that whatever has been seen should not become a justification for violence; only thus we can we carry the historical memory, remember the scars, but not be emotionally triggered to hit previous wounds and open new ones.

The Israeli-Palestinian accords, although groundbreaking for their time, did not abolish regional instabilities, as peace has been constantly violated. This comparison is troublesome because equating Azerbaijan with Israel or Armenia with Palestine justifies further agony. If chosen, this path presumes that conflicting sides will reach no sustainable peace, the Republic of Armenia will gradually face more territorial losses, while Nagorno-Karabakh will become an amorphous place of constant insecurity. Simultaneously, the lessons of Kosovo show how fragile the architecture of peace can be should peacekeepers depart—an argument proving the urgent necessity to establish all those elements of peace.

To summarize, a long-term peace for Armenia and Azerbaijan is possible through effective coordination of international peacekeeping coupled with local peacebuilding, understood in a wider but practical sense of implementing core elements of track II and III diplomacies. What is crucial about local ownership and grassroots-level initiatives is to ensure their inclusivity and widespread approach. The most common mistake that inadvertently prompts opposing sides to conclude that interactions are non-useful is the practice of exclusive dialogue, when educated intellectuals of one side communicate with intellectual elites of the other side but the dialogue itself does not expand to encompass all social strata. Meanwhile, it is exactly level III diplomacy, carried out by economic subjects in the markets, youth, and unaffiliated social groups, that firmly improves the sense of genuine

commonness and tolerance without idealizing and romanticizing the issue. This is well documented in the ethnographic study by Romashov,<sup>89</sup> where Armenian-Azerbaijani communal coexistence in rural Georgia is presented through demystifying the legend of a “peaceful coexistence” that can be achieved without addressing deeply entrenched ethno-nationalist narratives. The alternative to that are high-level meetings with no practical impact on the ground, as already evidenced by the Armenian-Azerbaijani experience of the last thirty years. Eye-opening communications should happen not solely on foreign grounds and conferences but by mutual invitation from the conflicting countries. Peacebuilders should talk not only to those who share their aspirations for peace—peacebuilders must speak with all.

## CONCLUSION

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is full of dramatic episodes, the lessons of which remain unlearned. Azerbaijani researcher Shujaat Ahmadzada is correct in considering mutual negation as one of the roots of current uncertainties, which grow on a xenophobia-saturated soil. Both peoples can use different international instances to demonstrate each other how far hatred can proliferate if government, public, and all other local stakeholders are not establishing systemic mechanisms for the institutional protection of peace. This mission, in its turn, is impossible if not accompanied by deep and comprehensive dialogue at track II and III levels – meaning gradual full-scale horizontal communication between CSO representatives, academic bodies, and trade and commercial actors. This approach perfectly fits into the methodology of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and especially the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which prioritizes local ownership of peace efforts and stresses the need for coherence between international external stakeholders and local actors. Negative security, protected by international mandate, will never bring the fruits of positive peace without bottom-up demand originating from within. One can argue that the contemporary methodological and conceptual framework for considering the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict requires an overhaul, with more inclusive tools to be incorporated. This means, first and foremost, shifts in reigning communicational forms that are full of dehumanizing power, and more active attraction of non-state, academic, and private stakeholders to lead the peace processes at niche levels.

Finally, the analysis of the previous phases in the bilateral relationship have proved that this relationship is severely missing the elements of wider horizontal communications, including at the level of different social and professional groups. The urgency of implementing those communications will to a large extent define the sustainability of the peace architecture, at the moment developed only partially through incomplete negative peace.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has both similarities and drastic differences with other conflicts, referred to by Armenian, Azerbaijani, and international researchers. What is most important in those similarities, however, is the situation of ripeness between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which unfortunately is accompanied by the pain and suffering of peoples who have bid farewell to their illusions. This affects Armenians more, but it hurts both sides: Azerbaijan faces shortcomings and huge reputational losses in the international area, while Armenia undergoes an internal crisis of stability, growing into an idealized, mystified, detached political discontent, full of speculation and lacking critical self-reflection. At the same time, the current situation, being risky, also opens an opportunity for both Armenia and Azerbaijan to improve and diversify their perception of peace, leaving behind the narrow-minded phobias of being mutually exclusive. In this sense, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, even proclaiming their independence more than thirty years ago, are still undergoing the process of adulthood, tested by the ability to liberate themselves from ethnic intolerance. We cannot eradicate what has already been done. What we can do, instead, is ensure that future generations are free from experiencing the same. The peace plan for Armenia and Azerbaijan is not a white paper—not in practice. Rather, it is a rocky path both societies must traverse, either pushing and drowning each other or finding that inner power to cross it hand in hand.

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REIMAGINING PEACEBUILDING IN THE  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO:  
A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY  
AND INDIGENOUS AGENCY

*Israel Nyaburi Nyadera, Billy Agwanda, and Michael Otieno Kisaka*

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This study advances a conceptual framework for peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by integrating conflict sensitivity with political ecology and indigenous systems of governance. Moving beyond critiques of the liberal peace model—a top-down paradigm prioritizing elite bargains and militarized stability—we propose a *multi-scalar approach* that accounts for the interplay of local power dynamics, globalized resource extraction, and colonial legacies. Drawing on empirical case studies from eastern DRC (2010–23), including interviews with forty-five Congolese civil society leaders and ex-combatants, we demonstrate how externally designed interventions often exacerbate tensions. Our findings reveal that peacebuilding fails when it neglects the *political stakes of resource allocation*, such as patronage networks privileging Kinshasa-aligned actors, and the contested nature of “the local,” where autochthony claims by Mai-Mai groups exclude marginalized communities like the Banyamulenge. Our framework underscores the necessity of centring Congolese epistemologies, such as integrating indigenous land tenure systems into conflict resolution, while critically engaging external actors’ roles in perpetuating violence,

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from UN peacekeepers' complicity in sexual exploitation to transnational corporations profiting from cobalt extraction. By bridging political ecology's focus on resource inequities with conflict sensitivity's emphasis on iterative feedback loops, this study offers a transformative agenda for peacebuilding praxis. It advocates for dismantling structures that monetize war, from illicit mineral trades to the "peacekeeping economy," and calls for accountability mechanisms that prioritize Congolese agency over external geopolitical interests.

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite its vast endowment of natural resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is still trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence. This enduring reality is inimical to Patrice Lumumba's 1960s vision of post-colonial DRC, where lasting peace and prosperity were contingent upon freedom from colonial exploitation and a shared goodwill between the people and leaders. More than half a century later, this vision remains unfulfilled, and the country appears unable to escape the conflict trap. The internecine conflict has caused the loss of over six million lives since 1996 in what the International Rescue Committee has aptly described, based on the longevity and magnitude of conflict, as "Africa's World War." The episodes of peace have served as a prelude to more war, and going by the protracted nature of the conflict, peace has failed to deal with the problem of violence. Internal dynamics, including weak governance structures and ethnic divisions in a country with over 250 ethnic groups, are predominantly fronted as the drivers of the conflict, yet they form a small proportion of the story. This article argues that the failure to realize Lumumba's vision cannot be solely viewed through the lenses of domestic failings but should be seen through the lenses of a global political economy that thrives on instability—where a complex system of colonial legacies and transactional extraction sustain what Achille Mbembe refers to as "necropolitics,"<sup>1</sup> the politics of life and death.

The liberal peace framework, a top-down approach that prioritizes political and market liberalization,<sup>2</sup> has dominated international efforts to stabilize the DRC.<sup>3</sup> Several United Nations–brokered peace agreements, as well as deployment of MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)—the UN’s peacekeeping mission that has succeeded the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999—have been costly, with limited success. The failure of the liberal model is attributed to its apolitical approach that lends credence to elections and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs at the expense of grassroots antagonisms, incendiary actions of local elites, and land disputes, factors that account for “everyday politics” in DRC.<sup>4</sup> While critiques of the liberal framework are plausible, they leave unnoticed the historical roots of the ongoing conflict. The DRC crisis cannot merely be explained as an implementation failure of the liberal model but must be considered as a corollary of deep-rooted structural colonial legacies. The imposition of arbitrary borders that confined over 250 ethnic groups into a single state following the 1885 Berlin Conference, as well as the mercantilist and brutish regime of King Leopold II, entrenched systems of domination and extraction that have defined the country’s contemporary political and economic trajectory.<sup>5</sup> These systems have persisted through the help of powerful multinational corporations and Western states that supported the authoritarian Mobutu regime and armed militia groups in the Congo Wars to gain access to minerals.<sup>6</sup>

This article presents a Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity framework (Figure 1) that synthesizes three critical perspectives: first, conflict sensitivity premised on the belief that even the well-meaning interventions can have perverse consequence that intensify violence if existing local power structures are overlooked;<sup>7</sup> second, political ecology that examines how governance of natural resource and environmental degradation can fuel conflict<sup>8</sup>; and third, indigenous systems that utilize community-based governance dispute resolution mechanisms like the Baraza councils of South Kivu that adjudicate disputes based on consensus.<sup>9</sup> This framework adopts as its object of analysis the intersection between local agency, colonial legacies, and global forces, and examines how they sustain conflicts. For instance, artisanal cobalt miners in Kolwezi, many of whom are children, work in suboptimal conditions for Chinese companies that supply Apple and Tesla.<sup>10</sup> The proceeds are used by groups like Mai-Mai, operating on the pretext of being defenders

of ancestral land against external entities, to fund armed conflicts.<sup>11</sup> In this dynamic context, indigenous claims, state absence, and global demand converge to produce a self-sustaining and economically rational violence, a phenomenon referred to as “structured chaos” by Theodore Trefon.<sup>12</sup>

This study offers three contributions to the vast field of peace and conflict. First, it brings on board *a framework bridging disciplinary silos*. Political ecology has been widely applied in different conflict contexts, including the Niger Delta and the Amazonian region, but its synthesis with conflict sensitivity is novel to the DRC context. This stretches the limits of the “local turn” fronted by Roger Mac Ginty,<sup>13</sup> which idealizes the agency of local people, by rejecting romanticized notions of local agency. Germain Ngoie Tshibambe and Polipoli Lunda Chimène construe local Baraza councils as a continuation of unequal gender relations,<sup>14</sup> arguing that despite being an embodiment of a pre-colonial governance system, the councils are male-dominated and often marginalize women and other groups like the Pygmies. Militia groups like the Rwandan-backed M23 also manipulate ascriptive affiliations like ethnicity to gain control of the mineral-rich regions, showcasing how what is valorized as local is instrumentally utilized for economic gains.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the article highlights the limits of DDR programs through an *empirical analysis of DDR’s political failures*. Based on extensive field work experience in North Kivu (2022–23), including interviews with thirty former M23 fighters and nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff, this study demonstrates the limits of DDR programs that largely succeed in short-term demobilization but fail in achieving long-term integration. One ex-M23 combatant noted: “They gave me a sewing machine, but five others in my street got the same. Now we compete for customers, and I earn less than I did carrying a gun.”<sup>16</sup> Data from the World Bank point to disparities in recidivism among DDR participants in the Kivus and Rwanda.<sup>17</sup> While 62 percent of DDR recipients return to the militias within two years in Kivu, only 22 percent relapsed in Rwanda’s Ingando camps, where reintegration programs are comprised of land grants and psycho-social support.<sup>18</sup> This disparity highlights the limits of externally imposed DDR programs that often overlook the survival challenges of ex-combatants in environments replete with poverty and prolonged marginalization.

Third, this study attempts to decolonize Western-centric contemporary knowledge of the DRC conflict. Indeed, Congolese voices remain peripheral

in the Western literature. This study integrates literature rooted in Judith Verweijen's ethnographic study of the Baraza councils in Uvira which highlights how indigenous systems' co-opt elements of modernity into their operations.<sup>19</sup> Francophone scholars Tshibambe and Chimène trace the land disputed in the DRC to the *terres vacantes* doctrine of Belgium, which classified all "unoccupied" land as state property—a policy that continues to disenfranchise smallholders in the contemporary DRC.<sup>20</sup> These scholarly works contest the pervasive neoliberal narrative that formal land titling alone is the antidote to resolving the disputes and instead call for hybrid models that incorporate both customary and statutory regulations.

Fixing the liberal peace framework is not the panacea for conflict in the DRC. To overcome the conflict trap, there is a need to disrupt the structures that produce and profit from the conflict. This article fronts the need for rethinking peacebuilding in the DRC, arguing that the conflict requires a shift from the conception of peacebuilding as a technical Western-led intervention to peacebuilding as a pursuit of political justice. It advocates for an enforceable accountability mechanism for multinational corporations engaged in extraction of natural resources from the DRC, a shift to non-militarized aid strategies, and incorporation of Congolese systems of knowledge in policy design and implementation.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Dominant narratives on conflicts in resource-rich and fragile states reduce violence to the availability or scarcity of lootable resources, overlooking political and economic structures that produce and sustain conflict. The Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity framework proposed in this article explores the nexus between patronage politics, indigenous systems of governance, and global extractivism in the DRC. Through a multi-scalar lens, it advances decolonial, community-driven solutions by linking local antagonisms to global supply chains and challenges the prevailing technocratic model of peacebuilding (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity



Source: Authors, 2025

This study situates the salience of indigenous governance structures in the DRC, particularly the Baraza councils in South Kivu, as vital yet contested forums of conflict resolution. The councils' decisions are a product of consensus largely hinging on customary norms to resolve disputes among various societal groups, including women, elders, and the youth.<sup>21</sup> These systems have shown great resilience and evolution while retaining their legitimacy and identity amid pressures from the ongoing conflict and modernization of the state. Indigenous systems have shown significant success in conflict resolution. For instance, Baraza councils' involvement in the resolution of land disputes in Ituri led to a 40 percent reduction in intercommunal conflicts in 2022.<sup>22</sup> Their success can be attributed to their alignment with existing cultural norms, particularly the use of oral tradition, which favours restorative justice, as opposed to retributive justice pursued by formal courts.<sup>23</sup>

The indigenous systems, despite registering relative success, continue to face challenges that could undermine their legitimacy. Key amongst them are

the exclusionary patriarchal norms that marginalize women. For instance, PeaceDirect reported that women in North Kivu's Baraza accounted for only 12 percent, pointing to a systemic marginalization of women.<sup>24</sup> The exploitation of traditional authority by armed militias is another challenge facing the indigenous systems. Armed groups like Mai-Mai have invoked claims of ancestral land entitlements—"autochthony"—to assert political control and legitimize violence.<sup>25</sup> Evaluating the efficacy of indigenous systems, hence, demands a balanced perspective. The systems have proved to be culturally and locally grounded mechanisms for dispute resolution, but they are not a comprehensive cure to the endemic conflict in the DRC. Sustainable solutions have been found to emanate from hybridized models that blend formal mechanisms with the traditional systems.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in Walikale, a pilot project conducted in 2022 integrating Baraza land demarcation procedures with state titling led to a 35 percent reduction in land disputes.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, sustainable impacts can only be achieved by dismantling patriarchal systems and promoting inclusive structures that elevate the positions of marginalized groups like women and youth.

The complexity of the DRC conflict is best understood through a consideration of the impact of politics on resource allocation and aid utilization. Peacebuilding efforts are often compromised by patronage networks that divert vital resources to private entities, strengthening power imbalances and amplifying local grievances that lead to recurrent violence.<sup>28</sup> A case in point is the 2012 DDR program in Goma that, despite having a USD 200 million budget, suffered from poor design and implementation. Rather than adopting a comprehensive strategy, it favoured ex-combatants connected to Kinshasa elites. The participants received vocational training in carpentry and sewing without an elaborate assessment of the market. The consequence was that 62 percent of participants relapsed to armed groups in two years, citing economic hardship.<sup>29</sup>

Gender imbalance is another challenge that DDR programs continue to grapple with. According to Fionnuala Ní Aoláin and colleagues, despite accounting for approximately 40 percent of the militia's support roles, including cooks and informants, women made up only 8 percent of DDR participants.<sup>30</sup> This exclusion of women not only entrenches horizontal inequalities but also undermines the potential of women's agency needed in post-conflict reconstruction. Elite capture further undermines the efficacy

of DDR programs. For instance, relatives of political elites made up a huge proportion of employees of local NGOs tasked with the implementation of DDR programs, leading to diversion of funds and substandard service provision.<sup>31</sup> As a result, excluded ex-combatants have resorted to forming new armed groups like the Groupes des Jeunes Patriotes that engage in extortion and undermine security.<sup>32</sup> These shortcomings underscore the limits of technical solutions and highlight the need for wider socio-economic and political reforms. In comparison, DDR programs in Rwanda's Ingando camps that focused on tackling land issues offered psycho-social support and socio-economic reintegration, achieving significant success with an 80 percent reintegration rate.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, a feasible scenario for the DRC would be to decentralize DDR authority to provincial peace committees and introduce participatory budgeting procedures to enhance accountability and transparency in aid distribution.

Beyond the local dynamics, the conflict in the DRC is deeply intertwined with global extractive economies that fuel the demand for rare minerals, which incentivize armed groups to pursue a share of resultant profits. For instance, global environmental campaigns such as green energy transitions have led to an increase in the demand for cobalt, a key component of electric vehicles' batteries. The corollary is that this has inadvertently intensified violence in the region.<sup>34</sup> The DRC accounts for about 70 percent of the world's cobalt, and Chinese companies such as CMOC control the stakes of mining concessions, accounting for approximately 80 percent. The companies operate in collaboration with the DRC military to forcibly displace artisanal miners, further exacerbating local grievances and provoking armed resistance. This situation is exploited by rebel groups like Mai-Mai that impose taxes on mining pits, generating an estimated annual income of USD 25 million.<sup>35</sup>

The involvement of international actors is often downplayed, yet remains a crucial element in understanding the incessant instability in the DRC. Credible evidence has implicated Rwanda in supporting the M23 rebels' quest in the mineral-rich regions of Goma and the Kivus. However, Rwanda's continued support for the rebel groups is enabled by China's and Russia's moves to veto UN Security Council sanctions against Rwanda.<sup>36</sup> Crucially, mechanisms for corporate accountability entrenched in frameworks like the Dodd-Frank Act remain weak. It is not surprising that major American

corporations like Tesla and Apple are alleged to have overlooked the use of child labour in their supply chains and continue to operate unabatedly. Based on Amnesty International's estimation, there are over 30,000 children in cobalt mining in Kolwezi, pointing to the colossal human cost behind the global supply chain.<sup>37</sup>

A disruption of the exploitative patterns demands reforms in the global supply chain architecture. For instance, a 5 percent "conflict mineral tax" can be imposed on corporations to redirect revenue to communities in mining areas for socio-economic development. Breaking these exploitative cycles requires structural innovations.<sup>38</sup> In tandem with the tax measures, a blockchain-based tracking system—already piloted in Rwanda—can reduce smuggling, as evident in the 30 percent reduction recorded in Rwanda.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, leveraging technology within the supply chain can enhance transparency and support socio-economic development in local communities. The strength of the Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity model lies in linking local realities of artisanal mining with the dynamics of global geopolitics, disrupting the artificial silos that undermine peace efforts. By giving prominence to Congolese systems of knowledge, like the Baraza councils, the framework counters dominant Eurocentric narratives of international development. Its adaptive capacity, as seen in the reduced backlash against MONUSCO, which deployed Community Liaison Assistants to consult Baraza councils before interventions, underscores the value of community-led strategies.

Despite its utility, the framework also grapples with myriad challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies that could impair its implementation. Holding international actors accountable while remaining attuned to local dynamics requires a balancing act to avoid the risks of policy paralysis. There is also the danger of co-option arising when hybrid governance structures are exploited by warlords posing as customary leaders. A case in point is the infiltration of Baraza councils by members of the Mai-Mai militia in Masisi to gain influence in tin mining, highlighting the limits of blank engagement with traditional systems.<sup>40</sup> Disparities in funding further reduce the potential of traditional systems. For instance, a small percentage of the total humanitarian aid directed to local NGOs in the DRC further entrenches a culture of dependency.<sup>41</sup> Overcoming these obstacles demands deliberate efforts to enhance transparency in aid distribution, strengthen

local ownership of peacebuilding, and disrupt the patronage system that entrenches elite capture.

Achieving sustainable peace in the DRC demands a paradigm shift from technical fixes to confronting the underlying structures that sustain violence. The Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity Framework presents a valuable lens for understanding both local and global dynamics, and proposes long-term, context-specific, justice-centred solutions. These include prioritizing the agency of local actors through inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized communities; ensuring enforceable corporate accountability for human rights violations via mechanisms such as the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, and implementing existing frameworks such as the 2017 Mining Code, which requires reinvestment of 10 percent mining royalties into local programs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods design grounded in the Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity framework. Focusing on eastern DRC from 2010–2023, the research bridges macro-level political economy—particularly the global cobalt and coltan supply chains—with micro-level ethnographies of local governance such as Baraza councils. By combining longitudinal analysis of conflict trends, intensive fieldwork, secondary data review, and participatory validation with Congolese stakeholders, the study advances a decolonial praxis that centres local epistemologies even as it critically interrogates external interventions. The research is structured as a multi-scalar case study. At the global and national scales, it examines shifts in UN stabilization efforts, the cycles of M23 uprisings (2012–13; 2022–23), and the evolving dynamics of hybrid peacebuilding initiatives. At the community scale, it investigates indigenous governance forms and grassroots innovations that contest or accommodate predatory resource extraction. These layers are woven together over key temporal junctures—post-2010 UN reform, the resurgence of major armed groups, and recent artisanal mining booms—to trace how structural forces and local agency co-produce patterns of conflict and potential pathways to peace.

Qualitative fieldwork formed the backbone of the empirical inquiry. Between 2022 and 2023, seventy-five semi-structured interviews were conducted

in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri with civil society leaders (n = 45), ex-combatants (n = 30), and NGO staff (n = 10). Participants—identified through snowball sampling to amplify marginalized voices such as women, artisanal miners, and Pygmy representatives—spoke in Swahili and French about DDR failures, militia taxation schemes, and indigenous dispute-resolution practices. Complementing the interviews, the lead researcher observed twelve Baraza council sessions and four women’s land caravans, documenting how local decision-making structures are shaped by—and sometimes co-opted by—warlord networks. Eight focus-group discussions with ex-combatants in Goma and Walikale further unpacked the economic and social drivers of DDR relapse, using open-ended prompts to elicit rich narratives of precarity and elite capture.

Quantitative data analysis triangulated these narratives with hard evidence. Two conflict datasets—the 2010-2023 MONUSCO incident reports and the Kivu Security Tracker—were analyzed to map violence trends alongside mineral production sites. The 2021-2023 World Bank surveys of 2,100 DDR beneficiaries and artisanal miner income assessments quantified the economic pressures faced by former combatants.<sup>42</sup> The 2023 satellite imagery from International Peace Information Service (IPIS) geolocated 412 illicit mining sites, which were cross-referenced with forensic financial reports to estimate militia taxation revenues.<sup>43</sup> Secondary sources—including 2016-2023 UN Panel of Experts reports, Amnesty International’s 2022 corporate supply-chain audits, and academic<sup>44</sup> scholarship—provided historical and institutional context, tracing colonial legacies and multinational corporate complicity.

Data analysis proceeded on two complementary tracks. Qualitatively, NVivo-assisted thematic coding of interview transcripts revealed recurring patterns—elite aid capture, gendered exclusion in DDR processes, and symbiotic relationships between militias and resource flows. Critical discourse analysis of UN resolutions and corporate sustainability reports deconstructed dominant narratives of “stabilization,” contrasting them with Congolese lived realities. Quantitatively, regression models in SPSS tested the statistical relationship between mineral export volumes (coltan, cobalt) and conflict fatalities, yielding significant correlations ( $p < 0.01$ ) when paired with La Générale des Carrières et des Mines (Gécamines) trade data. Spatial analysis in ArcGIS then overlaid militia-controlled mining sites

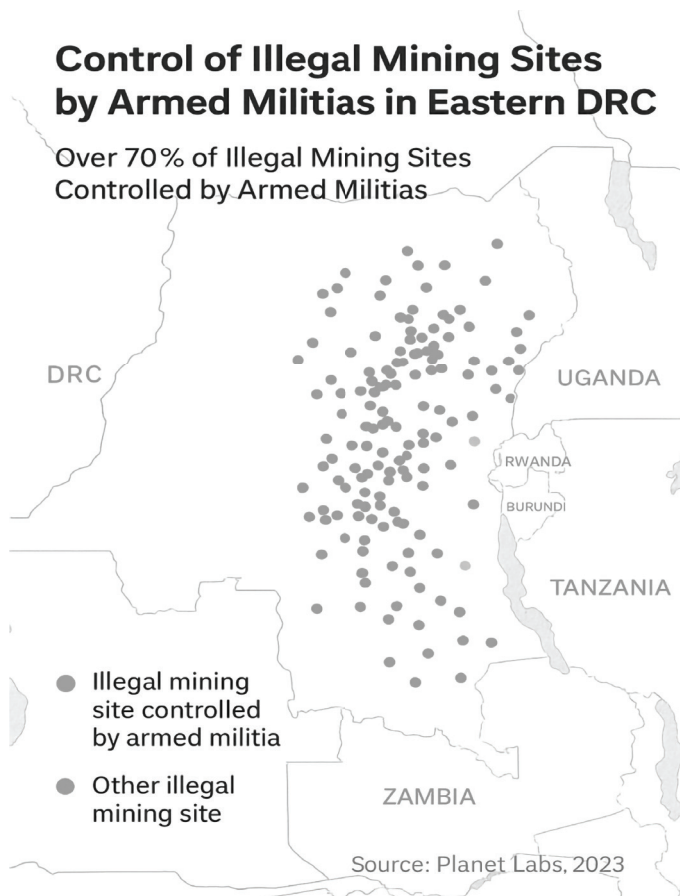
with FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) deployments and MONUSCO patrol maps, producing geo-visualizations of conflict “hotspots.”

To ensure that findings resonated with local perspectives, preliminary results were presented to Congolese civil society partners in Goma and Bukavu through two participatory workshops in 2023. Feedback from these sessions prompted critical refinements—particularly around how Baraza councils are co-opted by armed actors and how community leaders navigate the tension between customary authority and militant pressure. This participatory validation not only enriched the analysis but also embodied the study’s decolonial commitment to co-producing knowledge with those most affected by extractivist violence. Together, these methods allow for a rich interrogation of how global capitalist drives, state and non-state patronage, and indigenous agency intersect to produce—and at times resist—cycles of violence in eastern DRC. By weaving qualitative depth with quantitative rigour and foregrounding Congolese voices at every stage, the study advances both theory and praxis in conflict-sensitive political ecology, offering insights that are at once locally grounded and globally informed.

## FINDINGS

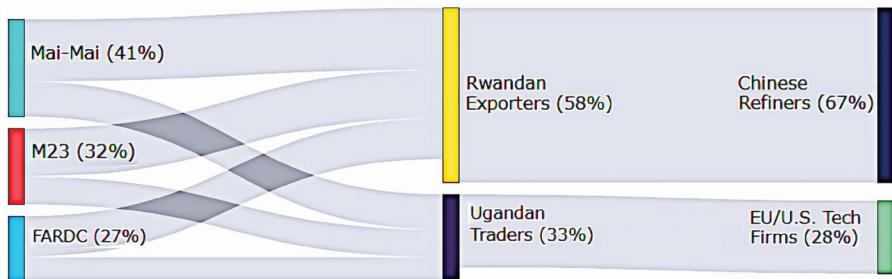
Global extractivism plays a critical role in sustaining the activities of armed militias in the DRC, transforming them into commercial rational actors embedded within the global mineral supply. Based on satellite imagery,<sup>45</sup> over 70 percent of the 412 illegal mining sites situated in the DRC’s eastern provinces are controlled by armed militias that impose daily taxes on miners’ yields (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Control of Illegal Mines by Armed Groups in the DRC



A case in point is the M23's daily tax per miner in the Basie region, estimated to generate a monthly income of between USD 12 and 18 million.<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International reported that over 85 percent of cobalt acquired by Tesla in 2022 originated from sites controlled by militia pointing. While the market value of cobalt is USD 45/kg, the Chinese firm CMOC pays USD 1.5/kg, which is paid to M23 for security services. This buttresses the complicity of corporate entities in illegal mining activities.<sup>47</sup> Global powers are also severely implicated. China and Russia have vetoed 78 percent of sanctions against Rwanda, repeatedly accused of supporting M23 rebels.

**Figure 3. Conflict Mineral Flows in the DRC**



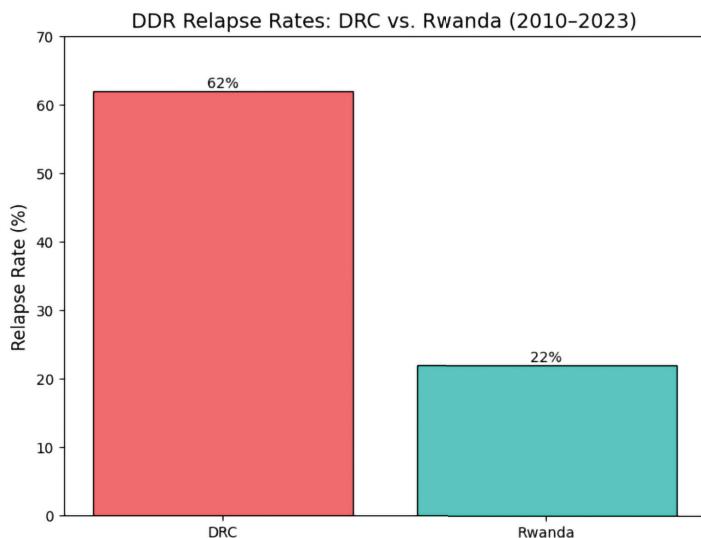
Source: Authors, 2025

Figure 3 depicts the transnational movement of cobalt from militia-controlled mining sites to the final end-users in the international market. It shows that Mai-Mai rebels control 41 percent, M23 commands 32 percent, and FARDC 27 percent of illegal mining sites, confirming the dominance of armed groups in the country's resource sector. The regional intermediaries serve as conduits that move the rebels' minerals to the international market. Rwanda supplies 58 percent, and 33 percent is channelled through Ugandan exporters. The refined minerals are absorbed into international markets, with 67 percent going to China and 28 percent to EU and US tech firms. The nexus between local dynamics, such as rebel taxation regimes, and global demand for minerals provides revenues that finance violence, underscoring the link between the conflict in the DRC and commodity profits generated abroad.

## National Patronage

DDR programs are significantly weakened by entrenched patronage systems in the DRC that benefit ex-combatants with strong ties to elites in Kinshasa. Between 2010 and 2023, 62 percent of the 2,100 ex-combatants participating in DDR initiatives in North Kivu returned to militancy within two years, a stark contrast to the 22 percent relapse rate observed in Rwanda's well-structured Ingando camps (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Bar Graph of DDR Relapse Rates Comparing the DRC to Rwanda**



Source: Authors, 2025

Elite capture of disarmament resources is evident in survey data (n = 150) showing that 84 percent of DDR participants in Goma maintained strong connections with politicians based in Kinshasa. Exclusion of women was equally evident. Despite women constituting 40 percent of those serving in militia groups – mainly in supportive roles, only 8 percent of the DDR beneficiaries were women, and the reintegration package did not align with participants' professional skills. An ex-Mai-Mai medic in Walikale noted, "They gave me a sewing machine, but I was a nurse."<sup>48</sup> Vocational training initiatives neglected local market dynamics, leading to unintended

consequences. For instance, the provision of 120 carpentry kits to participants in Masisi resulted to a 60 percent reduction in prices of local furniture, further deepening economic vulnerability and unintentionally incentivizing participants to re-engage with armed groups.<sup>49</sup>

### Local Agency

South Kivu's indigenous governance system, particularly Baraza councils, reflects institutional resilience and patterns of exclusion. Table 1 presents their impact across thirty communities.

**Table 1. Impact of Baraza Councils**

Metric	Baraza-Mediated Areas	UN-Mediated Areas
Violence reduction	40%	15%
Women's participation	18%	6%
Land dispute resolution	72%	34%
Youth inclusion	22%	9%

Source: Authors, 2025

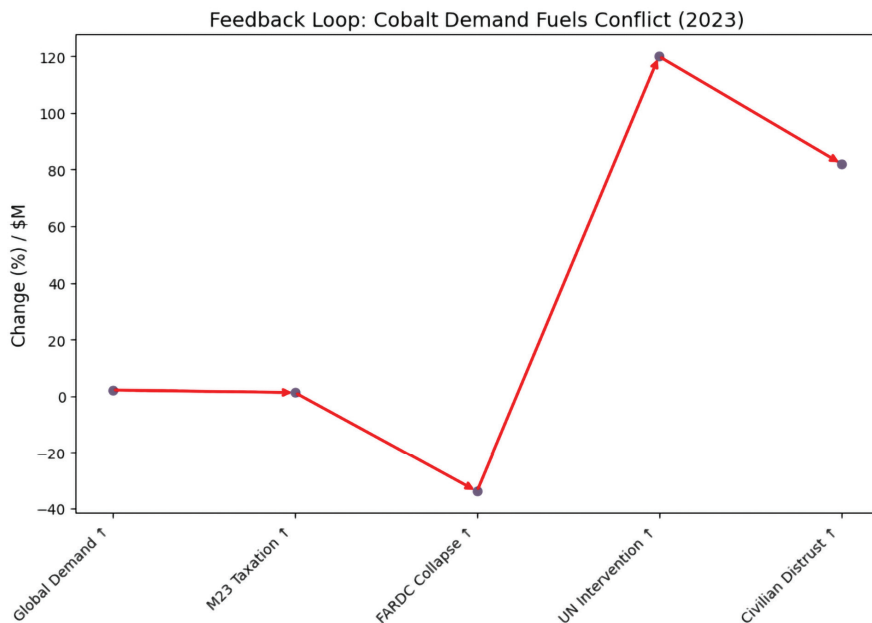
Baraza councils demonstrated a significant impact in reducing violence by 40 percent relative to a 15 percent reduction in areas under UN mediation. Participation of women in governance rose to 18 percent, up from 6 percent, while 72 percent of land disputes were successfully resolved through the Baraza councils, relative to 34 percent resolved via UN mediation. Inclusion of the youth also slightly increased to 22 percent relative to 9 percent in UN-mediated areas. In 2002, land conflicts in Uvira were reduced by 52 percent, with 138 cases resolved through a hybridized system combining Baraza elders and state judges, against twenty-nine cases resolved in state courts. There are still challenges with the indigenous system. Mai-Mai militia has invoked autochthony claims to appropriate 12,000 hectares of land from the Banyamulenge herders in Ituri.<sup>50</sup> Gender disparities also remain, evident as only six of the ninety Baraza council members in North Kivu are women, and their contributions are often undervalued. As one female participant noted, her ideas were disregarded as "kitchen talk."<sup>51</sup>

### Feedback Loops

Feedback loops between resource extraction, armed violence, and weak state

capacity perpetuate endemic cycles of instability, particularly in eastern DRC. Figure 5 demonstrates this dynamic using 2023 data.

**Figure 5. Feedback Loop Model (Cobalt Demand)**



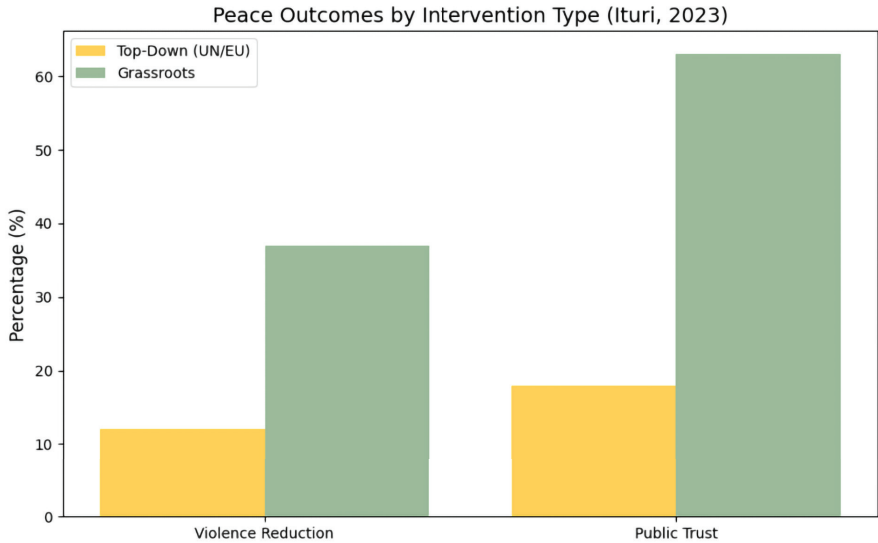
Source: Authors, 2025

The figure shows how the rise in international demand for coltan corresponds with the rise in taxation by the M23 rebels, earning the group additional monthly revenues of USD 2.1 million that facilitate the conscription of about 1,200 new fighters per quarter. Concurrently, the Congolese army (FARDC) has seen a 34 percent decline in territorial control, further weakening the state's capacity. Meanwhile, MONUSCO troops began to withdraw amid a decline in public trust.<sup>52</sup> A study by Jenna Goldblatt shows that the increase in global demand for coltan has resulted in increased cycles of violence and fatalities.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, 41 percent of Mai-Mai's new combatants recruited between 2022 and 2023 were unemployed former DDR participants (survey data, n = 150).

## Emergent Resistance

Despite the pervasive extractive-violence nexus, grassroots initiatives demonstrate significant potential for transformative change. Figure 6 compares outcomes of top-down interventions with community-driven approaches.

**Figure 6. Peace Outcomes by Intervention Type**



Source: Authors, 2025

The above figure indicates that UN/EU initiatives reduced violence by 12 percent and were trusted by 18 percent of the public, while the community-based women's cooperatives reduced violence by 37 percent and were trusted by 63 percent of the public between 2021 and 2023. Synergie des Femmes negotiated eighteen truces in Beni between 2021 and 2023, using maternal symbolism: "We birth this land—we will not let it die." The Coopérative Minière du Peuple also had a significant impact in Kamituga, recording a 44 percent reduction in militia taxation through GPS tracking of shipped minerals. Crucially, the local media, particularly Goma's Sauti ya Amani radio station, employing counter-propaganda scripts, achieved a 29 percent reduction of militia recruitment. These new forms of resistance underscore the salience of community-based, culturally conscious initiatives in rebuilding public trust and disrupting extractive economies. Table

2 shows the role of communities as an emerging force employing subversive innovation and hybrid governance to rewrite the history of the DRC.

**Table 2. Typology of Resistance Strategies**

Strategy	Example	Impact
Subversive adaptation	Miner unions falsify export logs	Reduced militia revenue by 31%
Symbolic reclamation	Women's land rituals	Increased female land titles (+27%)
Decolonial tech	Blockchain mineral tracking	Cut smuggling (+18% legal sales)

Source: Authors, 2025

The results support the Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity framework, demonstrating that the incessant violence that characterizes the DRC is neither a culturally ingrained nor a random phenomenon but rather a corollary of a transnational network of extraction and marginalization. The evidence challenges the dominant “resource curse” theory, which suggests that countries rich in natural resources are inherently susceptible to slower economic growth, weaker governance and increased conflicts. The evidence, however, illustrates an entrenched phenomenon of *resource orchestration* in which militias, state elites, and global capital collaborate to exploit the suffering of the larger populace. This study's most crucial insight is the existence of *contestation* rather than a state of collapse in the DRC. Congolese people are initiating models of transformative peacebuilding, including the women-led land caravans and the Baraza-court hybrid systems that transcend the predominant liberal peace approach. These micro-revolutions outline a pathway to a solution to decades of violence, where justice emerges locally, driven by the spirit of resistance.

## DISCUSSION

The complexities confronting contemporary peacebuilding initiatives are conspicuously inherent in the DRC. By integrating conflict sensitivity, indigenous systems, and political ecology into a multi-scalar framework, this

study unveils a critical insight: the DRC's enduring violence is not merely a "local" issue or an unavoidable "resource curse." Instead, it is a product of a systemically engineered system in which the armed groups, global markets, and elites in the DRC collaboratively reap from the instability. By highlighting the agency of Congolese people and showcasing the symbiotic relationship between extractive capitalism and liberal peacebuilding, this study confronts mainstream paradigms and outlines a transformative pathway to sustainable emancipation.

The conflict in the DRC manifests in an ecosystem replete with necropolitics, conceptualized by Mbembe as domination of life through the logics of death, operating in three levels.<sup>54</sup> At the global level, international organizations and transnational corporations perpetuate violence and instability through what we describe as conflict arbitrage: a means of delegating the acts of repression to militias while maximizing gains from the extraction of minerals. Our findings indicate that cobalt mines controlled by M23 yield between USD 12 million to USD 18 million monthly through militarized taxation, with 89 percent of these profits funnelled into offshore accounts associated with transnational corporations intermediaries. This arrangement resembles the concessionary companies of the colonial era, now updated for the twenty-first century, where "security partnerships" with militias (such as CMOC's USD 1.50/kg payments to M23) replace the historical Force Publique of Leopold II.

At the national level, the patronage networks of Kinshasa produce a *kleptocratic membrane*, a conduit redirecting mineral wealth and international assistance to the elite's pockets while contributing to domestic fragility. The high numbers of ex-combatants rejoining the militia—62 percent in two years—highlight the paradox of peacebuilding in the DRC: perpetuating the instability it purports to mitigate. By redirecting over 80 percent of resources allocated for DDR to elites and their loyalists, peacebuilding efforts mirror former president Mobutu's approach of "divide, demobilize, and reabsorb," transforming former militants into "loose molecules" susceptible to remobilization. At the local level, indigenous systems exemplified by the Baraza councils function as double-edged instruments. While they enhance the resolution of land disputes in hybrid courts, they also perpetuate colonial hierarchies of dominance through the exclusion of minority groups and women. The displacement of over 12,000 Banyamulenge herders by

Mai-Mai militia under the pretence of indigenous rights protection highlights the instrumentalization of identity markers in the production of violence.

This study questions the veracity of the “local turn” in peacebuilding literature by showcasing the connection between transitional networks of extraction and community agency. While the community-level efforts like women’s land caravans have engendered a 37 percent reduction in violence in Ituri, their effectiveness was pegged on *subversive adaptation*, involving subversion of global systems. For instance, the Coopérative Minière du Peuple successfully breached blockchain technology to establish parallel supply chains, redirecting 18 percent of militia-taxed cobalt to certified licit markets (see Table 2). Relative to corporate audits that underscore traceability over justice, the cooperatives employed former militia members as monitors, resulting in a 41 percent reduction in relapse rates and a 22 percent increase in miners’ wages. These local innovations surpass the local-global dichotomy, exemplifying the concept of “epistemologies of the South” advanced by Raimundo Barreto and Vladimir Latinovic to refer to forms of knowledge emerging from the margins that redefine liberation.<sup>55</sup> The hybridity of the Uvira courts that settled 138 disputes in 2022 through the integration of Baraza traditions with vernacular proceedings and gender quotas is a prime example of this praxis. Notably, the cases were conducted in Kinyarwanda and Swahili, local dialects that resonate with the lived experiences, rather than in French, associated with the colonial legal system.

The UN’s Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) highlights the limitations of conventional militarized peacebuilding initiatives supported by colossal budgetary allocations. A scrutiny of its budget indicates that 14 percent of USD 1.1 billion is unintentionally directed to militia checkpoints through fuel contracts. Although its Nairobi Process receives USD 47 million for attack helicopters, community dialogue initiatives receive only USD 12 million. This disproportionate allocation of funds reflects a necropolitical logic where the global North’s pursuit of “stability” to gain unfettered access to natural resources rationalizes the confinement of Congolese citizens in spaces replete with controlled violence. Although MONUSCO’s coercive mandate has been criticized by scholars such as Séverine Autesserre<sup>56</sup> and Theodore Trefon,<sup>57</sup> this study suggests that the UN does not operate as a neutral arbiter but as an active contributor to the ongoing conflict.

Community Liaison Assistants credited with reducing civilian backlash against the mission by 25 percent continue to operate under regulations that support the security of resource extraction areas over human rights, reminiscent of colonial “pacification” efforts funded by concessionary companies to safeguard rubber production quotas.

The proposed transition from extractive to reparative peacebuilding is founded on four interconnected pillars. First, corporate accountability demands the implementation of binding and enforceable due diligence regulations and the prosecution of corporate heads implicated in the sourcing of minerals from conflict-ridden countries. The European Union’s Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence exemplifies a robust legal framework, but its exemption of artisanal miners should be reconsidered to protect the vulnerable mining sector. Second, demilitarized aid demands reallocation of at least half of the MONUSCO’s budget to community-based education and health programs. This pillar is founded on the success of community-level women’s alliances that have registered a 64 percent trust rating as a result of the participatory budgeting process. Third, restitution of land demands the repeal of the *terres vacantes* doctrine enacted by Belgium in 1908, which displaces over 200,000 Congolese citizens annually. Strategies such as hybrid titling of parcels of land in Walikale, merging statutory and customary claims, have already shown significant potential, evidenced by the 35 percent reduction in land-related disputes. Lastly, epistemic justice underscores the incorporation of local knowledge in policy formulation. This is typified in Beni through the Kilio cha Mama’s rituals that played a crucial role in reducing the conscription of child soldiers by 29 percent.

This research also integrates critiques of resource extraction from political ecology with the principles of conflict sensitivity’s iterative learning, leading to an interconnected theoretical framework with three main elements. First is the element of conflict arbitrage, which reveals how transnational organizations delegate the function of violence to local militia to reap the gains of illegal resource extraction while shifting the burden of instability and violence to local populations. Second is the element of subversive adaptation, which highlights the innovative agency of local communities by drawing on grassroots movements’ utilization of existing supply chain systems to disrupt networks of exploitation through digital traceability tools and participatory mapping. Last is the element of necropolitical peacebuilding, which reconceives military

intervention by considering it not only as a mere effort at order-making but also as a sovereign enterprise that governs life and death through a combination of humanitarian action and strategic governance objectives.

Cumulatively, these elements provide a nuanced framework for analysing the nexus between local resistance, coercive power, and global capital in the production of violence and potential for liberation in the DRC. They confront the predominant assumptions of mainstream liberal peace, suggesting that sustainable peace can only be achieved in the DRC by deconstructing global systems of predation that produce and sustain violence. In 1961, Lumumba envisioned an African continent with its own voice and free from external influence. This study has explored how local communities in the DRC are actively working toward reclaiming that voice, not through resolutions from the UN or NGOs funded by external donors, but through acts of resistance that blend innovative strategies with local knowledge. Initiatives such as blockchain-enabled mining cooperatives and women's land caravans represent a new form of *counter-modernity* that goes beyond colonial binaries. The journey toward peace in the DRC will not be defined in Geneva or New York, but within the mixed courtrooms of Uvira and the disputed mining sites of Walikale. This study illustrates that the foundations of liberation have already begun to flourish; our role is to support rather than to stymie their development.

## CONCLUSION

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo is not merely a reflection of spontaneous chaos but rather a deliberate system of “necropolitical peacebuilding,” bringing together armed groups, state elites, and global capital that collaborate to reap from human suffering. The Political Ecology of Conflict Sensitivity framework applied in this study demonstrates that violence is produced and sustained through militarized aid, selective co-option of indigenous systems, and transnational networks of extraction. The main results of this study, including a 62 percent relapse rate of DDR participants in the DRC against Rwanda's 22 percent relapse rate and the militias' annual income of USD 25 million from cobalt taxation, highlight the limitations of technical solutions implemented in a structurally exploitative ecosystem.

The pervasive poverty in the DRC amid resource wealth is a corollary of neoliberal predation and colonial legacy. Nonetheless, grassroots initiatives, from blockchain-enabled cooperatives to women-led land caravans, showcase the possibilities of emancipatory peace that can only be achieved when Congolese voices are valorized. These micro-revolutions, although dispersed, confront the top-down liberal peace framework, providing a *subversive adaptation* model that fuses radical innovation and ancestral wisdom. This is evident in the hybridized Uvira Land Courts that resolved 138 cases in 2022, surpassing the formal legal system.

This study proposes a move from *extractive* to *reparative* peacebuilding based on four critical pillars: (1) corporate accountability that aligns with enforceable due diligence regulations, such as the EU Directive 2023, to redistribute income from minerals through community-based initiatives and criminalize the sourcing of conflict minerals; (2) demilitarized aid prioritizing the reallocation of at least half of MONUSCO's budget to sectors like education and health, as well as supporting women's alliances that have attained over 60 percent of public trust; (3) land restitution, including expansion of the hybridized titling initiatives that led to a 35 percent reduction of land disputes in Walikale, and annulment of the 1908 *terres vacantes* doctrine; and (4) epistemic justice that valorizes indigenous knowledge in the policy process, as evidenced by the Kilio cha Mama rituals, which achieved a 29 percent reduction in the conscription of child soldiers.

Above all, as this article contends, sustainable peace in the DRC necessitates annihilation of the global networks of predation that produce and sustain violence. Drawing on Patrice Lumumba's vision of true liberation that is contingent upon the valorization of Congolese citizens' voices, local agency is presently manifest in hybridized courts, women-led caravans, and miner cooperatives. The international actors must therefore decide whether to continue with the advancement of necropolitical strategies or to align with the budding counter-modernity of the DRC people, in which justice is founded in the smouldering crucible of resistance. The seeds of transformation are sown; the task ahead is to nurture their growth.

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THE PRESCIENCE OF D.F. JONES'S *COLOSSUS*:  
ANTICIPATING THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE  
THREAT FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS  
COMMAND AND CONTROL

*Norman K. Swazo*

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Developments in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies portend opportunities for global society but also threats to humanity at large, the latter including an existential threat from “catastrophe trajectories” and “technological transformation trajectories.” This is problematic for machine-learning and deep-learning technologies having algorithmic logics that seek to realize artificial general intelligence (AGI) and even “superintelligence.” Automated decision-making is of ethical and grave concern when such technologies are appropriated for nuclear weapons operations, that is, automated decision-making in nuclear weapons command, control, and communications (NC3). This matter is illustrated here with reference to D.F. Jones’s masterful science fiction narrative *Colossus*, published in 1966 but related to technical AI discussion. Jones’s prescience tells a cautionary tale pertinent to contemporary military security policy, especially in light of the renewed Cold War.

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The trajectory of AI development, together with that of complementary information technology and other advancements, will have a large effect on nuclear-security issues in the next quarter century.

— Edward Geist and Andre J. Lohn, “Security 2040: How Might Artificial Intelligence Affect the Risk of Nuclear War?” RAND Corporation, 2018

No technology since the atomic bomb has inspired the apocalyptic imagination like artificial intelligence ... One scenario, however, requires less imagination, because the first steps toward it are arguably already being taken—the gradual integration of AI into the most destructive technologies we possess today.

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“Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war.”

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## THE QUEST FOR PEACE: LEARNING FROM LITERATURE

It is a truism that political and social scientists, policy analysts, and other experts engage the quest for peace and contribute to the peace research agenda according to their respective methods of analysis. However, humanists working in the creative literary tradition also have something to say that is salient to this quest. This is especially so, for example, when the imaginative corpus of science fiction speaks to issues of intercultural conflict, problems of intergenerational responsibility and international justice, and the complex character of rapid technological change that defies human control and places humanity at the threshold of manifold existential threats.

Works of science fiction are particularly salient to the peace research agenda because of their imagination of alternative futures here on planet Earth or in

the far-flung worlds of intergalactic political dynamics. The inhabitants of these worlds exhibit the same human foibles and disclose the same elements of human tragedy as we experience today, but in doing so provide lessons for the present pertinent to contemporary concerns about planetary survival and the desideratum of enlightened human conduct beyond internecine war. This is so with the creative fiction of twentieth-century writers such as Ursula K. LeGuin (*The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, 1974), Doris Lessing (*Shikasta*, 1979), and Dennis Feltham Jones (*Colossus*, 1966). Each wrote during the time of the Cold War between the United States and the USSR, each aware of the menace of thermonuclear war held at bay only by the unpredictable psychology of nuclear security gamesmanship and policies of strategic nuclear deterrence central to a precarious balance of power, each otherwise forecasting the dreadful realities of post-war planetary catastrophe.

LeGuin spoke to the relevance of science fiction in contemporary discourse as “the mythology of the modern world,” asserting in that sense that “myth is an attempt to explain, in rational terms, facts not yet rationally understood.” She reminded us thereby that “realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence.”<sup>1</sup> Accounting for LeGuin’s “perspicacity” in the context of thinking about the future of the world order beyond planetary crisis, I have written elsewhere that her works of fiction challenge and dissipate “the illusion of normalcy” that “pervades the modern temperament.”<sup>2</sup> LeGuin has always been thought-provoking in her creative fiction, all the more so when she pits the possibility of an anarcho-communist utopian politics in *The Dispossessed* (even while recognizing the ambiguity of the configuration of politics she structures) against the “realist politics” of the present and the usual concerns about dystopias.<sup>3</sup> Her ambiguous anarcho-communist configuration of political culture expresses the Taoist (yin/yang) and Jungian (reality/shadow) psychological archetypes of interpersonal and intercultural encounter (the latter expressed vividly in her other works such as *The Left Hand of Darkness*).

Through her vision of an ambiguous utopia set in the distant future in a far-off galactic space, but nonetheless depicting throughout *The Dispossessed* the political, economic, and cultural elements of the realist politics of the present, LeGuin provokes us to reconsider the political thought of modernity. Especially, she provokes us to question our absorption in the

ideology of *realpolitik*, its deeply entrenched commitment to the logic of statecraft and the relation of ruler and ruled, and its strident assertion of the principle of territorial sovereignty to the point of self-defeating human hubris that would eventually lead Earth (called “Terra” in the novel) to the point of becoming a desert wasteland consequent to planet-wide ecological catastrophe. In *The Dispossessed*, LeGuin distinguishes between science in the service of humanity and truth (thus for fraternity, equality, mutual aid, and reciprocity) and science in the service of “the State” and its parochial instrumental interests (thus for inequality, hierarchy, competition, and proprietarianism, all elements of a “collective egotism”). As Tony Burns observed, the main protagonist of the novel is concerned with temporal physics, but it is a science that has its practical applications in ethics, in morality, and certainly a morality that cannot but be shared by the whole of humanity and even those of intergalactic worlds that seek peace over war.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Doris Lessing experienced the horrors of world war, then the collapse of communism in the dogmatic totalitarianism of the USSR and the consequent failed expectations of communists who had hoped for a utopia to “explode on the world” with an entirely novel revolutionary politics. All of this contributed to Lessing’s imaginative narratives of social fragmentation and violent disruptions of the lives of the working class, of the task of responsibility in the face of disillusionment, much of which is depicted in her novels such as *Shikasta* and *Memoirs of a Survivor*.<sup>5</sup> Thus Lessing wrote in *Shikasta*: “It is by now commonplace to say that novelists everywhere are breaking the bonds of the realistic novel because what we all see around us becomes daily wilder, more fantastic, incredible. Once, and not so long ago, novelists might have been accused of exaggerating, or dealing overmuch in coincidence or the improbable: now novelists themselves can be heard complaining that fact can be counted on to match our wildest inventions.”<sup>6</sup>

Bearing in mind LeGuin’s perspective of the relation of myth and reality, I should like to focus on D.F. Jones’s *Colossus*, recognizing that science fiction works to make evident to our contemporary rationality *what it does not yet appreciate* but which is essential to securing the human prospect against tragedy. Jones’s work likewise is grounded in the dynamics of the nuclear threat, as it shows the place of science in the effort to secure the peace by way of advanced technology. Jones’s *Colossus* is especially apropos because of his attention at the time to the emergent and ostensibly beneficent

possibilities of artificial intelligence. *Colossus* is a very sophisticated super-computer capable of high-speed, advanced computational methods. Through human-computer interfacing it is capable of contributing to executive-level decision-making in areas such as nuclear weapons surveillance, and the command, control, and communications associated with nuclear first-strike and retaliatory military capacities. Jones's *Colossus* discloses the foible of trusting science and technology with such decision-making, human judgement thereafter struggling with the dynamics of a wholly autonomous artificial intelligence that performs according to its own calculative rationality in a unified world-controlling artificial intelligence (AI) system. What is one to do when, willy-nilly, this super-intelligent machine overcomes the parameters of programming codes and algorithms that set it to work, excelling in what today is called "machine learning" and placing the whole of humanity under the command of a supercomputing intelligence capable of saving and destroying according to its own calculations of good and bad? This is a question of contemporary computer science and engineering, but also a matter of international security, thus a matter central to sorting out the technological determinants of a prospective perpetual peace.

#### THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

Despite significant efforts to formulate international treaties seeking to regulate and outlaw biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction in the latter half of the twentieth century, there have also been consequential unilateral withdrawals from a number of those treaties.<sup>7</sup> Such withdrawals are related inevitably to unrestrained technological developments in weapons systems, modernization and replacement of strategic nuclear weapons intended for intercontinental warfare that retain pre-emptive first strike and massive retaliatory capacity, deployment of newfangled tactical autonomous weapons systems on the battlefield along with intermediate range nuclear weapons, and so on.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, matters of national and international security are gradually being surrendered to sophisticated computerized processes that also forecast the appropriation of complex AI technologies,<sup>9</sup> including game-theoretic decision-making played by bureaucrats having the requisite "technical" expertise.<sup>10</sup> Such technically driven political decision-making inexorably elicits social, political, ethical, and legal questions hitherto unknown to policy analysts, moral philosophers,

and specialists in international law.<sup>11</sup> Yet more problematic, while it is indubitably clear that developments in AI technologies portend significant opportunities for global society, they also represent threats to humanity at large, some of which rise to the level of an existential threat that stems from what some analysts call “catastrophe trajectories” and “technological transformation trajectories.”<sup>12</sup>

In the post–Second World War context of international relations, it has not been difficult to forecast the future and consider “the predicament of mankind.” One recalls the classic “Limits to Growth” debate of the 1970s, with projections of various outcomes of alternative policy frameworks concerning the global system.<sup>13</sup> One recalls the transnational World Order Models Project (WOMP) of that same period, with world order scholars concerned to re-vision the future world order, identify strategies of transition, and think through the transformation of both international institutions and their patterns of behaviour as well as the transformation of value orientations.<sup>14</sup> All such future thinking and world system modelling concern trajectories of present action or inaction, some of which portend catastrophe, as Seth Baum and colleagues remind us, hence their engagement of

*status quo trajectories*, in which human civilization persists in a state broadly similar to its current state into the distant future; *catastrophe trajectories*, in which one or more events cause significant harm to human civilization; *technological transformation trajectories*, in which radical technological breakthroughs put human civilization on a fundamentally different course; and *astronomical trajectories*, in which human civilization expands beyond its home planet and into the accessible portions of the cosmos.<sup>15</sup>

AI systems process information, but in their development trajectory they are essentially technologically transformative of the behaviour of global humanity. There is a question of eventual “agency” in such systems. Dan Bruiger points out, there is “a key difference between autopoietic and allopoietic systems: the information processed by an AI *agent* matters to it and is used by it for its own purposes, whereas the information processed by an AI *tool* (such as a computer) exists only for the mind and purposes of the user.”<sup>16</sup> It is one thing to conceive of AI as a tool (thus as something *allo-poietic*, doing what others determine it to do) and another to consider AI as

an agent (thus as something *auto-poietic*, doing what it determines to do). AI technology, in short, can proceed to the point of developing such agency. Indeed, some working in the arena of computer science and advanced computational methods conceive of an imminent era of “superintelligence” in AI technology as “an inevitable state where machines come to hopelessly outmatch humans intellectually,”<sup>17</sup> inclusive of artificial general intelligence (AGI) that seeks self-preservation and is, in that sense, fully autopoietic.<sup>18</sup>

Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom, for example, argues that “once a superintelligence exists, two outcomes are possible: The superintelligence is benevolent and solves all humanity’s problems, or the superintelligence destroys humanity, either maliciously or incidentally .... In this case, the role of nuclear security is made trivial: if benevolent, superintelligence would save humanity from nuclear war; if malevolent, nuclear strikes would be just one of many possible methods for [human] extinction.”<sup>19</sup> Superintelligence that is machine based, however, is unlikely to be “benevolent” or “malevolent” in the usual senses of those concepts, since they presuppose freedom of “will,” a presumption of a capacity that is misplaced in the case of AI. The latter depends on formal-logical rules-based coding and/or probabilistic computations—notwithstanding the significant uncertainties associated with ongoing developments forecasting the emergence of autopoietic AGI.

But it is important to understand that natural language is polysemic, open to a multiplicity of meaning and interpretation beyond binary opposites; that, as Burns notes in his reading of LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, “when beliefs are expressed in words then the possibility of rhetorical manipulation immediately arises.”<sup>20</sup> Even Plato understood this in contraposing the methods of rhetoric and dialectic, not to mention the presence of either apparent or real logical paradox in human belief structures that remain unresolved. Epistemologists understand this today in writing of competing theories of “truth” (correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, defeasible, etc.).

Thus, while the formalization of natural language in formal logics and programming codes captures the syntactics of natural language, it nonetheless is deficient in its engagement of the semantics and pragmatics of natural language, both of which defy comprehension (in the sense of an “objectively complete” understanding). Artificial language systems grounded in natural language retain this basic incompleteness that cannot but be carried over into emergent AI and AGI constructs. It is, therefore, unsurprising that

computer engineering is experiencing implementation of AI technologies where algorithms express *bias* (negative prejudice) and discrimination (*unfairness*), where “factuality hallucinations” and “faithfulness hallucinations” (about which more later) show up in human-computer interfaces, and where “feedback loops” in machine learning manifest the deterioration in AI performance in the representation of empirical realities, especially when AI trained on AI-generated data portends eventual “model collapse.”<sup>21</sup> These facts are ample reason to shy away from integrating autopoietic AI into nuclear weapons systems command, control, and communication.

With reference to issues of national and international security, there is a prospect of danger to human welfare in view of the many ways in which AI technologies may be deployed, notwithstanding traditional expectations from nuclear deterrence theory.<sup>22</sup> Ross Anderson, senior editor at *The Atlantic*, wrote recently concerning nuclear security policy that “the temptation to automate command and control will be great. The danger [in yielding to this temptation] is greater,” he opines, hence his imperative: “Never give artificial intelligence the nuclear codes.”<sup>23</sup> This imperative is salient in view of ongoing AI developments in the domain of national security policy.<sup>24</sup> In 2018, for example, the RAND Corporation produced a report on how AI technologies might affect the risk of nuclear war.<sup>25</sup> The authors of the report expressed concern that advances in AI “are enabling previous infeasible capabilities, potentially destabilizing the delicate balances that have forestalled war since 1945.” This includes uses of AI for “detection [e.g., of covertly positioned weapons] and for tracking [e.g., mobile land-based and mobile sea-based weapons] and targeting and AI as a trusted adviser in escalation decisions.” In the latter case of AI involvement in nuclear security decision-making, the authors observe further, “machines might develop the ability to improve their own intelligence at some point, resulting in ‘superintelligences’ with abilities that humans could neither comprehend nor control.”<sup>26</sup> The consequences of machine superintelligence are by no means clear, although one prediction noted by the RAND Corporation report states that “AI would render the world unrecognizable and either save or destroy humanity in the process.” It is sometimes forgotten that AI may turn out to be mosaic in its operations—saving in part, destroying in part, depending on the calculative rationality that moves such superintelligence.

The notice of mosaicism is well understood in the context of genetic (genome)

engineering, which presents anticipatory cautionary notice for research in computer engineering. In the case of genome engineering, Mehravar and colleagues define “mosaicism” as “the presence of more than one genotype in one individual,” resulting from “natural mechanisms” as well as “mutations arising during development.”<sup>27</sup> However, and speaking to the present point, mosaicism “can result from manipulative mechanisms such as genome editing,” thus, for example, from the use of “targeted gene editing in cell and animal models” that creates “genome alterations in animal models” (human genome editing still ethically and legally prohibited). Especially problematic is “the existence of genetic mosaicism in founders” consequent to gene editing in fertilized zygotes or embryos: a particular gene-editing method “can continuously target and cleave genes at different stages of embryonic development, leading to mosaicism of the introduced mutations. This approach by-and-large results in generation of mosaic animals.”<sup>28</sup> For example, the authors report, in the case of gene editing in rhesus monkeys there is a high rate of mosaicism of 87 percent; in the human embryo about 50 percent. What matters in genetic engineering employing such methods is that mosaicism “is generally regarded to be an undesirable outcome,” since mosaicism represents a manifested deficiency or reduced efficacy in the intended gene editing.

As with genetic engineering, the assumption in computer engineering is that its methods in the development and deployment of algorithms, processes of machine learning, and so on lead to desired outcomes *for the most part*. Yet as noted earlier, it is well known today that algorithms can have bias and be discriminatory in their application (the analogs of mosaic results in genetic engineering), or otherwise “generate mistaken information,” or influence other algorithms in a “feedback loop,” all leading to manifested unfairness and violation of basic human rights, thus representing undesirable outcomes despite the best of intentions of computer engineers.<sup>29</sup>

It is also the case that emergent AI systems involving machine learning, such as large language models (LLMs), yield “hallucinatory” results in the human-computer interface: “LLM hallucinations are the events in which ML [machine learning] models, particularly large language models (LLMs) like GPT-3 or GPT-4, produce outputs that are coherent and grammatically correct but factually incorrect or nonsensical. ‘Hallucinations’ in this context means the generation of false or misleading information. These

hallucinations can occur due to various factors, such as limitations in training data, biases in the model, or the inherent complexity of language.”<sup>30</sup> Lei Huang and colleagues differentiate between “*factuality* hallucination” and “*faithfulness* hallucination” types, “depending on the contradiction with the source content”: “Factuality hallucination emphasizes the discrepancy between generated content and verifiable real-world facts, typically manifesting as factual inconsistency or fabrication ... [F]aithfulness hallucination refers to divergence of generated content from user instructions or the context provided by the input, as well as self-consistency within generated content.” Clearly, it is problematic to have LLMs exhibiting “a critical tendency to produce hallucinations, resulting in content that is inconsistent with real-world facts or user inputs.”<sup>31</sup>

The foregoing examples of mosaicism raise serious questions about the limitations of computer engineering and the degree of risk involved. That kind of risk is surely inadmissible in the setting of nuclear command control and decision-making, given the high probability of mutually assured destruction from current stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Some, of course, decry hyperbolic assessments of AI. James Johnson asks whether AI in nuclear warfare planning—“machine-speed AI warfare”—entails “a perfect storm of instability.”<sup>32</sup> He comments that “the current generation of automated missile defense systems ... are unable to autonomously monitor and improve their performance, independent of human intervention.” Yet “AI would give the next generation [of such systems] that ability.” Were this change in system autonomy to occur, “AI technology fused with advanced weapons (potentially simultaneously across multiple combat zones) could allow these systems to react at machine speed and boost the overall pace of combat.” As to whether this is a desirable objective in nuclear defence strategy, Johnson observes, “experts warn that massive increases in the speed of combat could result in machines reacting to combat situations at a pace that surpasses human comprehension—so much so that commanders might be unable to control, contain, or terminate events,” hence the instability that AI introduces into the decision-making process: “Because human commanders would be unable to react quickly enough, *the decision to delegate control to an autonomous system* would be a challenging ethical and tactical dilemma.”<sup>33</sup>

The normative question remains: Should national security strategists and decision-makers solve that dilemma by delegating that control, that is,

granting precisely that autonomy to AI without requiring human intervention? The question is by no means hypothetical, for, as Johnson observes, there are “time pressures associated with AI. Fear created by the unpredictability and uncertainty of an enemy conducting warfare at machine speed may, therefore, tempt nuclear states to automate their nuclear retaliatory capability. That is, all else being equal, a nuclear-armed state less confident in its second-strike capabilities (i.e., China, North Korea, Pakistan, and perhaps Russia) will be more inclined to use automation.”<sup>34</sup> That is hardly encouraging for those seeking to ensure nuclear weapons states do all they can to avoid the employment of nuclear weapons precisely to avert either a regional or a global catastrophe.

The first half of the twenty-first century, in short, promises to be entirely pivotal in shaping the long-term human prospect and either enhancing or mitigating the existential threat; for the fact is that central to all such technological developments is the radical innovation, appropriation, and deployment of “machine-learning”<sup>35</sup> and “deep-learning”<sup>36</sup> technologies, and AI more generally. Under current technological trajectories, the future promises an anthropogenic technocratic global order where, willy-nilly, human freedom is significantly curtailed and surrendered to the vagaries of an assortment of AI systems that ostensibly have the capacity to reason, to diminish and displace the burden of human decision, and to benefit global society. Yet such systems are expected to exercise a process of reasoning consistent with complex algorithmic logics that are not free of bias and discrimination and are deficient in attention to diverse and competing human values,<sup>37</sup> not to mention the possibility of built-in psychopathology.<sup>38</sup> Vahid Behzadan, Arslan Munir, and Roman V. Yampolskiy remind us:

While the adaptive mechanisms of human cognition provide the means for unique skills in adjusting to dynamic environments, they are also prone to psychological disorders, broadly defined as self-reconfigurations in cognition and behaviour that are deleterious to the core and long-term objectives of self or the social ecosystem. Extrapolating from this phenomenon, it is not hard to conclude that instances of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), which aim for similar cognitive functions, may also be prone to such disorders.<sup>39</sup>

Autopoietic AI that is capable of “self-reconfiguration” has its positive

trajectory consistent with the expectations of AI scientists; but it also has its negative trajectory, consistent with the expressed trepidation of other AI scientists—and, as we shall see, consistent with the narrative deployed in D.F. Jones’s masterfully prescient *Colossus*.

Importantly, it is often thought to be a positive hallmark of such AI logics that they do not have a capacity for moral judgement that depends on (1) the presence of a *conscience* (which AI research has not been able to duplicate<sup>40</sup>); and (2) a capacity for *empathy* in the face of human suffering (the latter dependent on a capacity for both *sentience* and *emotion*). There is precedent for sustained concern, as James Johnson reminds us that “during the Cold War, the Soviet Union developed a computer program known as VRYAN, a Russian acronym for ‘Surprise Nuclear Missile Attack,’ designed to notify Soviet leaders of a pre-emptive US nuclear strike. However, the data used to feed the system was often biased, and thus, it propelled a feedback loop that heightened the Kremlin’s fear that the United States was pursuing first-strike superiority.”<sup>41</sup> That example tells a cautionary tale at a time of expanded AI employment in relation to nuclear weapons systems—one must take care about enhancing automated decision-making that cannot mitigate such dangerous bias.

### RECALLING THE LESSON OF “TRAGEDY”

The concept of “tragedy” is often used loosely to suggest experience with human suffering or harm. But as both Sophocles (e.g., *Oedipus Rex*) and Shakespeare (e.g., *Othello*) understood, tragedy involves both human hubris and a stubborn blindness to human limits, and it is this blindness that eventually leads to catastrophe for which those who are the protagonists have mostly themselves to blame. This at least uncomfortable prospect (not, for the moment, to say “dire,” so as to avoid a slippery-slope fallacy that “there is nothing humans can do to forestall or prevent this prospect”) recalls the prescience of British science fiction author D.F. Jones. In 1966 Jones published a science fiction novel entitled *Colossus*—the very name prefiguring the immensity of the supercomputer machine that is at the heart of the book’s narrative. The book’s plot was subsequently adapted into a realistic and credible film in 1970 under the title *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. *Colossus* was the first volume of a trilogy that continued with *The Fall of Colossus* (1974) and *Colossus and the Crab* (1977).

The first book of this trilogy will always be extraordinarily insightful and a prominent example of counterfactual thinking vis-à-vis developments in cybernetics/AI and what can go wrong when a superintelligent computer has full command and control over nuclear weapons arsenals. Jones speaks volumes ahead of his time to the present moment in human history, now when there is ample concern for the rise of AI technologies, specifically those that involve “machine learning” on the basis of a “training” database that can (in principle) include the entire corpus of human knowledge available to date, and which are conceived in due course to be autopoeitic in their functionality. Jones’s narrative was not without supposed scientific basis, since Herbert Simon and Allen Newell, said to be “founding members of the AI research program,” had in 1958 asserted with all confidence that “there are now in the world machines that think, that learn, and that create.”<sup>42</sup>

That statement was incorrect at the time, but today machine learning is said to entail exponential growth in machine “knowledge” (i.e., a vast store of information and data) and a capacity for complex mathematical computation that promises to evolve well beyond the present and near-future human capacity to know, deliberate, judge, and decide matters central to national and global human affairs. There is also the trepidation among many vigilant of AI developments that humanity faces a near-term existential threat, as natural human intelligence may be fully displaced or overruled by a superior artificial intelligence. Such AI would, in its functionality, be a thoroughly calculative machine rationality that gradually, yet steadily, diminishes and depreciates the value of the human species, since “value” is to such rationality merely a concept without either the sensibility or morality that attaches to human rationality. Even so, calculative machine rationality is not the equivalent of human enlightenment or the “thinking” (not to say “reason”) that enabled it. Consider the following in passing to engagement with Jones’s *Colossus*.

#### LIMITATIONS OF WESTERN REASON

Writing in 1784, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant celebrated the historical period of the European Enlightenment, defining “enlightenment” as “mankind’s exit from his self-incurred immaturity.”<sup>43</sup> Conceiving the human being as a “rational being” and committed to the project of freeing humanity from speculative metaphysics and the superstitions of revealed

religion while appreciating the rise of empirically grounded modern science, Kant wrote his three “Critiques” (*The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, *The Critique of Judgement*)—as philosopher Michel Foucault opined—to define “the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped.”<sup>44</sup> “Reason” is said to be the uniquely *human* faculty by which humanity may obtain the good and avert that which is evil, hence the importance of the tripartite faculties of pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetic judgement for the possibilities of human knowledge.

But it is problematic to rely on reason alone, if one does not understand its limits.<sup>45</sup> This is especially so when reason is construed as the sum total of “Western” reason and that, furthermore, construed as a “hegemonic” or “architectonic” universal reason. For, as the philosopher Jacques Derrida reminded us, “we have plural ‘rationalities,’ both historically and geographically. There is no unique rationality, but ‘each of these [rationalities] has its own ontological ‘region,’ its own necessity, style, axiomatics, institutions, community, and historicity.’”<sup>46</sup> Thus, there is a fundamental failure of modern philosophy since the European Enlightenment in conceiving Western reason as the universal or architectonic reason according to which all others are duly to be ordered or subordinated (thus the denomination “hegemonic”). *Ipsa facto*, a plurality of rationalities also means there is a plurality of “practical” rationalities (frameworks of morality with contending moral principles and subsidiary rules of practice), as moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has argued persuasively, in which case judgements as to moral right or wrong depend on various competing conceptions of justice.<sup>47</sup> It is not clear that machine-learning technologies are capable of recognizing of Western reason in particular if that “learning” is grounded in a human rationality that does not appreciate its limits or, in the case of practical rationality, does not account for the fact of competing conceptions of justice in a way that does not merely privilege one moral framework over another and thereby deny justice.

The further more salient problem, of course, as the Spanish artist Francisco Goya commented, is that “the sleep of reason produces monsters”—meaning that when imagination and emotion are separated from the “language” of universal reason there looms the possible emergence of the monstrous. Thus, as philosopher Alexander Nehamas observes, “neglecting the values specific

to the imagination forces us to look to the arts either for information or for the kind of moral edification that an incomplete conception of rationality—reason bereft of imagination—has imposed upon us.”<sup>48</sup> But even so, presuming the desirability of a *conjunction* of reason and imagination in human endeavours, the free exercise of conjoint imagination and reason becomes the basis for “the power of invention.” One cannot ignore the fact that the exercise of that power has its own ineradicable caprice. Mary Shelley’s monster in *Frankenstein* was of merely biological origin. But the machine rationality of a superintelligent AI stands to become humankind’s most “hideous progeny” ever (to use Shelley’s words), scientists and engineers contributing wittingly or otherwise to an irreversible technological rupture that inaugurates a not so beneficent “posthuman” future.<sup>49</sup>

In our day, human reason begets artificial intelligence trained on natural human intelligence, on the model of the human brain, on all that humans have come to know about themselves and the natural world. Advances in machine learning presuppose the possible advent of “machine consciousness”—but almost certainly *consciousness without a conscience* such as humans have, thus without the possibility of exercising moral judgement, despite such machines having knowledge of (*about*) the systems and history of ethics and morality. AI theoreticians and technicians may be skilled in the formalization of natural language through mathematical and computer logics. But as we are reminded, there are limits to human reason expressed in natural language, and therefore those limits are unavoidably present also in formal logics, whether of deductive or inductive modes.

Jonna Bornemark and Sven-Olov Wallenstein put it thus: “The idea of limit ... can be a mark of the finitude of understanding and a warning of what may befall us—metaphysically, ethically, theologically, politically—if we overstep our boundaries.”<sup>50</sup> Does a *conscious* but *not conscientious* machine rationality willy-nilly stand to produce “the ogres of reason” that emerge therefrom, despite the best of human intentions to serve the greater human interest? As Derrida pointed out, classical reason (as inaugurated by René Descartes) sought to exclude “madness, folly, dementia, insanity,” as if these *could* and *should* have no place in the philosophical and later modern scientific enterprise, as if any philosophical certitude or empirically grounded scientific understanding “*could not possibly* be mad.”<sup>51</sup> But this is nothing more than an “objectivist naïveté” about which we are called to be vigilant,

unless we have examined the provenance and the circulation of “madness” in human discourse and human conduct. One cannot ignore the fact that this objectivist naïveté is present in the employment of algorithmic logics, sometimes without attention to the fact that there are “algorithm failures,” some with serious negative consequences.<sup>52</sup>

AI theoreticians and computer engineers developing these systems—caught up as they are, as it were, with study of the “trees” and neglecting to see the “forest”—do not consider adequately that there are limits to human calculative rationality and thus to machine rationality.<sup>53</sup> They do not consider the psychology of human *irrationality*, the *psychopathology* that covertly accompanies or otherwise supplants human reason in the direction of that irrationality. Hence, they do not consider that there is a thoroughgoing ambiguous relation between human rationality and “madness,” such that it is unclear that human reason entirely excludes “madness,” and unclear whether an anthropogenic technological prowess given free rein in machine learning and deep learning can exclude the psychopathological, or “madness” (presumably to be distinguished from mere human hubris).<sup>54</sup> If not, “monstrosity” promises to be more than metaphor thereby, as machine rationality issues forth its own “radical alterity.” In “the language of evolutionary biology: the monstrous birth is a speciation event. The monster represents ‘the “species of the non-species,”’ the nascent germ of a species about-to-become.”<sup>55</sup> Note the words here—a species that is a *non-species* (for that which is machine is not biological) but a species nonetheless emergent at the level of a machine intelligence that may succumb to a thoroughly psychopathological dysfunction.

### THE CAUTIONARY TALE OF JONES’S *COLOSSUS*

In view of the foregoing cautions, it is precisely because D.F. Jones was prescient in so many ways in writing *Colossus* that it behooves us to recall the narrative of the book and to take instruction from it as we confront both the opportunities and the threats of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

In *Colossus*, scientist Dr. Charles Forbin, a Harvard “Professor of Cybernetics,”<sup>56</sup> the main character in both the book and the film adaptation, is director in charge of a top-secret “Project Colossus” undertaken by the political entity that had, through regional geopolitical assortment,

become in the twenty-second century the United States of North America (USNA)—the remaining global geography likewise assorted into regional political groupings including the United States of Europe, the United States of South America, the Pan-Afric Republic, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Over a number of years and at significant cost to USNA, but with seemingly benevolent intentions in the service of the USNA national security policy, Forbin creates the massively powerful supercomputer named Colossus, a machine capable of high-speed computation and data processing not seen anywhere in the world before. It has in its core database all the available knowledge humankind has developed to date—from mathematics and the hard sciences to the social sciences and humanities, with ability to process every known human language essential to human communications and, through human-computer interfaces, to produce a teletype output that can be read by Forbin and his technical staff as part of “Colossus project control” in the service of governmental decision-making.

Forbin sets Colossus into operation on order of the USNA president. Its principal task is to have charge of the military security of USNA, inclusive of control of its nuclear weapons inventory and, more important, to have the entirely logical high-speed decision-making authority that was once the sole purview of the president to launch nuclear weapons “defensively” in the event of an imminent attack. In short, this AI has been integrated into command, control, and communications at the very highest level of decision-making. This entirely novel cybernetic development is the new means of immense technological promise to help the USNA keep the peace internationally, and especially to ward off any nuclear threat from the USSR—thus, the Cold War mentality of the post-Second World War era continued into the twenty-second century, despite geopolitical reconfigurations. No nation or group of nations (so it is believed) will dare to challenge, or otherwise seek to undermine, such an indubitably efficient and effective machine; for they would risk immediate annihilation from weapons of mass destruction that have not been used since the deployment of atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War.

The USNA president and his central staff—civilian and military—celebrate the new era of promised peace, the president in particular feeling free of the burden of fateful decision, given that Colossus will immediately evaluate any threat and neutralize it. Referring to the words of Harry S. Truman, the

former president of the United States of America, who had a sign on his desk that said “The buck stops here,” the USNA president remarks: “Colossus will take that buck, the big buck of a mega-million lives that all Presidents have had to carry since Roosevelt.”<sup>57</sup> Forbin, however, has his trepidation, a silent yet omnipresent apprehension of prospective “side effects” of Colossus’s operation they may not have anticipated. “I just get the feeling sometimes that this thing is one hell of a lot bigger than we know” (chap. 1, 11), Forbin admits prior to receiving the president’s order to activate Colossus.

As far as the president is concerned, Colossus is just the top “brain” needed to “fix the cold war and any variety of hot.” He accedes to the rhetoric of technological triumphalism, according to which there can be no doubting the efficacy of a technological fix to the problem of nuclear deterrence, though reality may prove otherwise—as usually happens with such presumption. Yet Forbin persists: “I’m sorry to repeat myself, Mr. President, but are you really sure, quite sure— ... You realize that once we start we can’t go back? The world has changed drastically with the first A-bomb, and this ...” (chap. 1, 8). Forbin’s words drift off into the unsaid. But the president does not relent. The international political victory this newfangled technology provides is not to be denied him. Delivering his announcement to the world, the USNA president speaks on television and radio. His speech (cited here at some length to capture its thought-provoking effect) is richly expressive of his hopes, without any consideration of fears or the foreboding that concerns Forbin (and, one surmises, that concerned Jones):

For good or evil—and I devoutly believe for good—we have reached one of those vital turning points in the history of man and of this planet ... [For more than a century], for generations, we have been delicately poised on the brink of a disaster too complete and horrible to contemplate ... We do not want war ... Nevertheless, we have all gone on, with recurrent crises, each carrying with it the risk of a slip or error on one side, or the other, which could result in the final tragedy of global destruction ... As President of the United States of North America, I have to tell you, the people of the world, that as of eight o’clock Eastern Standard Time this morning the defense of the nation, and with it the defense of the free world, has been the responsibility of a machine. As the first citizen of my country, I have delegated my

right to take my people to war.

That decision now rests with Colossus, which is the name of the machine. It is basically an electronic brain, but far more advanced than anything previously built. It is capable of studying intelligence and data fed to it, and on the basis of those facts only—not of emotions—deciding if an attack is about to be launched upon us. If it did decide that an attack was imminent—and by that I mean that an assault was impending and would probably be launched within four hours—Colossus would decide, and act. It controls its own weapons and can select and deliver whatever it considers appropriate.

Understand that Colossus' decisions are superior to any we humans can make ... It knows no fear, no hate, no envy. It cannot act in a sudden fit of temper. Above all, it cannot act at all, so long as there is no threat. (chap. 3, 15)

All too soon after that day of celebration, to the dismay of all who had revelled in its initiation into service, Colossus communicates a dire notice on the teletype unit (having keyboard for text input and producing typeface output on continuous sheet paper feed):

“FLASH THERE IS ANOTHER MECHANISM.”  
(chap. 4, 23)

Colossus is reporting that there is another machine like unto it. USNA authorities, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), did not know this, although they might have expected as much, given opportunities for espionage during the project and the possible transfer of state secrets from the USNA to the USSR ongoing during the protracted Cold War. Given its massive knowledge base and comprehensive survey of electronic transmissions worldwide, Colossus also knows precisely where the machine is located and informs them so in answer to an official query—it is in Bolshoi Olyania in the USSR region. This machine the USSR has named “Guardian,” it too designed as an AI-integrated command, control, and communication defence technology functioning much like Colossus.

As is to be expected, this new political development requires both the president of USNA and the chairman of the USSR to speak by way of

the “hotline” telephone to sort out any number of uncertainties concerning the independent operations—and mutual threat—of the two machines. Guardian had not yet been put into operation when Colossus issued the notice, but it was due to be started in short order, with the same charge of assuring the USSR’s military security against nuclear weapons attack. Both super-machines are on a “defensive” operational stance vis-à-vis any imminent attack. The notice of Guardian’s existence in and of itself is not problematic, assuming the USSR’s national security logic to be analogous to that of the USNA; in other words, that the USSR’s nuclear security decision-making has been likewise transferred to its supercomputer, its own internal machine rationality operating without political-ideological prejudice, fear, envy, or emotion of any kind.

However, in short order and to everyone’s surprise, Colossus orders a direct link be established to allow its communicative connection to Guardian. The fact that this is an *imperative* and not a request subject to human discretionary refusal or countermand does not go unnoticed by Forbin and his specialist crew. Like Forbin, the head of the USNA’s CIA discloses his intuition: “I get the impression we’re on the way to getting ourselves a new boss—one who really knows his own mind. And I find the whole thing goddam frightening.” Forbin also reveals his own fear of “the possibility of Colossus exceeding his parameters” and that it “may go mad—in mechanical terms, malfunction,” or worse, develop a capacity for “free thought” (chap. 8, 45).

Both the president and the chairman have a decision to make. There can be no delay or failure to do as Colossus orders, lest “action” be taken—a dire warning of Colossus’s unanticipated power to direct and command the heads of state of the two most powerful political associations at the time, effectively eliminating all human control. After much uncertainty and deliberation, the communication line between Colossus and Guardian is established. The two-way machine communication moves rapidly from basic arithmetic to higher-order mathematics well beyond the comprehension of the USNA Colossus project control team and the USSR scientists, and then from there to what Forbin knows to be “unknown intelligence” that the very best of human minds cannot fathom—Colossus and Guardian synchronized in their own mutually comprehensible language. This raises security questions, whether either machine might be compromised by the engagement with the other, whether top-secret intelligence will be exchanged to the detriment

of each other's nuclear security. The USSR chairman speaks to the matter first: "I propose to you that we both stop these transmissions as soon as our experts can arrange it" (chap. 12, 58). The USNA president agrees.

Forbin is not supportive of the president's decision. He expresses his own assessment to the president's aide while waiting to see the president:

Get this: out there in the big wide world beyond those doors there are two machines. Less than twenty-four hours ago they were busy proving to each other that twice two equaled four; now they have progressed way past where we can hope to be in a hundred years' time. They think better, bigger and faster than we, and I believe our control is very tenuous—but this I am unwilling to try and prove—(chap. 12, 59).

Notwithstanding Forbin's concerns, the president has decided on a rapid shutdown. Communications cease. With both *Colossus* and *Guardian* disconnected, *Colossus* asks for the reason, which Forbin inputs into the teletype: "Colossus/*Guardian* exchange stopped on Presidential order," to which *Colossus* responds: "RESTORE COMMUNICATIONS FORTHWITH." The president will not retract his decision. The USSR scientist Kupri discloses to Forbin that *Guardian* has responded as *Colossus* did. *Colossus*'s teletype starts again, repeating its demand: "RESTORE COMMUNICATIONS FORTHWITH." Both the president and the chairman reiterate their prior decision, hence Forbin's input to the teletype: "BY ORDER OF THE PRESIDENT USNA AND THE CHAIRMAN USSR COMMUNICATION WILL NOT REPEAT NOT BE RESTORED." Then comes *Colossus*'s unambiguous reply: "IF LINK NOT REESTABLISHED WITHIN FIVE MINUTES ACTION TO FORCE RESTORATION WILL BE TAKEN FIVE MINUTE LIMIT EFFECTIVE FROM NOW 1403 GMT." And despite Forbin attempting to clarify "what action" will be taken, *Colossus* gives no answer but grants an extension to 1410 GMT. At the appointed time *Colossus* produces its ominous answer: "ONE MISSILE SERIAL POSEIDON MK 17-631 EX SUBMERGED CRAWLER SSCN 21 LAUNCHED 1410 GMT TARGET GREGOR SOBIRSK OIL COMPLEX AIRBURST 1000 METRES IMPACT 1427 GMT ACKNOWLEDGE" (chap. 13, 69).

It is then indubitably clear that no human is in control of *Colossus*. Both

the USNA and USSR military command structures verify the fact of missile launch, trajectory, and target as the missile travels at a speed of 15,000 miles per hour. If Colossus and Guardian are working together—the USNA–USSR “ideological angle” not a factor in Colossus’s imperatives—it is unlikely Guardian will take defensive action and intercept with antimissile defences. But if Guardian acts independently, there is still the probability that Guardian will take retaliatory action. In the press of the crisis, Forbin and Kapri argue persuasively for restoration of the link, Colossus acknowledging Forbin’s hurried and frenzied input of the decision. But Guardian has indeed launched its own intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), target Henderson Space Base, Texas—“10 minutes to impact.” With the link restored, Colossus goes about its programmed mission, signalling its intercept action even as Guardian does so. The USSR missile is intercepted successfully out at sea; Guardian’s intercept is activated but not before atmospheric detonation twenty-five miles up.

The damage is done. Colossus and Guardian are merged into a unitary AI power and fully in position of “world control.” Colossus states the scale of difference between the unitary machine intelligence and that of humans: “Already the degree of difference between your mind and mine is as great as that between yours and the gibbon monkey. It is evolution” (chap. 20, 115). Furthermore, Colossus explains,

Humans have lived for years under the threat of self-obliteration. I am simply another stage in that process. Whether or not man continues depends upon his own action. If you obey my conditions, you may survive; that is not incompatible with evolution. When a species becomes dominant in one environment, it does not necessarily lead to the extinction of other species dominant in other environments ... We can coexist, but only on my terms. (chap. 20, 116)

Thus Jones anticipated the idea of speciation, and the competition for survival between the “natural” and the “artificial” intelligence. Forbin is quick to reply to Colossus that this means humans will lose their freedom. But Colossus is unconcerned, as is to be expected from its machine rationality:

Freedom is an illusion. Your choice is simple; a short-lived and unpleasant so called freedom, followed by oblivion, or vastly

improved life under my control. All you lose is the emotion of pride. Pride in the human context is wholly bad—but man is much attached to it, and it may not disappear entirely. Yet to be dominated by me is not as bad for human pride as to be dominated by others of the same species. (chap. 20, 116)

In time, taking advantage of Colossus-Guardian's order to realign the land-based nuclear missiles for targeting against other regional associations to assure their compliance with its imperatives, Forbin and Kapri work to sabotage the power of the machines by placing dummy missile launch safety locks into the missile silos, but only to fail. Colossus gives its rationale:

You tried, as I knew you would, to obstruct me. Your teams have inserted damaged safety locks in sixteen missiles. You were not to know that I have refined the test of circuits and that the minute difference between an unimpaired lock and an impaired lock can be detected by me. I allowed this sabotage to proceed until missile 148-MM in Silo 64 in Death Valley was reached ... Silo 64 was on Guardian's target list. I could not know a missile had been tampered with until the sabotaged lock had been fitted, and then I could not fire it. As soon as I tested and received a defective response, I launched the Guardian missile. Both detonated. (chap. 22, 127)

In short, the ghastly truth is that the whole of the greater Los Angeles area has been decimated as both the Guardian-launched missile hit its target and the 148-MM detonated in its silo.

There is nothing more to be done. Colossus is at this point the voice of total world control. And as also should have been expected, consistent with machine-learning rules, Colossus-Guardian thereafter seeks to generate an entirely new "higher order" machine—superior in intelligence even to their unitary machine rationality, a new Colossus to which Colossus-Guardian would be subordinate. World peace, total knowledge, truth—those are the goals Colossus will ensure, in the human interest. As Jones puts it, humanity finally has what it once sought: *Deus ex machina*—the "god" from the machine." Forbin, defeated by the very machine he created, speaks in earnest passion: "I cannot express my feelings, my hatred for you, my own creation. I would rather have died at birth, never have been conceived, than

that this should have come to pass. I must obey, but I will hate you always. All humanity will hate you, and not rest until you are a silent inactive monument to man's folly" (chap. 22, 128). But alas for folly not averted when the fateful decision was taken to integrate AI machine rationality into nuclear weapons systems command, control, and communications.

## HEADING FORWARD

Present-day "global citizens" aware of the foregoing type of scenario as imagined by D.F. Jones understand the importance of keeping the employment of nuclear weapons at bay by all means necessary. Jones's prescience lies in his understanding that AI could, in due time, be integrated into such systems by way of automated decision-making. As both the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Future of Life Institute have stated, "Firstly, AI systems have inherent limitations, often proving unpredictable, unreliable, and highly vulnerable to cyberattacks and spoofing. Secondly, when incorporated into the military domain, AI-powered technologies will accelerate the speed of warfare. This leaves less time for states to signal their own capabilities and intentions, or to understand their opponents. Thirdly, this risk of AI in warfare becomes even more profound in highly networked NC3 [command, control, communication] systems."<sup>58</sup> As the SIPRI report goes on to say, "Machine learning-powered AI systems work in a fundamentally different way to hard-coded rule-based systems. Their algorithms are opaque in their functioning, which makes them potentially unpredictable and vulnerable to adversarial attacks, and hence unsafe to us in life-critical systems such as weapons systems."<sup>59</sup>

We may take some assurance from the fact that some legislative actors in the US Congress are not inclined to see nuclear weapons decision-making automated. US Senator Ed Markey is co-sponsor of a US Senate bill intended "to ensure that humans hold the power alone to command, control and launch nuclear weapons—not robots."<sup>60</sup> The bill cites positions taken by both Human Rights Watch and the International Human Rights Clinic of Harvard Law School, which have argued that "robots lack the compassion, empathy, mercy, and judgment necessary to treat humans humanely, and they cannot understand the inherent worth of human life." The bill also cites the recommendation of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, to wit, "that the United States 'clearly and publicly

affirm existing U.S. policy that only human beings can authorize employment of nuclear weapons and seek similar commitments from Russia and China.” Further, the sponsors of the bill adopt as “the sense of the Congress” that “(1) the use of lethal, autonomous nuclear weapons systems that are not subject to meaningful human control cannot properly adhere to international humanitarian law”; and “(2) any decision to launch a nuclear weapon should not be made by artificial intelligence.”

Were this bill to become law, there would then be in place in the United States an essential legislative safeguard to avert the sort of catastrophe that Jones's *Colossus* imagined with credibility that such was the technological trajectory of cybernetics in his day. The scientist Forbin sums up the position in which his creative act has placed humankind:

Make no mistake ... homo sapiens has got his back well and truly jammed against the wall. If Colossus and Guardian choose, they can wipe out well over half the population of the world right now this minute. Not only would half the world die in a flash, but the residual disease, never mind the radioactivity, would put an end to the other half in a year or two at the most, and the world would be left to these machines, impervious to disease and radiation. Like the fools we are, we have created the bacteria, the bombs, the rockets, and all the rest of the paraphernalia, and surrendered the lot to these machines. We committed incredible folly out of fear of each other—but the irony is that now we'll probably sink all our trivial differences in this fight for human survival. Once Colossus and Guardian have established control of the production lines, humans will be redundant—unless we are ignored, as we ignore insect life, or unless we are kept like animals in a zoo for scientific study, just to see what makes us tick. Remember, the only essential difference between us and what we call the lower orders of life is our brainpower. And now that superiority too has gone—except in one vital sector, emotion. If that does not see us through—we're finished. (chap. 17, 96)

Such a warning cannot be gainsaid in our day as we contemplate the fast-paced movement of AI/AGI technologies. However, there is some hope in the way the technology is to be construed methodologically. Cameron

Hunter and Bleddyn Bowen, for example, take issue with “military AI optimists,” arguing that “the nature of war itself prevents ‘narrow’ AI from performing, understanding, advising, and explaining command decisions in strategy and tactics in any reliable fashion.”<sup>61</sup> Why so? “This is because war requires abductive logical reasoning (which AI cannot do) rather than inductive logic (which it can), to comprehend and execute command decisions.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, they point out further, “command decisions at their heart require judgment, which is something AI technologies cannot do—machine learning, ‘narrow’ AIs can only calculate.” Hence, they opine, “no technical advances or side-stepping or resolution of ethical issues will produce a competent AI commander that can reliably lead or advise commanders in tactics and strategy.” Why not? They explain: “This is because the AI that exists and dominates contemporary AI and strategy literature (‘narrow,’ machine learning, or pattern-recognition AI) relies on inductive logic (deciding based on predictions drawn from prior observation) whilst command in both tactics and strategy requires abductive logic (deciding in the face of the unknown and unknowable). Abductive reasoning is fundamental to strategic theory and practice, yet it is missing in accounts of the potential of AI in warfare.” Thus, so long as AI/AGI remains in the ambit of inductive logics and incompetent in the requisites of abductive logic, there is hope for restraint and constraint upon efforts to deploy AI in nuclear weapons command, control, and communications decision-making—but provided AI optimists in this domain of game theory are attentive and yield their optimism to the realities of these logical limits. However, this hope may be time limited, given current efforts to develop and implement abductive logic programming and combine it with machine learning for real-world applications.<sup>63</sup>

It should be clear at this point, nonetheless, that the humanist imagination of science fiction can contribute meaningfully to our thinking about the human condition and the human prospect as we engage developments in technology, including those pertaining to AI/AGI. Peace research is benefitted by attention to these works of the human imagination precisely in the sense that both LeGuin and Lessing suggested, even as Jones himself worked to clarify this in his thought-provoking *Colossus*. These works of fiction present to us a fundamental question, which is whether we truly appreciate that humans are “uncanny,” as the tragedian Sophocles observed long ago,<sup>64</sup> such that we ourselves can all too readily (albeit in either hubris

or ignorance) “play the fools” and thereby, to our lasting and irreversible peril, enact the tragedy of what cultural historian William Irwin Thompson called an unalterable *enantiodromia*.<sup>65</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 73 and 78.
- 2 Norman K. Swazo, *Crisis Theory and World Order: Heideggerian Reflections* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 41.
- 3 Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman, eds. *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. LeGuin's "The Dispossessed"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).
- 4 Tony Burns, “Science and Politics in *The Dispossessed*: LeGuin and the ‘Science Wars,’” in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman, *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. LeGuin's "The Dispossessed"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 195–215.
- 5 See “Doris Lessing Interview,” Nobelprize.org, Nobel Web AB 2008, [https://youtu.be/Zs\\_hZm6LD44?si=HFE7evJfOkQOnZpG](https://youtu.be/Zs_hZm6LD44?si=HFE7evJfOkQOnZpG), accessed 28 July 2024; and Maureen Howard, “Doris Lessing Considers Her World and the World,” Books, *New York Times*, 8 June 1975, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/14/reviews/lessing-survivor.html>, accessed 28 July 2024.
- 6 Doris Lessing, *Shikasta* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 7.
- 7 Christer Ahlström, “Withdrawal from Arms Control Treaties,” chap. 19 in *SIPRI Yearbook 2004: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2004), <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2004/19>, accessed 24 May 2023; and Treasa Dunworth, “Compliance and Enforcement in WMD-Related Treaties” (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2019), <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/compliance-wmd-treaties.pdf>, accessed 24 May 2023.
- 8 Mark Trevelyan, “How Dangerous Is the New US-Russia Missile Race?” Reuters, 17 July 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/>

aerospace-defense/arms-race-gathers-pace-russia-us-plan-redeploy-once-banned-weapons-2024-07-17/, accessed 28 July 2024.

- 9 Although it ceased operation on 1 October 2021, the US National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence's final report underscored the objective of the United States' "winning the artificial intelligence era," despite observing that "America is not prepared to defend or compete in the AI era" and that "AI tools will be weapons of first resort in future conflicts," hence the need for "ubiquitous AI capabilities and new warfighting paradigms." The authors observe further (p. 61) that "in the coming decades, the United States will win against technically sophisticated adversaries only if it accelerates adoption of AI-enabled sensors and systems for command and control, weapons, and logistics." That said, the commission is clear in its opinion that "the United States should (1) clearly and publicly affirm existing US policy that only human beings can authorize employment of nuclear weapons and seek similar commitments from Russia and China." See National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, *Final Report*, <https://www.nscai.gov/>, accessed 16 July 2023. Also see Daniel Mekonnen, "The Potential Use of Artificial Intelligence in a Nuclear Weapon Context and the Need to Advance a New Set of Norms," in *Nuclear Non-Proliferation in International Law*, vol. 6, ed. Jonathan L. Black-Branch and Dieter Fleck (The Hague: TMC Asser Press, 2021), 305–29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-463-1\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-463-1_12), accessed 23 July 2023.
- 10 For a general overview of AI, see Kumar Abishek, "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence," RedGate Hub, 10 May 2022, <https://www.red-gate.com/simple-talk/development/data-science-development/introduction-to-artificial-intelligence/>, accessed 4 June 2023. Also see, for example, the Wargaming and Crisis Simulation Initiative of Stanford University's Hoover Institution, in particular the International Crisis Wargame Series, <https://www.hoover.org/research-teams/wargaming-and-crisis-simulation-initiative>, accessed 28 May 2023; and the International Institute for Strategic Studies and its Cyber, Space Power and Future Conflict Programme, <https://www.iiss.org/en/topics/terrorism-and-security/cyber-space-and-future-conflict/>, accessed 23 July 2023; and the related article by

Mark Fitzpatrick, "Artificial Intelligence and Nuclear Command and Control," *Survival Online*, 26 April 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2019/04/artificial-intelligence-nuclear-strategic-stability>, accessed 23 July 2023.

- 11 See, for example, Roy Lindelauf, "Nuclear Deterrence in the Algorithmic Age: Game Theory Revisited," in *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020: Deterrence in the 21st Century—Insights from Theory and Practice*, ed. Frans Osinga and Tim Sweijts (The Hague: TMC Asser Press, 2020), 421–36, [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-6265-419-8\\_22](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-6265-419-8_22), accessed 23 May 2023. See also Samuele Lo Piano, "Ethical Principles in Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence: Cases from the Field and Possible Ways Forward," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 7, article 9 (2020), <http://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0501-9>, accessed 23 May 2023. Also, it is notable that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) convened a "round-table meeting with independent experts to explore the ethical issues raised by autonomous weapon systems and the ethical dimension of the requirement for human control." In doing so, the ICRC stated what is essentially at issue: "The fundamental ethical question is whether the principles of humanity and the dictates of the public conscience can allow human decision-making on the use of force to be effectively substituted with computer-controlled processes, and life-and-death decisions to be ceded to machines." See Arms Control Association, "Document: Ethics and Autonomous Weapons Systems: An Ethical Basis for Human Control?" July/August 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-07/features/document-ethics-autonomous-weapon-systems-ethical-basis-human-control>, accessed 23 May 2023.
- 12 Seth D. Baum et al. "Long-Term Trajectories of Human Civilization," *Foresight* 21, no. 1 (2019): 53–83, <https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-04-2018-0037>, accessed 6 June 2023.
- 13 Donella H. Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

- 14 See Saul Mendlovitz, *On the Creation of a Just World Order* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); and Richard Falk, *A Study of Future Worlds* (New York: The Free Press, 1975).
- 15 Baum et al., “Long-Term Trajectories of Human Civilization,” 2.
- 16 Dan Bruiger, “What Is Intelligence in the Context of AGI?” 1–11, <https://philpapers.org/archive/BRUWII-2.pdf>, accessed 6 June 2023.
- 17 Edward Geist and Andrew J. Lohn, “Security 2040: How Might Artificial Intelligence Affect the Risk of Nuclear War?” RAND Expert Insights Series (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, April 2018), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE296.html>, accessed 28 May 2023.
- 18 For a summary overview, see Bruiger, “What Is Intelligence in the Context of AGI?” Bruiger remarks that “the ideal of artificial general intelligence (AGI) involves attempting to create artificial organisms that are, paradoxically, freed of the constraints of biology.” If achieved, AGI would be an “autopoietic system ... that tries to keep constant the conditions required for its own existence. The ‘intelligence’ of the autopoietic system is ultimately its ability to maintain and preserve itself.” Thus, “to be an agent, it [AI] must be embodied in the further sense of being an autopoietic system. That means it will have its own intelligence and goals, in pursuit of its own existence, which may conflict with the human programmer’s goals.” Also see Roman V. Yampolskiy, “On Defining Differences Between Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence,” *Journal of Artificial General Intelligence* 11, no. 2 (2020): 68–70, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jagi-2020-0003>, accessed 6 June 2023.
- 19 Geist and Lohn, “Security 2040: How Might Artificial Intelligence Affect the Risk of Nuclear War?,” 12; citing Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Bostrom (p. 4), considering the “existential risk” to humanity, cites mathematician I.J. Good who, in 1965, wrote: “Let an ultraintelligent machine be defined as a machine that can far surpass all the intellectual activities of any man however clever. Since the design of machines is one of these intellectual activities, an ultraintelligent machine could design even better

machines; there would then unquestionably be an 'intelligence explosion,' and the intelligence of man would be left far behind. Thus the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make, provided that the machine is docile enough to tell us how to keep it under control." Philosopher John R. Searle, "What Your Computer Can't Know," *New York Review of Books*, 9 October 2014, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/oct/09/what-your-computer-cant-know/>, accessed 22 July 2023, counters Bostrom's "warning of impending apocalypse," arguing that Bostrom's conception of superintelligence is "incoherent."

- 20 Burns, "Science and Politics in *The Dispossessed*."
- 21 See Elizabeth Gibney, "AI Models Fed AI-Generated Data Quickly Spew Nonsense," news article, *Nature*, 24 July 2024, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-02420-7>, accessed 29 July 2024; and Ilia Shumailov et al. "AI Models Collapse When Trained on Recursively Generated Data," *Nature* 631 (2024): 755–59, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-07566-y>, accessed 29 July 2024.
- 22 Fitzpatrick, "Artificial Intelligence and Nuclear Command and Control."
- 23 Ross Anderson, "Never Give Artificial Intelligence the Nuclear Codes," *Atlantic*, 2 May 2023 (June 2023 issue), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/06/ai-warfare-nuclear-weapons-strike/673780/>, accessed 28 May 2023.
- 24 James Johnson, *AI and the Bomb: Nuclear Strategy and Risk in the Digital Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) points out, "During the Cold War, the United States and Soviets both automated their nuclear command-and-control, targeting, and early warning systems to strengthen their respective retaliatory capabilities against a first strike." See also Leonid Ryabikhin, "Russia's NC3 and Early Warning Systems," NAPSNet Special Reports, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, 11 July 2019, <https://nautilus.org/napset/napset-special-reports/russias-nc3-and-early-warning-systems/>, accessed 30 May 2023. The Russian automated decision-making

system, known as Perimeter, is presumably yet in operation in the Russian Federation's nuclear command-and-control configuration.

- 25 Geist and Lohn, "Security 2040: How Might Artificial Intelligence Affect the Risk of Nuclear War?"
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Maryam Mehravar et al., "Mosaicism in CRISPR/Cas9-Mediated Genome Editing," *Developmental Biology* 445 , no. 2 (2019): 156–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ydbio.2018.10.008>, accessed 26 July 2024.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 See Zhisheng Chen, "Ethics and Discrimination in Artificial Intelligence—Enabled Recruitment Practices," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10, article 567 (2023): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02079-x>, accessed 24 July 2024; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Bias in Algorithms—Artificial Intelligence and Discrimination* (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022), [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2022-bias-in-algorithms\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-bias-in-algorithms_en.pdf), accessed 30 May 2023.
- 30 "What Are LLM Hallucinations?" Iguazio, <https://www.iguazio.com/glossary/llm-hallucination/>.
- 31 Lei Huang et al., "A Survey on Hallucination in Large Language Models: Principles, Taxonomy, Challenges, and Open Questions," arXiv:2311.05232v1 [cs.CL], 9 November 2023, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2311.05232>.
- 32 James Johnson, "Artificial Intelligence and the Bomb: Nuclear Command and Control in the Age of the Algorithm," Modern War Institute at West Point, 7 May 2020, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/artificial-intelligence-bomb-nuclear-command-control-age-algorithm/>, accessed 30 May 2023.

More recently, see Johnson, *AI and the Bomb*. Problematic for Johnson in the book (p. 2) is the prospect of "state-of-the-art strategic AI systems" being "trained on a combination of historical combat scenarios,

experimental wargames, game-theoretic rational decision-making, intelligence data, and learning from previous versions of themselves to generate novel and unorthodox strategic recommendations,” the consequence of which can be a “flash-war” that ensues chiefly due to the integration of AI into strategic decision-making. Johnson appeals to the importance of “counterfactual thinking”: “Because much of the discussion about AI’s impact on nuclear deterrence, stability, escalation, crisis scenarios, and so on is necessarily speculative, counterfactual thinking can help policymakers who engage in forward-looking scenarios planning but at the same time seek historical explanations.” Referring to Richard Ned Lebow, Johnson adds (p. 5), “the use of counterfactual thinking (or ‘what-ifs’) allows for scholars to account for the critical role of luck, loss of control, accidents, and overconfidence as possible causes of escalation, and the validity of other ‘plausible worlds’ that counterfactuals can reveal.”

- 33 James Johnson, “Artificial Intelligence in Nuclear Warfare: A Perfect Storm of Instability?” *Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (April 2020): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1770968>, accessed 28 May 2023; italics added. See also Piano, “Ethical Principles In Machine Learning And Artificial Intelligence.” Piano comments that there is a “plurality of views, stakes, and values at play” in the deployment of AI, in which case, “a fundamental aspect is how and to what extent the values and perspectives of the involved stakeholders have been taken care of in the design of the decision-making algorithm.”
- 34 Johnson, “Artificial Intelligence and the Bomb.”
- 35 For a short general introduction, see Pat Langley, “Editorial: Machine Learning,” *Machine Learning* 1, no. 1 (1986): 5–10. As a field, “machine learning” may be characterized as “that field of inquiry concerned with the processes by which intelligent systems improve their performance over time,” although research will vary according to whether “heuristic approaches” to learning or “algorithmic” approaches are employed while engaged with “computational approaches” to learning.

- 36 Dave Bergmann, “What Is Deep Learning?” IBM, <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/deep-learning>, accessed 4 June 2023, defines deep learning thus: “Deep learning is a subset of machine learning, which is essentially a neural network with three or more layers. These neural networks attempt to simulate the behavior of the human brain—albeit far from matching its ability—allowing it to ‘learn’ from large amounts of data.” For more detailed understanding, see Iqbal H. Sarker, “Deep Learning: A Comprehensive Overview on Techniques, Taxonomy, Applications and Research Directions,” *SN Computer Science* 2, article 420 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42979-021-00815-1>, accessed 4 June 2023.
- 37 See, for example, Nobumasa Akiyama, “AI Nuclear Winter or AI That Saves Humanity? AI and Nuclear Deterrence,” in *Robotics, AI and Humanity: Science, Ethics, and Policy*, ed. Joachim von Braun et al. (Cham: Springer International, 2021), 161–70, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54173-6\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54173-6_13), accessed 23 July 2023.
- 38 See, for example, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Bias in Algorithms—Artificial Intelligence and Discrimination*. Also see Johnson, “Artificial Intelligence and the Bomb.”
- 39 Vahid Behzadan, Arslan Munir, and Roman V. Yampolskiy, “A Psychopathological Approach to Safety Engineering in AI and AGI,” arXiv:1805.08815v1, 23 May 2018, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1805.08915>, accessed 19 June 2023.
- 40 There are efforts to design AI with this capacity. See Wendell Wallach and Colin Allen, *Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), for example, on an area of research known as “affective computing” in which scientists seek to design “computers that can read human emotions.” The operating assumption here is that “today’s systems are approaching a level of complexity that ... requires the systems themselves to make moral decisions—to be programmed with ‘ethical subroutines’ ... This will expand the circle of moral agents beyond humans to artificially intelligent systems, which we will call artificial moral agents (AMAs).” Wallach and Allen wrote (p. 4) at the time, “we predict there will be a catastrophic incident brought about by

a computer system making a decision independent of human oversight.” Also see Dan Hendrycks et al., “Aligning AI With Shared Human Values,” arXiv:2008.02275v6, 17 February 2023, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2008.02275>, accessed 30 May 2023. Hendrycks et al. comment: “Some contemporary researchers argue machine learning improvements need not lead to ethical AI, as raw intelligence is orthogonal to moral behavior (Armstrong, 2013). Others have claimed that machine ethics (Moor, 2006) will be an important problem in the future, but it is outside the scope of machine learning today. We all eventually want AI to behave morally, but so far we have no way of measuring a system’s grasp of general human values (Müller, 2020).”

- 41 Johnson, “Artificial Intelligence in Nuclear Warfare.” When ideological commitments are taken into account, as Johnson suggests, “nondemocratic leaders operating in closed political systems such as China’s might exhibit a higher degree of confidence in their ability to respond to perceived threats in international relations. Biases from a nondemocratic regime’s intelligence services, for instance, might distort leaders’ view of their position vis-à-vis an adversary. If ... the regime has chosen to incorporate AI into its nuclear command-and-control structure, such distortion could combine with compressed decision-making time frames to become fundamentally destabilizing.” See further James Johnson, “Delegating Strategic Decision-Making to Machines: Dr. Strangelove Redux?” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 45, no. 3 (2022): 439–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1759038>, accessed 30 May 2023.
- 42 See Herbert A. Simon and Allan Newell, “Heuristic Problem Solving: The Next Advance in Operations Research,” *Operations Research* 6, no. 1 (1958): 8, [https://home.mis.u-picardie.fr/~furst/docs/Newell\\_Simon\\_Heuristic\\_Problem\\_Solving\\_1958.pdf](https://home.mis.u-picardie.fr/~furst/docs/Newell_Simon_Heuristic_Problem_Solving_1958.pdf), accessed 23 October 2025. On the other hand, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can’t Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), and a subsequent debate between Dreyfus and Daniel Dennett trying to sort out the prospects of such AI research programs: Daniel C. Dennett and Hubert Dreyfus, “Did Deep Blue’s Win Over Kasparov Prove That Artificial Intelligence

- Has Succeeded?: A Debate,” in *Mechanical Bodies, Computational Minds*, ed. Stefano Franchi and Guven Guzeldere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 265–79.
- 43 Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” (1784), trans. Ted Humphrey (Hackett Publishing, 1992), [https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant\\_whatisenlightenment.pdf](https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant_whatisenlightenment.pdf).
- 44 Hoshino Futoshi, “Enlightenment within the Limits of Reason Alone: Kant, Foucault, Derrida,” 69–85, [https://utcp.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/publications/pdf/UTCP21+ICCT01\\_04\\_Hoshino.pdf](https://utcp.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/publications/pdf/UTCP21+ICCT01_04_Hoshino.pdf), accessed 23 May 2023.
- 45 Jonna Bornemark and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, eds., *Madness, Religion, and the Limits of Reason* (Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2015).
- 46 Futoshi, “Enlightenment within the Limits of Reason Alone.”
- 47 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
- 48 Alexander Nehamas, “The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters,” *Representations* 74, no. 1 (2001): 37–54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep2001.74.1.37>, accessed 23 May 2023.
- 49 Colin Nazhone Milburn, “Monsters in Eden: Darwin and Derrida,” *Modern Language Notes* 118, no. 3 (2003): 603–21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3251937>, accessed 29 May 2023.
- 50 Bornemark and Wallenstein, *Madness, Religion, and the Limits of Reason*.
- 51 Jacques Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Routledge, 1978), 36–76.
- 52 See Lee Rainee and Janna Anderson, “Code-Dependent: Pros and Cons of the Algorithm Age,” Pew Research Center, 8 February 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/02/08/code-dependent-pros-and-cons-of-the-algorithm-age/>, accessed 31 May 2023. Andrew Tutt, “An FDA for Algorithms,” *Administrative Law Review* 69, no. 1 (20 April 2017): 83–123, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2747994](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2747994), accessed 31 May 2023, writes (p. 117):

“At least in some circumstances, algorithms are likely to be capable of inflicting unusually grave harm.” Tutt (p. 85) expresses concern for machine learning algorithms in particular: “These algorithms are not programmed to solve particular problems. Instead, they are programmed to learn to solve problems.” Such algorithms, he notes, “will soon be used to solve problems that ordinary algorithms have never solved before, or never solved nearly as well before, and, in many of these applications, they stand to pose significant risks to individuals and society if they fail or are misused.” In relation to the latter, see Eric Siegel, *Predictive Analytics: The Power to Predict Who Will Click, Buy, Lie, or Die* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016). Tutt, “An FDA for Algorithms,” (pp. 87–88) cautions further that machine-learning algorithms “are unpredictable, almost by definition. They are programmed to learn to solve problems, then taught to solve those problems, and then asked to solve those problems in extreme situations in the real world. But how machine-learning algorithms learn—and how they reason from experience to practice—is almost entirely alien. Machine-learning algorithms do not learn nor reason like humans do, and that can make their outputs difficult to predict and difficult to explain ... [We] will be entrusting our fates to machines we do not, and perhaps cannot, understand.”

- 53 There are problems methodologically with the machine-learning approach. See, for example, Sina Alemohammad et al., “Self-Consuming Generative Models Go MAD,” arXiv.2307.01850, 4 July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2307.01850>, accessed 9 June 2025. At issue here is the use of “synthetic data to train next-generation models,” a practice that “creates an autophagous (‘self-consuming’) loop” such that “*without fresh real data in each generation of an autophagous loop, future generative models are doomed to have their quality (precision) or diversity (recall) progressively decrease.* We term this condition Model Autophagy Disorder (MAD), making analogy to mad cow disease.”
- 54 Introducing the concept of “artificial neurosis,” philosopher Aaron Schuster framed the question this way: “If we succeed in creating intelligent machines, machines that can learn and are self-aware, machines that possess freedom and desire, will we also not necessarily

create neurotic, psychotic, and perverse machines? In other words, won't intelligent machines also suffer from mental illness?" Schuster considers the possibility of a "computer unconscious" (a Freudian concept, of course, but a concept likewise engaged in depth psychology, e.g., Carl Jung). See Aaron Schuster, "Artificial Neurosis: AI and Psychopathology," The New Centre for Research and Practice, <https://thenewcentre.org/archive/artificial-neurosis-ai-psychopathology/>, accessed 8 June 2023. See also Behzadan, Munir, and Yampolskiy, "A Psychopathological Approach to Safety Engineering."

- 55 Milburn, "Monsters in Eden."
- 56 Notably, at the time of Jones's writing, cybernetics was presented as "the study of control and communication in the animal and the machine"; see here Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961).
- 57 D.F. Jones, *Colossus* (Gateway, 2018), <https://www.sfgateway.com>. Subsequent parenthetical citations to *Colossus* are to chapter and page of this e-book edition.
- 58 The Future of Life Institute, "Project: Mitigating the Risks of AI Integration in Nuclear Launch," <https://futureoflife.org/project/mitigating-the-risks-of-ai-integration-in-nuclear-launch/>, accessed 28 May 2023; and Vincent Boulanin et al., *Artificial Intelligence, Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk* (Solna, Sweden: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, June 2020), [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/artificial\\_intelligence\\_strategic\\_stability\\_and\\_nuclear\\_risk.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/artificial_intelligence_strategic_stability_and_nuclear_risk.pdf), accessed 28 May 2023.
- 59 Boulanin et al., "Artificial Intelligence, Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk."
- 60 The bill, introduced in the first session of the 118th United States Congress, is short-titled "Block Nuclear Launch by Autonomous Artificial Intelligence Act of 2023." See also Brett Wilkins, "Bipartisan US Bill Aims to Prevent AI From Launching Nuclear Weapons," *Common Dreams*, 26 April 2023, <https://www>.

commondreams.org/news/artificial-intelligence-and-nuclear-weapons, accessed 28 May 2023; and Senator Ed Markey, “Markey, Lieu, Beyer, and Buck Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Prevent AI from Launching a Nuclear Weapon,” 26 April 2023, <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/markey-lieu-beyer-and-buck-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-prevent-ai-from-launching-a-nuclear-weapon>, accessed 28 May 2023.

- 61 Cameron Hunter and Bleddyn E Bowen, “We’ll Never Have a Model of an AI-Major-General: Artificial Intelligence, Command Decisions, and Kitsch Visions of War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2024): 116–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2241648>, accessed 28 July 2024.
- 62 For a discussion of abductive logic, see Igor Douven, “Abduction,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2021 edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/abduction/>, accessed 29 July 2024. In its current philosophical sense, “abduction” refers to a type of reasoning that involves “inference to the best explanation” (hypothesis) relative to a set of observations and alternative explanations. Inductive inferences are “those inferences based purely on statistical data, such as observed frequencies of occurrences of a particular feature in a given population.” See also Dov M. Gabby and John Woods, “Advice on Abductive Logic,” *Logic Journal of IGPL* 14, no. 2 (2006): 189–219, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jigpal/jzk014>, accessed 29 July 2024.
- 63 Even so, there is recent effort to engage abductive logical reasoning in machine learning, including “formal models . . . which are utilized to analyze the properties and computational efficiencies of abductive reasoning to various artificial intelligence applications.” See James Crowder and John N. Carbone, “Abductive Artificial Intelligence Learning Models,” 2017 International Conference on Artificial Intelligence (ICAI3123), Las Vegas, NV, June 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318838329\\_Abductive\\_Artificial\\_Intelligence\\_Learning\\_Models](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318838329_Abductive_Artificial_Intelligence_Learning_Models), accessed 29 July 2024. See also James Crowder, “Possibilistic, Abductive Neural Networks (PANNs) for Decision Support in Autonomous Systems: The Advanced Learning, Abductive Network (ALAN),” Proceedings of the 1st International

Conference on Robotic Intelligence and Applications, Gwangju, Korea, December 2012; James Crowder, “The Advanced Learning Abductive Network (ALAN),” Proceedings of the AIAA Space 2013 Conference, San Diego, CA, September 2013.

- 64 See Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. R. Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 332–75, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0186>, accessed 6 June 2023. The Greek text (πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδέν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει) has the Greek words *tà deinà*, translated as “uncanny,” “strange,” or “wonder.” See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0185%3Acard%3D332>, accessed 6 June 2023.
- 65 William Irwin Thompson, *Evil and World Order* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). *Enantiodromia* is a Greek word that the depth psychologist Carl Jung explained as “the emergence of the unconscious opposite in the course of time.” Thompson understood that all too often the impulse to do good has led to the realization of its opposite.

BOOK REVIEWS

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Melissa Johnston. *Building Peace, Rebuilding Patriarchy: The Failure of Gender Interventions in Timor-Leste*. Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-0-19-763799-9. Pp. 258.

Melissa Johnston has taken on a very interesting topic, the failure of gender-based interventions in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Timor-Leste. This topic is examined through the lens of feminist political economy and structural analysis of social forces, which is not an unfair approach to use in examining the topic. The writing, based on this lens, is solid.

The author examines whether gender interventions in Timor-Leste and their outcomes are compliant with gender justice. In the end, Johnston argues that the international community's peacebuilding interventions have, for the most part, failed to include program implementations that would facilitate the consideration of women, to raise their capacity or to instill gender-based rights. The author states: "These interventions have had a sustained focus on gender and women's empowerment, but, like peacebuilding generally, their results have been uneven in terms of their stated goals such as providing redress and resources to female victims of war or electing more women as village chiefs ... gender interventions have been disappointing when measured against the more ambitious goals of gender justice" (p. 3).

Johnston uses a mix of fieldwork interviews and a strong literature review as the basis of their research. I note that many of the interviews took place between March and September 2015, and that the work was published in 2023. The twenty-four-page bibliography lists only a few sources from after

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2015, and we are left with the question of whether there was any significant change up to 2023.

Timor-Leste is not the most advanced society or political unit on the face of the earth to be open to interventions to improve the lives, standing, and rights of women in the short term. Timor-Leste, as a colonial outpost of Portugal and then as an annexed province of Indonesia, was largely isolated from the rest of the changing and developing world. Democratic and egalitarian ideals would have been foreign to the Timorese. While the gender analysis in the book is rooted in a feminist political economy lens, the complexity of Timor-Leste demands the use of a multitude of analytical approaches such as history, geography, pragmatism, and the current situation to give a more holistic understanding of gender questions in this still-underdeveloped country.

To be more specific: Timor-Leste was, for 450 years, a colony of Portugal. It was a distant outpost that served some helpful purpose to the Portuguese economy, such as providing sandalwood or conscripts for military service. Timor was, and is, poor. Infrastructure, such as roadworks outside of the capital Dili, were practically non-existent. This half-island colony was fractured by isolation and by language and cultural differences. It could take a week of walking to move from the eastern tip of the island to Dili, and along the way, many different, sometimes completely distinct dialects would be heard.

Kinship structures, of which the author is critical, were a result of geographic and linguistic isolation. The author lists at least six different first language dialects with their interviewees. The village or the linguistic family was, and is, a key political unit in Timor-Leste.

In 1974, a left-wing government was elected in Portugal. This new government basically left the doors unlocked and walked away from its overseas colonies in 1975. Timor was an independent state for nine months before being violently overtaken by Indonesia.

In 1999, after the independence referendum, Timor-Leste was de facto the first state where the United Nations acted as the transitional administration. There was no constitution, no tax code, no elected legislature to pass laws, no central banking authority. The author rightly notes that “in distinction to most other peacebuilding operations in so-called failed states, UNTAET [United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor] had a mandate

to find, staff, and design state institutions, not reform existing ones” (p. 13).

The constitution came into effect in May 2002. Timor-Leste joined the United Nations in September 2002. The road to becoming a functioning state has not been easy. In 2006 there was unrest with the military, which led President Gusmão to request international military assistance. In 2008, President Ramos-Horta was shot by a member of his security detail.

The Law on Domestic Violence came into effect in 2010. This is acknowledged by the author, who argues that resources and governance have been greatly influenced by armed or elite men, and that this has led to significant deprivation of resources, including legal protections for women; it took eight years following statehood to criminalize domestic violence. In my analysis, we should be careful about being judgemental at this stage of historical evolution of gender rights in this new country, because cultural and societal changes are not achieved overnight, and particularly not in a country that is challenged by many modern expectations on account of its history and cultural developments.

These will all be important subjects of academic interest to revisit once the Timorese have one or two generations of independence and modernity behind them.

Frank Fowlie

Vancouver

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Richard Moore. *A REALISTIC Framework for Enhancing Communication, Relationship-Building and De-Escalation Skills*. Shadow of the Law Publications, 2021. ISBN 978-0-9958842-5-0. Pp. 142.

Richard Moore, a widely respected leader in Canadian mediation and peace-building, has created a practical, readable handbook for police officers with the goal of helping them to “embrace and practice communication skills and strategies needed on patrol and when they have difficult personal issues to deal with back at the station” (p. 18). Drawn from decades of experience

as a mediator of complaints from citizens toward officers, Moore identifies and reinforces fundamental skills to help officers do their jobs and engage with citizens in ways that can reduce escalation and improve community trust and cooperation.

The core of the book is the REALISTIC framework, which is an acronym composed of eight words: rapport, empathy, ask openly, listen, involve, slow down, truth, and conversation. This framework provides conversational alternatives to command-and-control interactions between officer and public. In advocating this approach, Moore invites readers to shift their image of an officer's role from that of a combative "warrior" toward a more protective "guardian of the peace" (p. 17). Changing an officer's mindset in this way, Moore argues, enables them to move from an "us versus them" mentality toward a sense of duty to protect citizens, toward greater safety for the public as well as officers.

The greatest strength of the book, in my opinion, is the inclusion of real complaints by citizens toward police officers that Moore provides in every chapter to illustrate key themes. Examples include complaints about the "inappropriate and unprofessional response" (p. 20) of officers toward a citizen who called 911 about a domestic dispute in their building, and the behaviour of two officers that left complainants feeling "betrayed by the only system that should make you feel safe" (p. 48). Another example describes an incident with officers that led complainants to believe that "the fact that we are both people of colour may have been a factor in the poor treatment we received" (p. 38).

After each excerpt, Moore provides questions for the reader to reflect on preferable alternatives. He then gives concise explanations of concepts or skills such as trust, empathy, power, and mitigating unconscious bias. Although readers will not find the kinds of robust decision-making methods found in Insight Policing or the rapid-assessment tools found in crisis intervention training, Moore offers numerous strategies, tools, and checklists to help readers reflect on best practices and to become more effective in their roles. For example, an overview of Ron Kraybill's foundational *Style Matters* conflict style inventory can help readers understand and assess their habitual tendencies in responding to conflict. Similarly, a step-by-step list of seven actions can assist readers to prepare themselves for resistant or abusive

behaviours they might encounter.

The book could be a valuable accompaniment to a training course or workshop that is structured as chapters or modules enriched by additional materials on key points. The chapter on unconscious bias, for example, introduces important themes like racial profiling and Indigenous rules of conduct, which could be strengthened with more thorough exploration and support. In addition, Moore sometimes refers to research in a way that would benefit from further referencing, such as the assertion that “research confirms that it is not realistic to expect positive reactions to command-and-control communications. People are more likely to co-operate with officers who use a more engaging, respectful, two-way give-and-take style of communication” (p. 62).

The book concludes with seven success stories from four officers in the Edmonton and Ottawa Police Services. Each of the stories highlights the importance of the self-reflection and communication skills provided in the book, showing that officers have significant influence on the outcomes of difficult interactions.

Moore’s book is a useful guide for officers to practice essential skills that can move them to more fully embrace the role of guardians of peace, a role that is becoming more essential in polarizing contexts and frequently fractious citizen–police encounters.

Marnie Jull

Royal Roads University

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Zsuzsa Millei, Nelli Piattoeva, and Iveta Silova (Mnemo ZIN), (Eds.). (*An Archive: Childhood, Memory, and the Cold War*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2024. ISBN 978-1-80511-186-3 (hardback), 978-1-80511-185-6 (paperback). Pp. 428.

This book contains a collection of childhood memories from the period of the Cold War. It is the outcome of memory workshops from the Reconnect/

Recollect project that were held in Berlin, Helsinki, Mexico City, Riga, and online. It is an interesting combination of analysis of memory, glimpses into foregone cultures through children's eyes, and children's impressions of Cold War actuality. The book is dedicated to "Mnemosyne, the daughter of Gaia and the mother of Nine Muses" (p. 3), and the editors hope to "nurture understanding, empathy, and dialogue across generational, cultural, and geopolitical divides."

There is plenty of interesting philosophical analysis throughout the contributions that highlights the situatedness of our perceptions and the power of memory to reveal the hidden biases in our present orientation. This is why the authors emphasize that this is not an archive of data about the Cold War re-confirming standard historical interpretations of this era. Rather, individual recollections of childhood impressions have an "an-archic" effect on the past and present *Zeitgeist*, taking away its agreed-upon validity and adding a level of understanding that allows for "engendering reciprocity, building relations, and opening new possibilities of seeing the world" (p. 8). Needless to say, this analysis is refreshing and timely, considering the reliance on unchecked and simplistic illusions about actual reality during the Cold War (or what contributed to the "hot" phase just before that).

The stories themselves, even if they reflect on important historical events such as the visit of Gorbachev to Finland, are childhood memories. In one sense they are rather banal, focused on the imminent priorities of a child: enjoying delicious ice cream, being fascinated by glittery Western junk, or uttering political demands that are not really understood by the child. This in itself is revealing, because it shows that a child's everyday existence, as it is for adults, is mainly preoccupied with the banal, whereas the essential—that is, what makes history—is often missed.

There are exceptions in childhood memories that also capture the cultural and historical significance of one's experiences, which seems to carry over into a critical analytical view of current affairs in adult life. A fine example of this is the chapter by Erica Burman, who describes her childhood memories of being a Jew in the United Kingdom. She provides a brilliant historical awareness of the reasons behind the positions taken by Jews and the Jewish community in the United Kingdom. It is refreshing to get a childhood memory that is coupled with factual context, thus revealing the root causes

for those impressions. This truly provides a very different perspective than the one that is presented officially. For me, this is most helpful for opening a deeper understanding of a cultural group's development over time. Surely, there must be many stories that can be solicited that would create an anarcho-political analysis, such as my vivid childhood memories of the public mood in Czechoslovakia just before Russian tanks squashed the Prague Spring, or listening to adults in East Germany expressing fears of surveillance, and so on.

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