

## Peace and Conflict: A Look at my Own Backyard

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines peace and conflict through the lens of an autobiographical “backyard,” arguing that global transitions—ecological, geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural—must be understood not only at macro and meso levels but also through the intimate micro-dynamics of individual experience. Situated within contemporary scholarship that frames the present era as one of profound systemic transformation, the study extends the author’s earlier work on peace and resistance by employing a methodology of critical self-assessment, or autoethnography. Through six guiding questions, the article interrogates encounters with aggression, violence, sexual harassment, deprivation, institutional racism, DARVO, and conflict across the author’s life course, spanning childhood in Indonesia, migration to the Netherlands, academic and professional trajectories, political activism, and the impact of personal tragedy. These narratives are analyzed through frameworks drawn from victimology, transcultural psychology, and power relations, illuminating how institutional structures reproduce exclusion, hierarchy, and racialization while also revealing the author’s evolving strategies of resistance—from physical self-defense and ethical refusal to organizational leadership, whistleblowing, and advocacy for vulnerable groups, migrants, and refugees. The discussion contrasts Western individualistic models of power and masculinity with communitarian non-Western philosophies such as Ubuntu, arguing that durable peace requires integrating these divergent epistemologies. A heuristic conflict model,  $F(C \mid PF-LA-PE) = VVPB \ \& \ NE$ , is proposed to conceptualize conflict as relational, contextual, and structurally embedded. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that personal histories of conflict mirror broader global patterns shaped by colonial legacies, systemic discrimination, and structural violence. It concludes that any credible pursuit of world peace must incorporate micro-level experience as both analytical foundation and normative guide, recognizing the inseparability of individual, societal, and global dimensions of conflict and transformation.

**Keywords:** peace and conflict, autoethnography, victimology, transcultural psychology, institutional racism, systemic exclusion, non-Western worldviews, Ubuntu, global transition.

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of a *world in transition* has become a defining theme in contemporary academic and policy discourse. Although conceptualizations differ, there is broad agreement that humanity is undergoing structural transformations of such magnitude that they redefine established political, environmental, economic, and social orders. These shifts are not discrete but profoundly interconnected, producing a condition of heightened uncertainty and contestation over possible futures.

The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU, 2011) interprets this transition primarily through the lens of environmental crisis. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable modes of production and consumption necessitate what they term a new “social contract for sustainability.” This framework underscores the inadequacy of incremental reform, instead calling for systemic transformation: innovative governance, intergenerational responsibility, and transdisciplinary cooperation. In this paradigm, ecological boundaries become the decisive determinants of humanity’s civilizational trajectory.

In contrast, **Brown (2016)** situates the phenomenon within the turbulence of geopolitical and socio-economic change. She characterizes the present as a period of “*extreme transition*” marked by the destabilization of social systems, identities, and cultural frameworks. Her perspective foregrounds the psychological and existential dimensions of disruption, emphasizing how overlapping crises—pandemics, armed conflicts, and global inequalities—erode traditional sources of meaning and legitimacy.

A more integrative view is offered by **World Scientific Publishing (2023)**, which examines transition through the shifting dynamics of global order. Their analysis highlights the erosion of post-Cold War stability and the emergence of a multipolar, fragmented world system defined by competition, institutional fragility, and economic restructuring. This geopolitical framing complements ecological and cultural interpretations, underscoring the interdependence of material power relations, systemic vulnerabilities, and normative reconfigurations.

Collectively, these perspectives illuminate both the *multidimensionality* of transition and the absence of a single explanatory framework. Whether understood as an ecological imperative, a cultural crisis, or a geopolitical reordering, the literature converges on one conclusion: incremental adaptation is insufficient. The contemporary world stands at a *civilizational crossroads*, demanding new paradigms of sustainability, governance, and social cohesion.

Building on this foundation, the present article approaches the question of transition from the perspective of **world peace**. It extends a series of prior works (Steinmetz, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c) and an accompanying e-book (Steinmetz, 2025d), all of which foreground peace as both analytical lens and normative objective. This focus has been advanced through diverse methodological approaches, addressing factors such as systemic crises, societal resistance, authoritarian megalomania, tensions between Western and non-Western worldviews, enduring legacies of white superiority, the entanglements of capitalism and arms trade, and the persistence of (neo)colonial practices. These explorations are framed by the recognition that the contemporary global order is fundamentally deficient in peace.

The reflections presented here have primarily engaged the **macro** and **meso** levels of analysis, examining structural and societal dimensions of conflict and transition. However, a comprehensive account requires further inquiry into the **micro** level: the lived experiences and capacities of individuals. The central question that arises is thus: *Can individuals cultivate peace within their own lives—resolving conflicts empathetically, living harmoniously, and contributing to a broader culture of peace?* This micro-level inquiry remains critical if the vision of a just and peaceful world is to move beyond abstraction and into practice. I would like to point out that people in the Western world often engage in bad-faith communication by using distorted images. The following map is a prime example of this phenomenon.



Figure 1: The true size of Africa (<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=The+true+size+of+Africa>)

### I AM EXAMINING MYSELF. WHAT METHODOLOGY AM I USING TO ACHIEVE THIS?

**Self-assessment:** In this article, I will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Have I encountered aggression, violence, or sexual harassment?
2. Have I encountered deprivation and institutional racism?
3. Have I encountered DARVO<sup>1</sup>?
4. Have I encountered conflicts?
5. How did I deal with these incidents or crimes?
6. Was my approach successful, and if so, what were the reasons?

Please note that I may be affected by incidents or crimes in a variety of ways. I could be affected as a victim, perpetrator, witness or first responder.

**My own history:** I was born and raised in Medan, on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, within a family of six: my parents, three siblings, and myself. Over the course of my childhood, we lived in three distinct places that shaped my earliest impressions of the world. The first was Medan city itself, specifically in a neighbourhood inhabited largely by academics and professors. The

<sup>1</sup> DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) is a manipulative strategy commonly employed by perpetrators of abuse and misconduct to evade responsibility and undermine their accusers. The sequence begins with **denial**, in which the perpetrator rejects or minimizes the occurrence or severity of the alleged behaviour. This is followed by **attack**, targeting the credibility, motives, or psychological stability of the accuser. Finally, through **role reversal**, the perpetrator positions themselves as the true victim, portraying the accuser as the aggressor. Research demonstrates that DARVO is prevalent across multiple contexts, including **domestic violence**, **sexual harassment**, and **institutional responses to abuse** (e.g., within universities or religious organizations). The consequences for victims are severe: DARVO contributes to **gaslighting**, reduced self-esteem, and heightened psychological distress. Moreover, it fosters **mistrust in authorities** and **silences victims**, who may feel isolated, shamed, or powerless to disclose their experiences. At the societal level, DARVO perpetuates cultures of impunity by protecting perpetrators and discrediting those who seek accountability. Recognizing and naming DARVO as a rhetorical and psychological tactic is therefore crucial for empowering victims, strengthening institutional accountability, and disrupting cycles of abuse.

second was Berastagi, a highland town known for its horses, cool air, and striking views of the surrounding mountains and the third Lake Toba. As a child, I recall moments of wonder in the Lake Toba: clouds descending low enough to brush the water's surface, and countless small fish darting beneath it, impressions that remain vivid in memory.



**Figure 2: Medan-Sumatra-Repulique Indonesia (<https://ap.lc/Hzuxg>)**

My surname, Steinmetz (in German: bricklayer), originates from South Germany, specifically Bavaria, and was inherited from my father, Carl (means King in German) Hermann Dino Steinmetz. His ancestors migrated to Indonesia in the early eighteenth century. My mother, Yvonne Ardaseer, carries a lineage tracing back to the Persian King Ardashir; her family established themselves in Indonesia as early as the sixteenth century.

The personal histories of my parents were profoundly marked by global conflict. My father endured the European theatre of the Second World War while living in Leiden, the Netherlands. My mother, in turn, suffered internment in a Japanese camp during the occupation of Indonesia. These traumas, combined with the political volatility of mid-twentieth-century Indonesia, defined the contours of our family's fate. When I was eleven years old, we fled the country. My parents foresaw that mass violence would unfold under President Suharto, initiated by the CIA, whose virulent anti-communism resulted in widespread persecution and the deaths of many, including numerous students my father had taught at the Indonesian military academy.

Despite this upheaval, my father had held an esteemed academic position. President Sukarno had appointed him Professor of Medical Physics at the Faculty of Medicine in Medan — a testament both to his scholarly expertise and to the turbulent intersections of science, politics, and history in our family's story.

## Work

At this juncture in my life, I am engaged in an ongoing effort to define my place within society. Although formally retired, I remain fully employed, as my combined state and private pensions are insufficient to cover the cost of living. My professional and personal commitments converge around what can best be described as activism: a sustained opposition to injustice, unequal treatment, and the absence of tailored approaches to human needs. I am trained as a transcultural psychologist and victimologist, and I inhabit these identities also as an activist. In practice, as of 2025, this entails several key activities:

1. Authoring scholarly articles and books that examine and critique injustice;
2. Delivering lectures and workshops that bring existing inequities to public and professional attention;
3. Advocating for structural reforms in primary and secondary education in Amsterdam;
4. Providing therapy to individuals in vulnerable positions, including women subjected to intimate partner violence and children deprived of access to schooling.

My professional engagements are now anchored in two organizations:

- **Expats & Immigrants B.V.** (expats-immigrants.com)
- **Stichting Pak mijn Hand (Take My Hand Foundation)**

External assessments, such as a profile generated by ChatGPT-4, have highlighted the breadth of my professional contributions. These include my expertise as a psychologist and criminologist in the Netherlands, with a sustained focus on: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), multiculturalism, violence and aggression, radicalization and terrorism, offender reintegration, (neo)colonialism, peace and resistance, and the intersections of Western and non-Western worldviews. My scholarly and clinical work has sought to advance understanding of complex human behaviour, particularly as it relates to migrant communities and intergenerational trauma. This intellectual and professional trajectory has resulted in dozens of publications, reflecting a longstanding academic career. My research impact is documented through platforms such as **ResearchGate** (<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Carl-Steinmetz/stats>), where I remain active within the international research community through publications, conference contributions, and collaborations.

## **MY OWN ENCOUNTERS<sup>2</sup> WITH CONFLICT AND THE MANNER IN WHICH I ADDRESSED THEM**

### **Indonesia**

I was happy in Indonesia. I lived in harmony with my parents' family, their friends, the children, nature (both flora and fauna) and the universe. I don't remember any conflicts during that time. When I was born, my mother was unable to breastfeed me. She may have transferred her frustration at not being able to feed me onto me, as I was her first child. This is referred to as developmental trauma<sup>3</sup> in scientific literature.

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<sup>2</sup> Human memory, while indispensable to daily functioning and identity, is neither a perfect recording device nor an immutable archive. Rather, it is a dynamic and reconstructive process, vulnerable to distortion, omission, and even the incorporation of false information over time. This malleability means that confidence in a memory often fails to correspond with its accuracy, a disjunction that poses particular challenges in high-stakes contexts such as eyewitness testimony.

Memory (Link: <https://ap.lc/BpPIU>) tends to preserve the gist of experiences more reliably than their fine-grained details. Although susceptible to contamination through suggestion, conversation, or retelling, research indicates that recollection of novel or highly distinctive real-world events may be more accurate than is often assumed. Still, the reconstructive nature of memory frequently results in the unintentional creation of plausible but erroneous details, shaped by contextual cues and subsequent experiences.

The paradox of memory lies in its dual character: it is both dependable in retaining overarching meaning and fragile in preserving precise factual content. To safeguard against error, corroboration with external evidence is essential, particularly when accuracy is critical. Furthermore, techniques such as rehearsal, contextual anchoring, and structured organization can enhance retention, though they cannot eliminate memory's inherent vulnerability to distortion.

<sup>3</sup> Developmental trauma (link: <https://ap.lc/rbxmO>) denotes the profound and multifaceted consequences of chronic, life-threatening experiences or significant disruptions in early attachment relationships. Arising during sensitive

I know my parents were angry when my sister and I left home in Medan to visit the village (kampung) during their siesta. There could have been tigers and snakes in the tall grass (alang alang). Fortunately, we did not encounter any. When I was five, I got glasses and told my mother, 'Everything looks so beautiful.' The tropics are beautiful, too.

I wasn't a well-behaved child. Once, my sister and I started a fire under our parents' bed. They were not amused. To discipline us, my father took us to see a huge fire in the neighbourhood. That gave us quite a shock!

## The Netherlands

I have experienced conflict throughout my life, ever since I arrived in the Netherlands from Indonesia. I attended primary school in Voorburg (little village near the Hague) for a short time. Both girls and boys teased and bullied me there. They mocked my appearance and my outdated Dutch. In response, I threw the girls' bags into the ditch and fought the boys. I had learnt how to do that at a boxing school in The Hague. It was my father who had enrolled me there.

After that, I attended a primary school in Delft for a short time. By that point, we had moved from Voorburg to Delft. The headteacher there hated me. I still don't know why. It may have been structural institutional racism. At the time, however, I didn't know that term. This headteacher threw books at me in class. I instinctively threw them right back at him. Needless to say, my parents had to come to the school to explain my behaviour. Fortunately, they firmly supported me. The bullying and harassment started on my first day at secondary school, the Athenaeum Stanislas Highschool in Delft. This was an all-boys' school. It was only when I was in the sixth form that girls started joining the school. One young white man had it out for me. I

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developmental windows in infancy and childhood, these adversities—such as abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, family instability, or invasive medical procedures—interfere with normative brain maturation. In doing so, they undermine fundamental capacities for emotional regulation, behavioural control, and the formation of secure interpersonal bonds. The cumulative effect often manifests in enduring psychological, emotional, relational, and somatic difficulties, frequently aligned with the clinical features of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD).

### Core Features

- **Timing:** Emerges in early and highly sensitive stages of development.
- **Nature of Trauma:** Typically, repetitive, severe, and interpersonal in character, often entailing disruptions to secure caregiving bonds.
- **Developmental Impact:** Alters brain architecture, compromising self-regulation, emotional balance, and relational security.

### Illustrative Experiences

- **Maltreatment:** Direct or witnessed physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- **Neglect:** Chronic deprivation of physical, emotional, or relational needs.
- **Attachment Disruption:** Trauma inflicted by a caregiver or destabilization of the primary attachment relationship.
- **Family Instability:** Exposure to domestic violence or chaotic, unsafe home environments.

### Long-Term Sequelae

- **Emotional Dysregulation:** Heightened vulnerability to anxiety, rage, or emotional numbing.
- **Behavioural Dyscontrol:** Impulsivity, self-harm, and difficulties with self-soothing.
- **Cognitive Impairments:** Deficits in attention, executive functioning, and learning.
- **Relational Challenges:** Impaired capacity for trust, intimacy, and secure attachment.
- **Somatic Manifestations:** Elevated risk of chronic pain, gastrointestinal problems, and other stress-related health conditions.

dealt with him quickly. During the first week, I beat him up in front of a large group of pupils. Neither he nor any other pupils ever bothered me again at that school.



**Figure 3: China - Changes under Mao II: The Great Leap Forward 1958-1962. Link: <https://ap.lc/wslod>**

I also had a #MeToo experience at this school. Some of the teachers were Jesuit priests, while others were laypeople. One of the Jesuit priests sent me to his bedroom because I was singing out of tune in the choir. He wanted to touch me. I told him, "I've had training in boxing and wrestling. So watch out." But the good man didn't listen. So, I punched him. After that, he lost his desire to touch me.

During my time at secondary school, I often argued with my father. He thought I should spend more time on my homework. One day, he took me to work with him at the Delft University of Technology. There, he showed me his rather unusual office. In the middle of the room stood an oval table with a chair on rails around it, enabling him to move between projects. I had to do my homework there and was set extra work, too. I was given material that I hadn't covered at school yet: set theory. This forms the basis of mathematics. Other than that, I had a pleasant adolescence. I was in a cabaret group with my school friends called the Little Red Book<sup>4</sup>. The group formed around the time that Mao Zedong became known as the founder of the People's Republic of China. At the time, we romanticised him. We had no idea that his political goals would result in 40–70 million deaths through the 'Great Leap Forward'<sup>5</sup> and the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> Published by the military newspaper of the People's Republic of China, it ran from April 1964 until around 1976. It is a compilation of quotations from Mao Zedong's speeches and writings. Its popular title, The Little Red Book, reflects its portable design. Link: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=het+roide+boekje+van+Mao+Zedong>

<sup>5</sup> The Great Leap Forward was a disastrous Chinese Communist Party campaign from 1958 to 1962 led by Mao Zedong to rapidly transform China from an agrarian society into an industrial communist nation. The policy involved forced



As I attended a boys' school, organising parties was difficult. The only girls we knew were our sisters or those we met through sports clubs. However, Delft offered a unique solution. As a boy, you could ride your moped to the Boterbrug Bridge and invite a girl to the party with you. I often did this on a borrowed Puch moped.

I also grew up at a time when youth gangs were commonplace. My own group was called 'The Frogs'. Its members wore long black capes. The Frogs' vision and mission were peaceful. However, we were not averse to violence. For instance, we fought the 'Bulls' (greasers riding Zundapps mopeds) on Scheveningen beach. The 'Bulls' beat us with chains. In response, we intercepted their chains with sticks and threw them into the sea — not the most environmentally friendly approach!

At the time, I was also a member of the Red Youth organisation, which had been branded a terrorist group. We were staunchly opposed to militarism. This was demonstrated annually at the Taptoe Delft<sup>6</sup> event in Delft. We sabotaged the event using radio transmitters. Using these, we directed several military corps towards the Delft market at the same time, resulting in a cacophony.

When I was seventeen, I went to Leiden University to study psychology. My father was very much against this. He had hoped that I would study electrical engineering and philosophy instead. However, I chose to study psychology because there were lots of young women on the course. I had missed having female friends very much during my time at secondary school.

By the end of the first month, I had finished my first year. During that year, I was involved in a moped accident. A woman drove her car over my leg. While I was in hospital, she gave me a beautiful history book. I was shocked when she asked for it back after I was discharged.

During my second year of studies, I spent some time living in Berlin with a female friend and her partner. I felt lonely because I thought my friend only tolerated my company. At the time, American soldiers were rather pompously driving their tanks and military vehicles along Kurfürstendamm. They seemed to feel the need to demonstrate that they were the world's police force. It was there that I became involved in a very unfortunate incident. I was doing

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collectivization into large people's communes, increased steel production via "backyard furnaces," and the abolition of private ownership. However, it led to agricultural collapse, mass famine, and the deaths of an estimated 30 to 45 million people, making it one of history's most devastating man-made disasters. Link: <https://ap.lc/wslod>

<sup>6</sup> Taptoe Delft (<https://ap.lc/dbwcc>), the precursor to the present-day Nationale Taptoe, was held in Delft from 1954 until 1974 and served as a prominent showcase of Dutch military music and ceremonial display. The armed forces played a central role, contributing performances by leading military bands and drum corps such as the Tamboerkorps of the Garde Grenadiers and the Marinierskapel, alongside demonstrations by specialist units including the so-called spookpeloton of the Air Force training school. The Jachthoornkorps of the Garde Regiment Jagers added further prestige, ensuring that the event presented a distinctly military and national character while offering the public insight into the ceremonial and cultural traditions of the Dutch armed forces.

The termination of Taptoe Delft in 1974 reflected broader societal transformations. Rising antimilitarist sentiment in the 1960s and 1970s, combined with political opposition and local commercial interests, led the Delft city council to withdraw its support. Consequently, the event relocated to Breda, where it gradually evolved into a more inclusive and less exclusively military spectacle. In this way, Taptoe Delft stands as both a symbol of post-war military tradition and a case study in the shifting relationship between armed forces, civic identity, and public culture in the Netherlands.

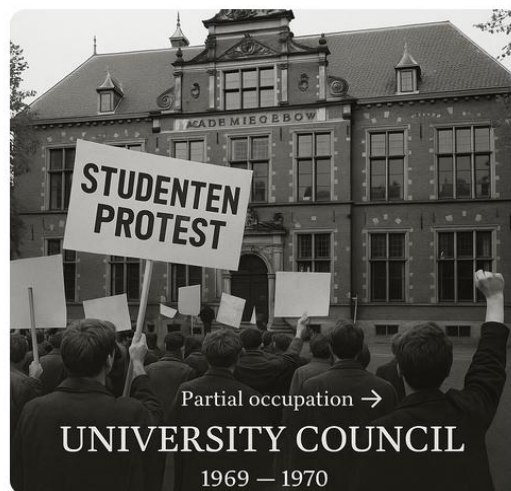


some shopping for our small group in my German friend's Fiat. I had parked behind Kurfürstendamm, where a large demonstration was taking place. As I walked through the crowd, a woman screamed that I had just robbed a jewellery shop. I had long black hair, a long beard, and a tan. According to her, I must have been a criminal.

I was arrested by the police and taken to a station for questioning. They also pulled me up by my hair. I was woken up at night by bright lights for further questioning. After two weeks, a solicitor was brought in through my girlfriend's friend, who worked for a German planning agency. He managed to get me out of this mess.

To complete my Bachelor's degree in Psychology, I took the following courses: 'The Psychiatric Patient', 'Depth Psychology', and 'Metabologica'. These were taught by Jan Hendrik van den Berg (Deventer, 11 June 1914 – Gorinchem, 22 September 2012).

He was a Dutch psychiatrist, as well as a professor of pastoral psychology, phenomenological method, and conflict psychology. During the turbulent 1970s, he was known for supporting apartheid in South Africa. I received more than one pass mark for the Depth Psychology module. When I had had enough, I requested a meeting with the professor in charge. I asked him why I had failed his modules. His answer was racist. He said, 'Your Dutch is terrible.' I responded, 'Then your Dutch must be terrible too, because I'm quoting verbatim from your books.' I know them by heart." He became so angry that he hit me. I didn't take that lying down and hit him back. After that, I got an eight (the lowest mark is a zero and the highest is a ten) for his courses.



**Student Protest and Democratic Reform at Leiden University (1969–1970)<sup>7</sup>:** Contrary to the popular notion of a large-scale “occupation” at Leiden University in the 1970s, the decisive events actually took place in 1969, on the cusp of the new decade. Inspired by the wave of international protest—most notably the French student uprisings—Dutch students demanded greater participation in what they saw as an overly hierarchical and authoritarian university system. In Leiden, these demands culminated in a partial occupation of the historic *Academiegebouw*. While comparatively restrained when set against the tumultuous events in

<sup>7</sup> <https://ap.lc/lbNNc>

Amsterdam, the Leiden protests nevertheless reflected the national movement for university democratization.

A direct consequence was the establishment of the **Universiteitsraad** in 1970, which marked the formal beginning of student and staff participation in the governance of Leiden University. This reform inaugurated a more democratic administrative structure, while retaining a characteristically *Leids* balance: gradual, measured, and firmly anchored in institutional tradition. The episode thus stands as a pivotal moment in the transformation of Dutch higher education governance, signalling both continuity and change in Leiden's academic culture. At the time, I was the spokesperson for the university's resistance movement. I was responsible for printing stencils — paper posters bearing messages of resistance — and I was also a member of the Students' Union. We were a powerful force back then. We sat on the university board and had the power to dismiss professors. During our time resisting the bastion of knowledge and power that is the university, we were as happy as kings. My father's professor friends found my behaviour despicable. Where was my respect for the older generation? After all, they had helped to rebuild the Netherlands after the European and Asian Second World War.

### **MY WORK EXPERIENCES**

Following the completion of my academic studies, I pursued a role with a start-up initiative that sought to address the issue of absenteeism within the educational sector. The organisation was overseen by a board of leading professors specialising in work-related stress, and it operated under the auspices of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

This was only my second professional position; prior to that, I had worked as a student assistant. At the time, I was still learning the fundamentals of professional life. As this was not covered in my university programme, I had virtually no experience of managing others and had no role models from whom I could learn leadership skills. To collect data on absenteeism due to illness, I employed a large group of students to code punch cards at the Ministry. When I once visited the site, I discovered them cheerfully playing badminton in the corridors.

My time at this company came to an abrupt end when I refused to hand over my data to a senior official from the Ministry. I considered the request unethical. The official wished to link my illness-related absenteeism data to wage information to calculate the financial burden of long-term sick leave in education.

### **Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice**

Following this experience, I joined the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice. I was recruited by Professor Dr. Jan J. M. van Dijk—later awarded the 2011 Stockholm Prize in Criminology—and by Dato Steenhuis, who would subsequently become chief public prosecutor in Leeuwarden. I thrived in this environment. Under Van Dijk's mentorship, I was introduced to the emerging field of victimology. Together, we developed the Dutch Victim Survey (including the opportunity theory, Steinmetz, 1979) and laid the foundation for victim support services in the Netherlands. In 1990, I completed a thesis on the effects of victim support. The reception within the victim support community was, however, critical. My quasi-experimental research revealed that conflating victim support with trauma therapy could inadvertently intensify victims' psychological distress.

During my tenure at the WODC, I was seconded to Canada, working both at the Ministry of the Interior in Ottawa and at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Though my time in Vancouver was marked by a sense of isolation, it was also a period of personal and professional growth. Initially lodged at the Bay Hotel overlooking the Harbour, I found the environment dispiritingly quiet and petitioned the Dean of the Law Faculty for relocation—an unusual but successful request.

Despite my deep appreciation for my work at the Dutch Ministry of Justice, not all experiences were positive. I became embroiled in a serious conflict with the IT department. Initially, my data analyses—requiring substantial computational resources—were conducted at the computing centre in Leiden, where I shared processing capacity with astronomers handling vast datasets. The Ministry later mandated that all computations be carried out in Apeldoorn, transferring responsibility to our internal IT division. One staff member there deliberately sabotaged my analyses. After several unsuccessful attempts to resolve the issue privately, I confronted him publicly, which—perhaps predictably—proved effective.

I was also tangentially involved in the controversy surrounding Professor Dr. Wouter Buikhuisen, appointed to a chair in socio-biological criminology at Leiden University in 1978. His work provoked intense criticism from colleagues and the media alike, with journalist Piet Grijs (Hugo Brandt Corstius) famously branding him a “Nazi criminologist” in *Vrij Nederland*.

On Van Dijk’s recommendation, I initially began my doctoral research under Buikhuisen’s supervision. The project drew on my earlier observational study of youth aggression in a disco in Voorschoten, later published as *Aggression in a Youth Club: An Observational Study in a Town in the West of Holland* (1988, pp. 105–134<sup>8</sup>). However, our collaboration soon faltered. I did not feel seen or supported, and I objected strongly to his proposal that I continue my fieldwork by offering free beer to participants—a suggestion I considered ethically indefensible, given the societal debate on alcohol misuse. I eventually abandoned the project, recalling this period as both intellectually disheartening and personally unpleasant.

After working at the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre for the Dutch Ministry of Justice and the Canadian Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as at the University of British Columbia in Canada, I became Director of the Institute for Psychotrauma in Utrecht. The institute earned money through commercial activities, such as providing psychotrauma assistance to banks and post offices.

It also conducted research, delivered lectures and workshops, and trained corporate response teams in ‘first aid for traumatic events’ like disaster management. My work there ended abruptly. After around five years, the institute’s head therapist, Carlo Mittendorf, and Circons director, Leendert Koppelaar, informed me that they had taken over the institute. This period was very unpleasant for me. The board of the foundation above the Institute for Psychotrauma approved this aggressive takeover. Consequently, the foundation’s chairman, Professor Dr Jos Dijkhuis (one of my PhD supervisors), and I were forced to resign.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://ap.lc/YknPE>

**Steinmetz Advies & Opleiding (Steinmetz Consultancy and Education)**

After that, I started my own commercial company, Steinmetz Advies & Opleiding. I experienced several unpleasant periods there. The first was when I hired an employee to deliver training courses.

After working for me for a month, he told me that I had to dismiss him. When I asked him why, he said it was because he was depressed. I offered to send him to the best psychiatrist in Amsterdam. It later turned out that he was right. Sometime later, it became apparent that he had turned my colleagues against each other. My company was almost ruined. When I realised what was happening, I dismissed him immediately.

Furthermore, signed contracts were often cancelled and invoices frequently remained unpaid. For instance, the AMC board (Amsterdam University hospital) had to pay an invoice. This invoice was reduced by 100,000 guilders. This was not because we had failed to deliver, but because the AMC was unwilling to pay the full amount. We provided support to a large group of people after the finance department seriously intimidated its employees. The intimidation was so severe that one employee took their own life.

Once my business was up and running again, I took my two sons to a mountain camp organised by the Dutch Climbing and Mountaineering Association (NKBV). That was in 1997. The camp was located in the Austrian Alps, near Mayrhofen in the Zillertal Valley. From there, we went to the Slegeis glacier, which has almost disappeared and turned into a large mountain lake since then. This mountain camp was for families. I was surprised that there were no official Austrian or Dutch guides. Instead, there were however only Dutch coordinators. While we were there, there was a lot of snow. We had to go on hiking trips alone, without guidance, but with maps and a compasses. There were many near-misses involving children during this camp. Walking and climbing in the snow is difficult, not easy, especially for young children. My sons were 10 and 6 years old at the time.

Sadly, my eldest son died during this mountain camp. He slipped while playing on rock slabs next to a glacial river. Suddenly, my life, my youngest son's life, and the lives of our families' lives turned into hell. I wrote an article about this experience called 'The Death of My Son Caro (2000)<sup>9</sup>'.

My son's death also impacted my business. I lost my way for over three years. During that time, I neglected my role as director. My colleagues told me, 'Go and mourn your son. We will take care of the business.'

However, when I came to my senses, I found that my company was almost bankrupt. I then applied business redesign principles, transforming the company from a security and safety firm into one that promotes child safety within the Amsterdam education system. To this end, I set up VIOS (Veilig in en om School — 'Safe in and around School') with Paul van Soomeren, Director of the DSP Group. Unfortunately, the Amsterdam secondary education system disbanded this organisation ten years later. This is why we are back to square one. Incidents involving weapons and drugs are now commonplace in primary and secondary education in

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322404839\\_The\\_death\\_of\\_my\\_son\\_Caro](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322404839_The_death_of_my_son_Caro)

Amsterdam. In his inaugural lecture at Tilburg University, Professor Jan J. M. van Dijk referred to my change in behaviour as 'The Mark of Abel: Reflections on the Social Labelling of Victims of Crime' (2006). The hypothesis that individuals who had experienced a shocking event or complex trauma were dedicated to helping vulnerable people around the world was proposed. This theory was supported by a comparison with the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel.

### **Healthcare: Intra-ethnic Ambulant Mental Health AlleKleur**

Subsequent to this experience, an intra-ethnic mental healthcare organisation was established in Amsterdam, known as AlleKleur B.V. en the overarching foundation AlleKleur Zorg. This mental healthcare company employs a multilingual workforce, with personnel able to communicate in the native languages of the clients. The impetus for this endeavour stemmed from the conviction that the ability to shed tears is inherently associated with one's mother tongue.

During my time there, I personally observed numerous incidents. Firstly, the occurrence of domestic violence was observed. On the day of the notification of an incident to the therapist, the psychologist or social worker and I accompanied the women to the police station. An urgent request was made for the individual in question to be remanded into police custody for a minimum period of one weekend. Furthermore, there were treatments available for clients suspected of terrorist activities. These treatments were carried out continuously in close cooperation with the municipality of Amsterdam. It is regrettable that we also encountered clients who have been impacted by the #MeToo movement, specifically within the context of Turkish religious movements. The subjects of this study had been victims of sexual assault at the hands of members of the clergy. We encountered a sense of powerlessness in our interactions with these clients, as the underlying motivation for the rape was rooted in Islamic religious practices.

The relationship between the company and the author, AlleKleur, was terminated on unfavourable terms. Achmea, the largest Dutch health insurer, prohibited us from providing therapy in our clients' native languages. Furthermore, the institution was prohibited from utilising the services of social workers. Our decision to work with social workers was motivated by the recognition that a significant proportion of the client base, comprising immigrants and refugees, was confronted with mental health challenges stemming from the practical difficulties they encountered, including but not limited to economic disadvantage, the inability to provide adequate childcare, overcrowded living conditions, and residence in high crime neighbourhoods.

Achmea instigated legal proceedings that ultimately resulted in the declaration of bankruptcy. An appeal was lodged against this decision. The legal victory was achieved through the joint efforts of myself and my youngest son. Furthermore, two legal professionals were engaged for the purpose of providing counsel. The presiding judge then addressed the leaders of Achmea, remarking, "It is likely that you perceive me to be lacking in intellectual capacity as a legal professional. However, the author's academic background also encompasses studies in the social sciences, with a significant portion of this education dedicated to the study of statistics. It is recommended that the people from Achmea undertake a course in statistics. This phenomenon can be attributed to an absence of the necessary level of understanding a risk analysis to comprehend it. AlleKleur was selected by Achmea from a number of mental health

care institutions for further investigation. The impetus for this shift was twofold: first, the pursuit of rapid growth, which was perceived as a criminal act; and second, the necessity of functioning within a network of substantial mental healthcare institutions.

*"The largest mental health institutions<sup>10</sup> in Amsterdam are the large institutions that also operate nationally, such as Arkin, Parnassia and Amsterdam. In addition to the specialised Forensic Mental Health Care De Waag. In addition, there are numerous other organisations, including the Amsterdam Association of Psychologists (AVVP), which represent a network of practices and have a presence in multiple locations throughout the city."*

Concurrently, Bas Knoop (auditor) and Nezahat Yildirim (commercial director) collaborated with the undersigned to ensure the settlement of the debt owed to Rabobank Amsterdam. The approximate financial value of the project is estimated to be in the range of 3-4 million euros. Subsequently, the Rabobank Amsterdam declined to provide legal representation in a civil lawsuit that had been initiated against Achmea. Consequently, I was compelled to relinquish a substantial portion of my wealth, amounting to three-quarters of a million euros, due to my inability to finance such a legal proceeding independently.

### **Expats & Immigrants B.V.**

Consequently, the decision was taken to establish Expats & Immigrants B.V. in 2013. Expats & Immigrants B.V. is a company that is guided by a mission and vision that include tolerance and justice. As previously outlined, the adoption of this vision and mission was influenced by the author's prior life experiences. In this world, the principles of justice and tolerance were conspicuously absent. This phenomenon can be attributed, at least in part, to the manner in which the Netherlands and Europe have historically approached the issue of immigration and the reception of refugees. In the midst of the global refugee crisis, German Chancellor Angela Merkel articulated a notable exception to the prevailing sentiment. In response to the substantial influx of Syrian refugees, Merkel articulated her confidence in the nation's ability to manage the situation, famously declaring, "Wir schaffen das" (translated as "We can do it").

*"Angela Merkel's statement<sup>11</sup> "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do this"), made in 2015, became the defining expression of her refugee policy during the Syrian crisis. With these words, Merkel conveyed her confidence in Germany's ability to meet the humanitarian challenge posed by the mass influx of refugees. Shortly afterwards, she temporarily suspended the Dublin Regulation, allowing thousands of refugees—predominantly Syrians—to enter Germany. This decision triggered an unprecedented wave of migration, with nearly one million people arriving in 2015, and turned the refugee issue into a focal point of political debate both within Germany and across Europe."*

*While Merkel initially received international praise for her moral leadership and humanitarian stance, domestic criticism grew as the social and logistical consequences of her open approach became apparent. The later remark "Wir haben es nicht geschafft" ("We did not manage it") reflected a shift in public sentiment,*

<sup>10</sup> <https://ap.lc/BOqLj>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Merkel+en+de+Syrischge+vluchtelingen>

*from solidarity to concern over integration and social cohesion. Nonetheless, Merkel's steadfast commitment to humanitarian principles was recognized in 2022, when she was awarded the **UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award**, honouring her moral vision and political courage."*

Expats & Immigrants B.V. demonstrated a commitment to supporting both immigrants and refugees in the Netherlands, as well as expatriates. Exclusion from sources of knowledge and expertise, networks and access to education, employment and healthcare was pervasive, manifesting in both overt and covert forms. The experience of exclusion can be likened to being relegated to the back of a queue, being denied the opportunity to participate, and being made to feel as though one is a second-class citizen.

Moreover, the education, healthcare and labour market systems in the Netherlands are not adequately adapted to meet the needs of immigrants, refugees and expatriates. The Netherlands has not yet established a bridge to the knowledge and skills present in their home countries. In the Netherlands, the doctrine of "adapt until you are white and feel white" is in force and has always been in force.

It is reasonable to hypothesise that these views resulted in difficulties being encountered in the Netherlands. As previously outlined, the initial experiences with the aforementioned company, AlleKleur Zorg, which specialises in intraethnic mental healthcare, were marked by challenges, ultimately leading to its dissolution. Expats & Immigrants B.V. addressed the marginalisation of immigrants, refugees and expatriates by producing written material on the subject and delivering lectures and workshops. With a few exceptions, the reactions did not manifest overt antagonism. The predominant response to this revelation was one of astonishment, and indeed, from a certain perspective, it is understandable to regard it as such. Notwithstanding the aforementioned points, it is this author's contention that a notable degree of ignorance persists surrounding the issue of discrimination and exclusion experienced by immigrants and refugees. For instance, an administrator at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences asserted that the institution is making every effort to cultivate a sense of belonging among its predominantly immigrant student body through the efforts of its teaching staff. Our own research (Steinmetz en Salim, 2023) showed that this was not the case. In fact, there was still a great deal of work to be done. This discrepancy stems from the mindset that 'it's not that bad, and we're already doing a lot to combat disadvantage'.

The following responses were provided for illustrative purposes: It is evident that no discriminatory practices have been observed in the local area. Prior to this, observations conducted in the Netherlands had indicated that discrimination was not a significant issue. The Netherlands is widely regarded as a tolerant nation, yet the subject of Black Pete remains a contentious issue. However, there is also a perception that the country is becoming overcrowded with foreigners.

In 2022, a collaborative endeavour was initiated with Anita Ramroochsingh to produce an article on the municipality of Amsterdam. The article, entitled 'Towards a reflection of the working population in Amsterdam government institutions', was published. This article constituted the basis for a workshop at Pakhuis de Zwijger (a debate centre) on de-whitening.



Anita Ramroochsingh was employed as a municipal official at the time. The subject's manager prohibited her from collaborating on an article with the author. This directive was issued by the highest-ranking civil servant in Amsterdam. Anita's decision to terminate her collaboration with me in the workshop was precipitated by the profound shock she experienced. The author was formally requested to appear before representatives of the Amsterdam district of Zuid. Moreover, the disruption of the workshop at Pakhuis de Zwijger was also perpetrated by them.

In 2024, Professor Maurice Crul, Frans Lelie and I collaborated on the publication of a compendium of quotations addressing issues of disadvantage and discrimination within Amsterdam's educational system. The interviews were conducted in collaboration with three researchers at VU University Amsterdam, Nina Arslan, Sarah Rhee and Marrit de Boer. A total of 100 mothers and children participated in the study, with each interview lasting for a duration exceeding two hours. The primary focus of the semi open interviews was to ascertain the experiences of (grand) mothers and children with exclusion and discrimination in primary and secondary education in Amsterdam.

The procurement of financial resources for this study, which ought to have precipitated a citizen council, can be delineated as a scenario of "take it or leave it". Alderwoman Marjolijn Moorman of Amsterdam articulated her stance against the financial implications of this approach. The justification provided for this decision was as follows: It is evident that the organisation known as "Wit aan Zet" does not receive any form of municipal financial contribution". The organisation known as "Wit aan Zet" is an activist entity led by Sunny Bergman and Jerry Afriyie. The stated objective of the organisation is the decolonisation of education in Amsterdam. Consequently, the interviews and citizen counsel approach do not receive financial backing from the City of Amsterdam. The project was ultimately granted financial assistance in the form of a grant from the Vrije Universiteit, facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Science. However, it was subject to the proviso that the project be completed within the specified budgetary constraints, with the stipulated financial parameters to be adhered to strictly. Secondly, as the interviewer, I was so distraught by what I heard that I felt compelled to retire to bed to recover.

In the aftermath of the publication of our compendium of quotations, the "white" world maintained its interpretation of the book as exclusively addressing issues of discrimination and racism. This was despite the fact that the introduction to the book carefully explained that it was about the exclusion suffered by children and educators from Amsterdam's immigrant and refugee populations. The prevailing sentiment, therefore, can be summarised as one of "language discrimination" against individuals of colour.

The quotation book meticulously delineates the concept of exclusion. The purpose of such behaviour is to convey to the other person that their contributions are not considered valuable. In summary, the objective is to differentiate between those who are considered to be of the first class and those who are considered to be of the second class.

## DISCUSSION

The present article concerns the conflicts experienced in the author's life. Conflicts that have been initiated by the author and/or by third parties. This assertion is made with the following adage in mind: The maxim 'He who does not honour the small is not worthy of the great'

encapsulates this sentiment. The present article was preceded by four publications of the author's on the subjects of peace, resistance, crisis and peace theories. Within the extensive corpus of contributions to the discourse on peace, a discernible distinction is made between the non-Western and Western approaches. The objective is to amalgamate these perspectives while preserving their distinct identities.

The Western perspective is characterised by an emphasis on individualism and autonomy. A prime example of this phenomenon is Donald Trump, who embodies the concepts of authoritarianism, lying and producing vague stories, masculinity and self-will, thus serving as a symbol of global power. The non-Western perspective is predicated on the concept of community spirit. The most perspicuous perspective is that of Ubuntu ('I am you because you are me').

This article attempts to answer the key question of how to deal with conflict. What theory, whether explicit or implicit, should I follow? Does my approach depend on the nature and scope of the conflicts I encounter? As a therapist, I believe that people encounter conflict throughout their lives. In the early years, for instance, conflict may manifest as violence or sexual harassment of children by fellow family members and/or teachers/ care workers. Evidence suggests a correlation between aggression and sexual violence among young people, and neglect and discrimination at the hands of their peers and adults, including teachers and social workers. This phenomenon has the capacity to occur in both offline and online contexts. Later in life, we often encounter problems in our relationships and with parenting. Throughout our lives, we are never taught how to prevent these issues. Hundreds of books have been written on these subjects, providing ample evidence for the idea that 'if it happened to me, it must be true'. These writings are also known as self-help books and articles.

Conflict is regarded as a meaningful concept. Consequently, the proposed solutions are found to be uniform. Conflicts are then classified into three categories: instrumental, expressive, and random. Notwithstanding the veracity of this assertion, it is imperative to refrain from perceiving a conflict in isolation from its contextual milieu. The context under consideration consists of the domains of private life, leisure activities and professional employment. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the nature of the relationship between the victim(s), perpetrator(s) and bystander(s).

In conclusion, the frequency of the conflict (i.e. whether it is one-off, regular or daily) is a significant parameter in resolving the conflict. This phenomenon 'Conflict' can be expressed in mathematical form.  $F(C)$  is used to denote the type of conflict, the victim-perpetrator-bystander (VVPB) relationship, and the nature and extend of incidents (NE). The application of this formula is  $F(C)$  contingent upon the fulfilment of the following condition: PF-LA-PE. In other words, a conflict must be viewed from a social context.  $F(C \mid \text{PF-LA-PE}) = \text{VVPB} \ \& \ \text{NE}$ .

## CONCLUSIONS

This article situates individual life experience within a broader discourse on global transition, arguing that the macro- and meso-level crises of the contemporary world—ecological, geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural—must be complemented by a systematic exploration of the micro level: the lived experience of peace and conflict in one's own life. Building on earlier work on peace, resistance, crisis, and peace theories, the author adopts a reflective,

autobiographical method best described as critical self-assessment or autoethnography. Six guiding questions structure the inquiry, focusing on experiences of aggression, violence, sexual harassment, deprivation, institutional racism, DARVO, and conflict, as well as responses to these events and their outcomes.

The narrative traces a life course beginning in Indonesia and continuing in the Netherlands, marked by migration, bullying, racism, sexual boundary violations, political activism, academic conflict, professional betrayal, and profound personal loss (the death of a son in a mountaineering accident). These experiences are read through the lenses of victimology, transcultural psychology, and power relations, showing how institutional structures (schools, universities, ministries, healthcare, insurers, municipalities) can reproduce exclusion, injustice, and racialized hierarchies. At the same time, the text documents the author's evolving repertoire of resistance: physical self-defense, moral refusal, whistleblowing, organizational redesign, legal struggle, and the creation of institutions aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, migrants, and refugees.

In the discussion, the article contrasts Western individualistic conceptions of power and masculinity—exemplified by figures such as Donald Trump—with communitarian non-Western perspectives such as Ubuntu. Conflict is conceptualized as context-dependent and multidimensional, shaped by the victim–perpetrator–bystander relationship, the nature and extent of incidents, and the social domains in which they occur. This is formalized in a heuristic conflict function,  $F(C \mid PF-LA-PE) = VVPB \ \& \ NE$ , emphasizing the need to embed conflict analysis in broader social, political, and economic structures.

Overall, the article demonstrates how one personal “backyard” reflects global patterns of colonial legacies, systemic discrimination, and resistance, and argues that any credible project of world peace must integrate such micro-level experiences into its theoretical and practical frameworks.

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