



# Coloring outside the lines? Imaginary reconstitution of security in Yemen through image transformations

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## Abstract

Inspired by new—forming in 2020—hopes for security and peace in Yemen, this essay explores the potential of digital image transformations for further empowerment of local actors already working for security and peace as well as bringing grassroots solutions into spotlight and into being. The essay analyzes the artistic transformation of a series of photographs submitted by a Yemeni citizen to the informal art-for-peace project *Color Up Peace* and turned into coloring pages for further engagement and transformation. Employing the utopia-informed methodology of *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security*, the analysis explores coloring pages as fields of opportunity to facilitate *participation* in peacework. Three questions guide this exploration: “what are visual images?,” “what do they do?” and “what is the normative basis of employing them?”—in relation to security as part of sustaining quality peace. The essay seeks to emphasize the importance of inclusive peace processes and arrangements, informed by everyday experiences of (in)security/(non)peace of regular citizens and allowing for a wide range of actors to participate. The included virtual exhibition of photographs, coloring pages and colored art further asks questions about participation, visuality and digitality of images and invites readers to make art and make peace within the project.

**Keywords** Imaginary reconstitution of security · Visual security · Visual peace · Yemen · Digital images

## By appointment only? Introducing (in) security, art and the possibility of peace in Yemen

This project’s thinking of image-making as peacework was inspired by developments in Yemen in December 2020—what could be an opportunity to bring about security and peace for Yemenis. After years of conflict and instability in Yemen, political figures and media outlets praised the December 2020 agreement to create a new power-sharing government as a chance “to restore security, stability and unity,” pave the way for “improvement of state institutions and increased political partnership”—and so a “lasting political resolution to the conflict” (Radwan 2020, quoting Al-Assoumi and Griffiths). With 24.7 million Yemenis currently in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA 2022), it is crucial for Yemen to transform the conflict and prevent further destruction. Earlier in 2020, the *International Crisis*

*Group* had indicated extending negotiations to a broader spectrum of actors and addressing the grievances leading to the 2011 uprising as potential steps to bring about peaceful change (2020). However, the 2020 power-sharing agreement does not appear to follow the advice in, e.g., including grassroots experiences of (in)security/(non)peace, thus risking to become just another undertaking in line of those that already failed to bring peaceful change.

While *Arab News* projected the new government to “alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people” (Radwan 2020, quoting Al-Assoumi), the Yemeni people are absent from the discussion. At the same time, the *International Crisis Group* prescribes the words “[a]ll we want is peace” to the conflicting parties (2020, p. 4), without elaborating on what “peace” may imply. The meaning of the “restored security,” which the power-sharing government was originally hoped to establish, remains equally elusive. What potential solutions could be like is highly contested, with Yemeni scholars and practitioners suggesting, e.g., battling water scarcity (al-Mowafak 2020), opting for compromise instead of zero-sum approach (Alwaday 2020) and investing into teachers (Al-Refaei 2021). In line with possible solutions, they also highlight the positive contributions

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that women have made to there being more peace as well as the importance of further empowering women through, e.g., education and entrepreneurship (Abdullah 2021a, 2021b; Bin Othman 2021). Insightful grassroots perspectives make it ever more important to rely on grassroots knowledge and support those grassroots actors already thinking/building peace in order to ensure new openings for peace result in peace. Far from Yemen but committed to there being more peace, I wanted to explore the possibility of security and peace in Yemen, as seen at the grassroots level, by looking into everyday experiences of (in) security/(non)peace by regular Yemeni citizens through means that are available to me and that have already proved helpful on the ground—digital visual art(-making).

In peace and conflict research, visual artistic images have been found to have the potential and/or to have played a role in, e.g., fostering dialogue, expressing what cannot be communicated with words, making peacebuilding concepts accessible, representing peace processes, putting justice at the center of peacework, bearing witness, bringing in personal perspectives, creating ethical encounters between viewers and images, and/or becoming a metaphor for interparty collaboration (see in no particular order Latar et al. 2018; Hawksley 2019; Mitchell 2019; Kim 2019; Lisle 2011). As this essay is being written, a Google search “art projects in Yemen” also returns numerous examples of practitioners’ perspectives including graffiti as visualization of the “indomitable spirit of Yemenis” (Levkowitz 2017), creative music and filmmaking workshops continuing through airstrikes (Cornwell 2019) and a first contemporary art gallery opening in Sanaa, although “by appointment only, due to periods of unrest” (Proctor 2020). These examples of manifesting hope show that Yemen does not *have to be* or *be seen*—(only)—as “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis” (UN News 2021, para. 1) and that development in other—*more peaceful*—directions is possible and is already happening.

In this essay, I explore the possibility of peace, and security within it, through digital visual image-making/transformations. At the core of this exploration is my wondering if the creative practice could facilitate empowerment of local actors already working for security and peace as well as bringing grassroots solutions into spotlight and into being. My aim is not to analyze/evaluate the variety and validity of proposed/possible peacebuilding strategies in Yemen, complex drivers of the conflict(s), or roles of external/internal actors in upkeeping and resolving tensions. Rather, my aim is to explore what digital visual images could add to security- and peacebuilding processes, in connection to the Yemeni context and the solutions proposed by researchers and practitioners on the ground. My hope is not to portray digital image transformations as a naive panacea, but a complementary approach with potential to make a constructive

difference in how peacework could be conducted in Yemen and beyond.

With (in)security being “something we cannot fully grasp” (Andersen and Vuori 2018, p. 2) in general and in Yemen, I zoom in on one set of (in)security/(non)peace experiences to understand what working with individual experiences in peace processes may mean for society at large. Developing a mixed methodology of utopia-informed image-making as *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security*, I explore how visions of security and peace can be enacted through the employment of digital visual images as security-building tools. I take an adventurer’s approach to wonder about the complementary questions of what images could *be*, what they could *do* and what the *normative basis* of employing them could be—in relation to security as a state of being and a pillar of peace. Adopting wondering as a research attitude means allowing “thought to be otherwise” while recognizing that researcher’s encountering the object of research co-creates it (Lobo-Guerrero 2012, p. 83).

This co-creation happens through a conversation (in the written form) and a transformation of images performed together with a Yemeni resident of the Sanaa area, a woman, a creative and a peace enthusiast, whom I refer to as my “intellectual companion” to recognize her crucial role in making this project happen. To explore experiences of (in) security/(non)peace within sustaining quality peace as my intellectual companion imagines it, I turned the photographs she submitted to this research project and the informal visual art-for-peace project *Color Up Peace*, into coloring pages. Via a virtual reality exhibition (see outro), these coloring pages are available as resources for others to engage with and transform the original visions of security and peace (including in ways analyzed in the essay). In this digital visual image transformation process, the essay especially focuses on coloring pages as opportunities to participate in peacework. And while the artistic and scientific exploration here is tied to the context of Yemen, the opportunities for participation this transformation opens, I hope, can one day be employed in a variety of peace processes and contexts to support those peace actors and solutions that are local to those processes/context.

While one set of experiences is undoubtedly insufficient for generalizing ways to enhance security and peace in Yemen (in connection to the December 2020 power-sharing agreement or beyond), this essay’s aim is different. Through the visual transformation, I seek to highlight the exigence of finding a variety of ways to include perspectives of regular Yemeni citizens and non-elite actors in designing peace arrangements informed by their everyday experiences of (in)security and visions of peace. As I will argue, working with digital visual images is one such way, ultimately allowing for one’s (in)security/(non)peace to be experienced and understood by others as well as for elements of security/



peace to be strengthened and made to last. Strengthening what already has been working and supporting those actors who have already immensely contributed to peacebuilding is an important part of my undertaking as I by no means presuppose that regular Yemeni citizens have not been already contributing, claiming spaces for peace and driving positive changes on the ground. I hope that explorations of the potential of images as security-building tools will serve as an opening to see Yemen, its people and their solutions in a new light. And I hope that this will help us develop nuanced understandings of conflict dynamics and grassroots needs to design high-quality sustaining peace arrangements. I start this research by mapping the theoretical grounds for exploring the links between peace, (in)security and images in contexts like Yemen.

### Security in sustaining quality peace

Seeking to further understand and operationalize the concept of “peace” beyond its arguably non-informatively broad definitions (endeavor started by Davenport et al. 2018), I construct this study’s theoretical location at the intersection of “quality peace” (Wallenstein 2015), “sustaining peace” (International Peace Institute 2017) and “hybridity” (Mac Ginty 2018) to explore expressly experiences of (in)security as peace is envisioned and created. Peter Wallenstein conceptualized “quality peace” as a postwar arrangement of such qualities which would prevent the conflict from violent recurrence. While these qualities are context-specific, the concept includes three pillars which generally ensure “quality” of “peace”: dignity, security and predictability (2015). Although my intellectual companion’s understanding of peace can be interpreted in multiple ways, I can see the three pillars of quality peace as follows:

*... the absence of violence, war, freedom from fear [security], peace is to live in harmony, peace is to live in cohesion across society [predictability] ... Respect of the other people around you, respect of their own right to live free of fear and judgement, respect of the fact people can be different than you and they should be, respect of yourself [dignity] (intellectual companion).*

While the pillars are interlinked, I focus on security only. Although “security” is understood differently in peace research (through, e.g., the security–development nexus) and (critical) security studies, Rita Floyd’s explorations of morality of security (2019) bridge the divide. Floyd emphasizes the importance of “restorative measures” in avoiding escalations in security policies. Such measures can broadly be seen as peacework, the restorative effect of which is meant to last and grow—not least because peacework is a process.

*International Peace Institute (2017)* highlights the process-like nature of peace in conceptualizing “sustaining peace.” The notion implies the empowerment and continuous support of the actors who already work to establish peaceful relations—both in contexts of overt conflict and, crucially, in ostensibly and/or relatively peaceful/secure ones. Among such actors having significantly contributed to security and peace, Yemeni researchers Sam Mohammed (2021) and Shaima Bin Othman (2021), respectively, identify non-state actors, who are “the de facto security providers in many areas” (para.8), and women, especially “given Yemeni women’s prominent presence during the 2011 uprising” (para.1) and their continuous efforts to, e.g., “influence the peace process through the UN-supported Yemeni Women’s Technical Advisory Group and the Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security” (para.7). These considerations (formed through personal interactions before reading the above-cited authors<sup>1</sup>), in addition to artistic experiences/drive, contributed to my decision to reach out to my intellectual companion and have her photographs be the basis of this project’s artistic and scientific exploration.

If we take into account the hybridity of quality peace and the need to capture its complexity (see Mac Ginty 2018), the range of actors supported and involved matters. Hybrid peace of quality would be “a longer-term process involving the interchange and negotiation between actors, ideas and practices to form a composite” (Mac Ginty 2018, p. 67). The more diverse the spectrum of people, experiences and thoughts is, the more sustaining the composite will be. This forms the need to not only support those already working for security and peace, but creating opportunities for more peace enthusiasts, who may have not previously had the resources/opportunities, to engage in peacework. Yet, as the Yemeni researcher Sam Mohammed highlights while arguing for effective security sector reform, “non-state actors who do not work in the interest of the people” should not be further empowered but should not be “excluded, to avoid further conflict” (2021, para.1). Within this framework, I explore what an (in)security composite could be and how it could potentially be engaged in peace processes to create more space for grassroots peace-fostering thought and action.

Adopting an Adornian approach to critical security studies, Carolin Kaltofen highlights that security “is located in the ineffable, in what cannot be captured by concepts,” including the multiple existing understandings of the notion of “security” itself (2013, p. 44). Instead, security and knowledge about/of it “only resides in the individual instances of experiencing security or insecurity” (2013, p. 45). Our productive comprehension of (in)security then depends on *who* communicates related experiences, bringing questions of participation to the forefront of designing effective security- and peacebuilding processes. “Sustaining quality peace” would thus ask: which actors, already



working for peace, to support? Out of a potential plenitude, I specifically focus on visual artists, extending the role to those without formal training in the arts.

An example of employing artistic image transformation techniques to include a greater variety of perspectives on collective experiences of (in)security/(non)peace is a community photography project organized by *Belfast Exposed* in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The project focused on one of the city's many peace walls, seeking "to ask questions about the wall from the perspectives of youth living alongside it" (Fairey 2019, p. 378). Employing photography as a dialogic approach to community healing, education and activism, the project saw the participants share "images from each other's viewpoints" and create "digitally manipulated photographs in which they removed the wall" on Cupar Way, West Belfast (ibid.). The project showed that digital transformation of images, using software like *Adobe Photoshop*, can foster re-imagining and redesigning of everyday environments by disrupting normalized dynamics (peace walls erected since the riots of 1969) and visualizing what does not yet exist—everyday wall-less peace as seen by the grassroots (see pp. 379–380). My aim is similar: to explore possibilities for security and peace as seen and experienced by regular Yemeni citizens, like my intellectual companion.

A follow-up question, then, is *how* to include firsthand experiences, so that we can learn from them and strengthen their constructive elements, especially if the actors involved do not share a neighborhood and perhaps have little to no common experiences like the (*Photoshop*-ped out) peace wall in West Belfast. After all, a truly inclusive peace process in Yemen (or elsewhere) would bring together a variety of actors from across the country, whose everyday experiences of (in)security/(non)peace would not necessarily have a common symbolic pictorial denominator. I see digital visual artistic image transformations as vital tools in thinking security and peace since, even if the ineffable knowledge of security cannot be built by "saying, representing, defining, conceptualizing security" (Kaltofen 2013, p. 45), it can be *experienced* through the *process* of image-making. In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey highlighted the ways in which an artist's experience can be similar to the experience of the ones engaging with the artwork (here, also transforming it):

"... to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience ... [with] relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent... [T]here must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced" (2005, p. 56).

I attempt to facilitate this experiencing in the essay by following practical recommendations developed by Noam Lemelshtrich Latar, Jerry Wind and Ornat Lev-er on the

basis of a hundred interviews with "88 artists [across disciplines], among them ten curators who are also active artists, and 12 museum directors" speaking about arts' potential in conflict resolution (2018, p. 209). The recommendations include—with a special focus on time and process—striving for a "synergy between art and new technologies that allow immersive experiences and self-transformations," specially designing "the context of the art experience" and making the audience an active part of the art experience (2018, p. 216). With regards to the first, I engage in collaborative *digital* art-making with a Yemeni intellectual companion to bring to the forefront their experiences and learn from them. As for the second, I design the context of the collaboration according to the utopia-informed method of *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* through the "photograph—coloring page—transformed art" co-creation process within the art-for-peace project *Color Up Peace*. And finally, I make the artistic security and peace experiences available to the audience/readership for further learning and digital re-experiencing through an open interactive virtual reality exhibition and a virtual guided tour (see outro). This way, I follow Roland Bleiker's call for further studies of interconnections between visuality and security, "not least because of how crucial questions of visuality are to understanding the nature, practice, and impact of security" (2018, p. 189) and peace.

### Utopian image-making as imaginary reconstitution of security

Although the concept of utopia came into politics from literary fiction, "[t]he relationship between politics and Utopia is curious because politics often rejects utopianism and yet politics is built on utopias" (Sargisson 2011, p. 25). In critical security studies, utopia has both been misunderstood as an ideal blueprint (absence of interstate war in anarchy as in Booth 1991) and celebrated as "the possibility of progressive alternatives to the status quo" whose nature is nevertheless not explored "in any serious way" (Wyn Jones 2005, p. 218). As a blueprint of simultaneously a "good place" and a "no place" (word's etymology), utopia received interdisciplinary criticism for leading to totalitarianism (Moylan and Baccolini 2011). Most insightful for exploring and strengthening security and peace is to consider a recent move within utopian studies to rather view utopia in terms of its *performative* capacity—as an attempt "not just to imagine, but to make the world otherwise" (Levitas 2013, p. xiii).

Drawing on the work of Ernst Bloch, Ruth Levitas points out that the utopian drive is an "anthropological given" arising from experiences of lack (2013, p. 5). This lack can be replenished through imagining fulfillment—often in cultural practices. Seen this way, digital visual artmaking processes not only "carry utopian desire but offer a glimpse of what



it is that is missing” (ibid.)—security and peace. That is, images could help identify areas for improvement in peace-work and become (self-)implementable arrangements of security/peace.

Scholars within utopian studies have attempted to outline utopia as a vision and method (Moylan and Baccolini 2011; Levitas 2011, 2013), falling short of specifying how exactly to practice critical imagination and explore alternatives. Similarly in critical security studies, scholars *doing* critique with normative peace-oriented considerations have found “few ways to actualize them” while exploring, out of what seems to be a utopian conviction, the “troublesome present and possible futures” (Austin et al. 2019, p. 4,5). Utopia as a *tool* for constructive change thus remains unexplored. I chose to operationalize utopia through the transformation of images based on the project *Color Up Peace* to explore what digital visual images are and (could/should be used to) do in relation to security. I focus on performative capacities of utopia to *practice* strengthening security rather than on utopia’s potential as a research method, even if learning cannot and should not in practice be separated from the empirics of peacework.

The project *Color Up Peace* invites people to submit photographs of what peace means to them (or what peace is associated with or where it can be seen), together with a textual explanation of how the photograph relates to peace. I turn these photographs into coloring pages, usually available to download and color. The idea behind the project is to give the participants an opportunity to think about peace, notice its elements in everyday life, engage in mixed-media art-making as a form of dialogue and develop visions of peace collectively. The ambition of the project is to employ image-making as a peacebuilding tool. Although I did not make these theoretical connections when I started *Color Up Peace* in 2016, I now see the image transformation as utopian performative imagination—or the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society (IROS).

Developing IROS, Levitas stressed that this kind of imagination is already in use “whenever and wherever people individually and collectively consider what the future might bring and how humans might choose to shape it” (2013, p. 218). Since I explore visual images as *security*-building tools, I am rather interested in Imaginary Reconstitution of *Security*: the ways in which images can be used to individually and collectively imagine, experience and enact visions of (in)security as part of peacework. This happens in three utopian modes; and to illustrate each of them I include an example of a photograph transformed into a coloring page and colored art. For clarity of the full method and out of ethical considerations, the examples in this section are based on a photograph I took (in Oslo, Norway, in 2017), transformed and started coloring myself (it is purposefully unfinished) (Fig. 1).



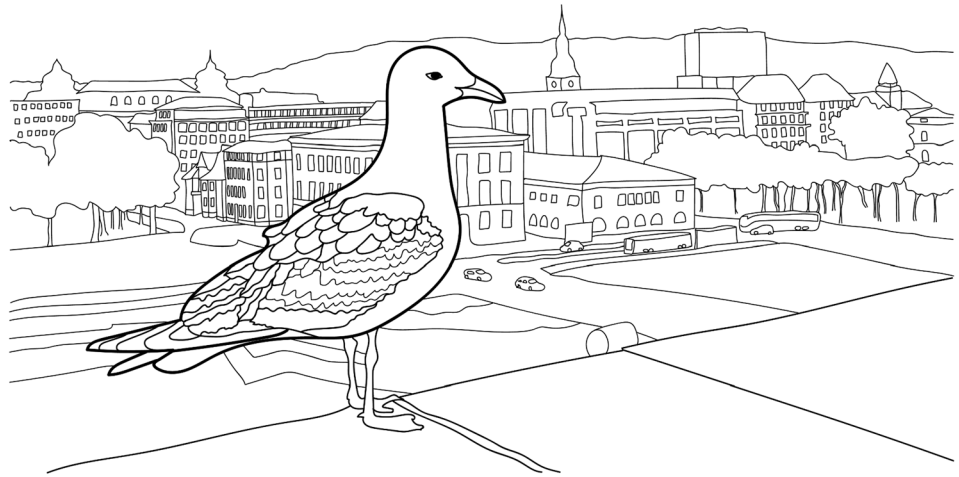
Fig. 1 Archeological mode of utopia

To begin with, I consider the *archeological mode* of utopia in the photographing stage of *Color Up Peace*, when the contributing photographers take peace photographs and send them to the project. Levitas conceptualized the archeological mode of utopia as “piecing together images of the good society” (2013, p. 153). This does not necessarily have to be an imaginary future society. In *Color Up Peace*, the contributing photographers piece together elements of peace (and security) already present/visible/seen in their surroundings. This corresponds to immanent critique within the framework of critical theory and its relation to security studies: “critical theory criticizes [the prevailing order] on the basis of the unfulfilled potential that already exists within it” (Wyn Jones 2005, p. 220). Launching the photographs into the process of transformation entails “the imaginary reconstitution of the models of the good society underpinning policy, politics and culture, exposing them to scrutiny and critique” (Levitas 2013, p. 154). In this essay, the photographs, while a crucial basis, are not included for ethical reasons (readers can see them in the virtual exhibition, see outro). They are, however, present through the textual explanations and the outlines I made based on them, as the next mode of utopia is the focus of the essay (Fig. 2).

Once photographs are submitted, I turn them into coloring pages, which refers to the *ontological mode* of utopia. The mode asks “what kind of *people* particular societies develop and encourage” and what makes humans flourish (Levitas 2013, p. 153, italics as in original). The questions correspond to the “central aspect of the constitution of security and political communities”—finding “what it means to be human” (Kaltfofen 2013, p. 40). That includes considering “what capabilities are valued, encouraged and genuinely enabled, or blocked and suppressed, by specific existing and potential social arrangements...” (Levitas 2013, p. 153). Those are expansive questions, which I only address



**Fig. 2** Ontological mode of utopia



through the lens of *experiences* of (in)security/(non)peace within images with the belief that *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* as a way to build sustaining quality peace should encourage *participation*.

When I draw outlines of coloring pages digitally over the photographs, I strive to make the outlines very similar to the photographs. Yet, designing the experiences of the artists working with the outlines sometimes results in “edits” of distorted areas and my imaginative adding of details to make the coloring process more engaging. Although outlines may not be identical to what the photographs show (after all, transformation is the goal), the similarity of the forms in the two media can metaphorically be considered the “specific existing arrangements” Levitas refers to. Finding out what the participants of the project “value,” choose to highlight or “suppress” can also be seen—by analyzing how they choose to engage with the outlines.

In this engagement, *digitality* of images is a crucial aspect, and the image transformations here are designed to employ “the digital medium’s inherent characteristics”—it’s *participatory* features (Paul 2016, p. 2). Many readers may associate coloring with printed coloring books, creation of which is also part of *Color Up Peace*. Here, the approach is different. By considering/practicing *digital* image transformations, my aim is to make images’ architecture, which I work with and create when drawing the outlines, available to others.

One outline, as simple as the finished project may be, can contain up to 300 layers in *Adobe Photoshop* or *Adobe Illustrator* (based on previously created outlines). When digital visual work is subsequently exported to .png/.jpeg, the creator’s experience may be that of puzzlement at how flat the image appears. Changing the digital format of images and creating transitions between media (digital to printed) results in experiences of/with images being drastically different for the original creator and the one holding a printed coloring page. The flatness of (especially printed) outlines

invites very limited participation—coloring (outside the lines) or drawing over. In contrast, digital engagement with the outlines (especially in formats of *Photoshop/Illustrator*’s .pdf<sup>2</sup>, .psd, .ai, .svg), creates many more possibilities for participation and (co-)creation/(co-)design: inverting colors, changing background color/texture, applying filters, rendering the image monochrome, collaging photograph materials into outlines, etc. In some ways, participation is then characterized by “disobeying” the outline and the original photograph—being bold in how different it can be if the (co-)creator/(co-)designer chooses to imbue their own experiences into the digital outline. And being even bolder in how different this already transformed digital art can be if another (co-)creator/(co-)designer were to further engage with it in their search for security and peace. Users (both trained and untrained in digital visual expression) can engage in image transformation processes by consulting, e.g., an ever-growing number of image transformation tutorials on, e.g., *YouTube*, and ideally a peace process including digital visual transformations would have a learning component to acquaint participants with the needed digital media and tools.

The ontological mode of utopia, in this case, is about leveraging digital images’ architecture as “architecture of participation” in what grassroots solutions are further “developed and encouraged.” Originating in the field of open-source software and conceptualized by Tim O’Reilly, architecture of participation “allows easy participation by independent or loosely coordinated developers ... The Web, however, took the idea of participation to a new level because it opened that participation not just to software developers, but to all users of the system” (O’Reilly 2015, para.5, self-quoting). Similarly, digital outlines invite all interested users to engage with them, irrespective of (a lack of) background in digital art, in a non-coordinated manner. It is non-coordinated since, once a photograph has been transformed into a digital outline, many users can simultaneously



or sequentially engage with the same outline to create a variety of images that, by the end of (multiple, layered) transformation, may have little to nothing in common with one another and/or the original photograph. The ontological mode of utopia and the outlines constitute the focus of this essay because employing images' architecture to enhance security and peace requires investigating images in moments of transitions and in-betweenness: when they are *unmade*, *redesigned* and/or *left unfinished*.

Of special importance for *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* is that architectures of participation do not only invite user engagement—they are *designed* to function *because of* and *with* user contributions. Correspondingly, sustaining quality peace requires seeing, noticing, learning from and building on the work of those actors who have already been contributing to security and peace. It is *designed* to support what already is good, even in the midst of conflict. And the digital outlines, with open opportunities to engage with image structures, are *designed* to enable working with those elements which already work for security and peace—both based on the photographic input and the potential of artmaking itself to contribute to peace efforts.

I thus see coloring pages as fields of opportunities, although not without trouble, for more inclusive and sustaining, digital and visual peacework. In the upcoming sections, I discuss not the visions of peace my intellectual companion and I may have created, but the potential of coloring pages—as images one can participate in—to enable (re-)experiences of those visions for peacework. The focus is thus not on the content or where the input comes from (other Yemeni citizens and other researchers would undoubtedly see things differently and make other images). Rather, the focus is on the *process* (Fig. 3).

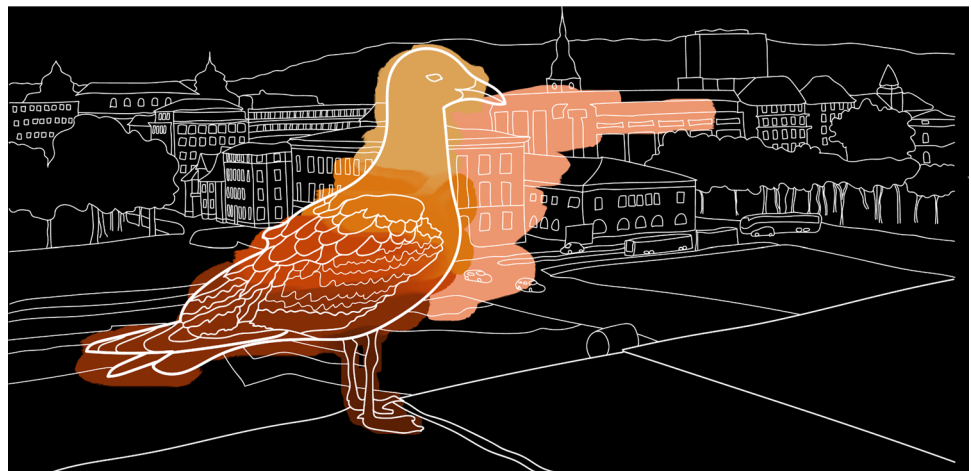
When the process of engaging images' architecture results in visual digital artifacts (not necessarily finished images, as the example below), the architectural mode of utopia is invoked. The colored (and, here, otherwise digitally

transformed) art within *Color Up Peace* follows the *architectural mode* of utopia: “the imagination of potential alternative scenarios for the future, acknowledging the assumptions about and consequences for the people who might inhabit them” (Levitas 2013, p. 153). In regular activities by *Color Up Peace*, a third person (i.e., not the original photographer and not myself) would engage with the coloring page to transform the initial vision of peace. While the architectural utopias of digitally transformed images are not analyzed here, I refer to the possibility of transformation as imagination of alternatives to the experiences the photographers capture, meant as constructive implementable propositions. This way, the full digital visual image transformation is a tool for both exploration of (in)security/(non)peace and achievement of security/peace. From a (critical) security studies perspective, it follows the call to employ visuality itself as a form of visual knowledge production (Andersen and Vuori 2018; Bleiker 2018), placing the “questions of critical methods and ... of substantive political vision” (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, p. 598) at the center of research and artistic practice. *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* is needed because capturing the complexity of security requires “new ways of thinking, seeing, hearing, and sensing the political” (Bleiker 2018, p. 196)—like digital visual image-making.

## Ethics of images in security

To think of images as security-building tools contributing to sustaining quality peace means to think of (1) what they are, (2) what they (could) do and (3) what the normative basis of employing them as such would be. While these questions are interrelated, I start from the third one as different ethical grounds can inform the other questions differently. The ethics of employing images as security-building tools is naturally part of the ethics of security itself. And so there would be fewer obstacles in this discussion if,

**Fig. 3** Architectural mode of utopia



as Browning and McDonald (2011) argue, critical security studies had not failed to develop a comprehensive account of the ethics of security.

Ten years ago, the gravity of the failure prompted the scholars to doubt the need for a “critical security studies project” in the absence of “a sophisticated ethical framework for engaging security” or even a vision of progress (2011, p. 247). A recent perspective on ethics of security by Floyd indicates no change: “as it stands, ethics in Security Studies is not a major area of research” (2019, p. 29). Because the value of security and the circumstances justifying security measures are not explored, Floyd argues, research of security fails to guide action. (Here, “action” refers to, e.g., digital artistic approaches to peacework.)

Non-consideration of the ethics of security (and images in relation to it) would then result in a non-sustaining peace arrangement that fails to guide further peace efforts and the action of those actors already working for peace. While the ethics of security—generally or in Yemen—is too complex of an issue to address in one essay, the way digital visual artistic collaboration happens here could be an action-guiding basic example for how regular citizens may be engaged in a sustaining peace process in long term and in depth. And so I build the context-specific ethics of image-making in this project through the lens of *companionship*.

Companionship refers to the relations those studying security build with, e.g., human objects of study, material and technological infrastructures, styles of thinking and other study-specific “mediating links” in the process of practically *doing* critique (Austin et al. 2019, pp. 4–5). Critique appears as a collaborative socio-material practice—as is digital visual image-making—of critical knowledge production, which utopia also implies. Building companionship does not mean “emancipating the oppressed” (Austin et al. 2019, p. 13). On the contrary, I see it as a conversation among “intellectual friends” co-creating knowledge (see Tilley 2017), whereby my intellectual companion’s experiences, art and insight make this research project possible in its current form. In independent artmaking, we came together as creatives, colleagues in art, peace enthusiasts and young women from/in conflict-affected communities (although undoubtedly different contexts) to build on (artmaking) experiences in other spheres of life. Even if these experiences inform our interaction here, participation in artistic *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security*, as I imagine it, would not require the same of other participants and at stages later than the current one of exploring the potential of digital image transformations to bring about sustaining quality peace. Through the lens of sustaining quality peace, my peace-biased aim was to highlight the visions of peace of a creative and a peace enthusiast and to, hopefully, so facilitate further pro-peace transformation.

My intellectual companion did not participate in selection of theoretical grounds and non-visual data, and so, her views are not represented this way and, beyond me quoting her, she bears no responsibility for the textual parts of this project. Original photographs are also not included because their rightful place is in negotiating and building sustaining quality peace, which this essay is only a preparatory step for. The photographs are available to see in the virtual reality exhibition (follow the link in outro). Through the analyzed coloring pages and the virtual reality exhibition, I hope to create opportunities for the visions of my intellectual companion to be experienced via artmaking to facilitate pro-peace change. The trouble that I acknowledge, then, is that there is more of my textual voice and artmaking than there should be of any one and the same person’s presence in inclusive peace processes. I take this risk to demonstrate what images could be useful for (without claiming they necessarily are or will be) if those working with them had at least basic experience with thoughtful image-making (not meant as formal training), acquiring which would ideally be part of peace processes too (e.g., getting acquainted with media, digital tools). To at least somehow compensate for the ubiquity of my presence in this project, I try to balance the theoretical grounds developed by elitist scholarly performers of non-artistic critique with insights of Yemeni researchers and practitioners, available to me in English. I particularly rely on Yemeni perspectives published by the *Yemen Policy Center*, a think tank aiming “to impact Yemeni and international policymaking with the ultimate goal to improve the living conditions of the Yemeni people” (Yemen Policy Center, n.d. para.1).

The materials that mediated digital image-making within this companionship include software and hardware (e.g., a graphic tablet), which have their own possibilities and limitations influencing what this project’s images are like. All the images included are meant as *peace* images and are created without malicious intentions to the best of our abilities, knowledge and the limited opportunities to stay in contact during the research process. The next section explores the possibilities for participation that the coloring pages create.

### Coloring pages as distributions of the sensible: engaging image structures

Exploring what images *are* or *could be* in relation to security, this section also seeks to answer to the “demand of the day ... for an embodied account of critique that reveals how it comes to matter, or not, practically speaking” (Austin et al. 2019, p. 4). My intellectual companion and I participated not only in ethical and political, but also esthetic acts—understood as experiences of “new modes of sense perception [inducing] novel forms of political subjectivity” (Rockhill 2004, p. 3). Here, utopian critique comes to matter when



coloring pages' architecture is engaged to (trans)form opportunities to experience (in)security—*distribute the sensible*.

In Jacques Rancière's *Politics of Aesthetics*, the "distribution of the sensible" refers to "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception" simultaneously adumbrating something common, its distinctive parts and (individual) positions within it. This commonality depends on participation through "distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity" (Rockhill 2004, p. 7). A certain distribution of the sensible would make some elements more visible than others, influencing which visible elements appear available to work with. Politics is formed when those not favored by the prevalent distribution of the sensible make themselves heard/seen despite the disadvantage of ostensibly having "no part" in what is visible (Deranty 2014, p. 102). Here, regular Yemenis like my intellectual companion and outsiders like myself, through altering what is visible about (in)security, can also change what there is to see and consider in a potential peace process. Practically, I consider a coloring page to be an operationalizable model of the distribution of the sensible and a way for my intellectual companion and myself to influence the (in)visible. In a coloring page, the (re)distribution happens through engaging with the image structure: the visible, sensible outline and the invisible, insensible, silent areas between the lines—in graphic design understood as "negative space."

The canvas of the coloring page is already a certain distribution of the sensible, effected by the content of the photographs (what one photographer finds visible may differ from what another photographer would find) and what

I find visible/important or what I invent in blurry areas of photographs as I create the outlines. Adding elements to the outline changes what is seen, i.e., what stands out from the coloring page. A basic example is a diagonal as future-oriented "suspension of a relationship between above and below" (Rancière and Engelman 2019, p. 51). In the coloring page below, my adding of lines—the leaves—could take the image further from the below-quoted experience of my intellectual companion and closer to, e.g., considering the tree's health under the conditions of water insecurity, which, as Yemeni researcher Hadil al-Mowafak argues (2020), must be addressed as soon as possible for there to be more peace (Fig. 4).

A further example of digitally bending or re-drawing lines for change is engaging with a coloring page made on the basis of, let's imagine, a recent photograph of a university classroom in Yemen. Yemeni researcher and translator Amal Abdullah notes that, following the formation of male-only government in December 2020, "pictures of brick walls being built in Sana'a university classrooms to segregate genders were being shared online" (2021b, para.1). Lack of women's representation in government prompted another Yemeni researcher and social activist Shaima Bin Othman to ask "Does this government deserve our participation?" (2021). Imagine engaging in social activism through digital visual arts: making a coloring page of a photograph including a separating wall and then erasing the lines of the wall itself to show what a more inclusive classroom could look like (somewhat following the wall-erasing example from West Belfast). If a social activist so working with the

**Fig. 4** Transforming outlines.  
 "That day I woke up and the weather was very beautiful. That took me to the mood that I have to go out and take some photos. Peace is the freedom to take shots to everything you like and enjoy." (intellectual companion)



image wanted to multiply digital media effect for change, she could also record the screen of her device as she is erasing the lines. She could so employ the potential of video, too, to engage in peacework. Video, as participatory media (here, participatory because the image transformation process is designed to involve different actors) has been found to facilitate “shared understanding of the conflict,” “building a vision of an interconnected [without walls?] future” and transformation of “the culture of violence” (Bau 2015, p. 122,125). Perhaps a far-fetched task for coloring pages alone, but increasing women’s participation in higher education—including through digital visual ways—could lead to their increased political participation (see Abdullah 2021b) and positive changes in inclusive gender-balanced governance for sustaining quality peace.

Image co-designers can engage further image structures, such as negative space, to perform utopian transformations for security and peace. In graphic design, “negative space” refers to “the blank space or area surrounding an image or text, which is integrated into a design to highlight the body of text or object in question” (DesignMantic 2017). A graphic designer would employ negative space to create relationships between elements of design to achieve target functionality (see Yalanska, n.d.), i.e., what the piece of graphic design is meant to *perform*. Negative space is active in guiding attention toward the positive elements of design (Guta 2019), e.g., the outlines and what could fill them. In a coloring page, negative space is not “negative” per se and its vitality is in the opportunities for transformation it creates. Understood as boundaries, the outlines make things happen—in the negative space as “the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.” (Bhabha 2004, p. 1, quoting Heidegger 1993).

Presencing of experiences of security and peace, and making security and peace happen, is facilitated by color. Explorations of the interlacing between security and color use have shown that the latter makes security comprehensible (Guillaume et al. 2015) and makes peace manifest “through a visibly identifiable set of norms” (Vuori et al. 2020, p. 56). If security and peace in Yemen are visible and taken into account, we will be able to strengthen them—as the sustaining quality lens would require. The performative function of color then is to first make experiences of security and peace as well as related values *available* for engagement and *recognizable* in the midst of potential conflict-related chaos. As part of enabling the presencing of peace, color use can imbue meaning into generally “objects that would not otherwise have clear meanings based on their sole shape or the forms drawn on them” (Vuori et al. 2020, p. 57, giving examples of flags and uniforms).

Another performative function of color is in (re-)making the visibilized history of the conflict and visualizing opportunities for peace. Imagery on conflict in Yemen portrays,

e.g., “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis” (UN News 2021, para. 1). Such portrayal can be accessed and changed through color palettes. Edith Young researched history of art and popular culture through color palettes to capture “substance that is otherwise shapeless” into palette compositions made out of rectangles featuring a certain color each (2021, p. 16). By creating color palettes for, e.g., prominent painters’ artwork or a famous figure skater’s performance outfits, Young shows that “it’s not just a red apple but also an apple’d red” (p. 8). In other words, color is not a neutral assigned value—it co-constitutes that which it colors and speaks of it even in the moments when we encounter the color without the colored. The colored then co-constitutes the color too, and we can be strategic about fostering certain co-constitutions over others.

All the images portraying violence and destruction in Yemen can also be abstracted to a color palette, featuring not just colors picked out of the sample images—but, most importantly, Yemen’ed and violence’d colors. What if images on Yemen told of, e.g., the various group identities on Yemen’s grounds, the recognition of which, as Yemeni researcher Mohamed al-Himyari (2021) argues, is crucial for Yemen’s stability? The palette there would be on the way to Yemen’ed peace’d colors. Under the conditions of what Frank Möller, while theorizing a peace aesthetics, calls “an obsession with violence in both popular culture and peace research” (2020, p. 29), designing outlines to foster generation of images and colors of security and peace could be one of the very few ways to make Yemen’ed security and peace visible and available to support. Therefore, negative space without color (and in the absence of outlines too) remains a collection of pixels—a lost opportunity to participate. A colored segment of negative space, however, is “a form of thought [photograph translated into the outline] that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced [security/peace]” (Rockhill 2004, p. 18), but visibilized for potential realization.

In such *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security*, taking the coloring page as a loose structure of the reality expressed in the photograph and performing the vision of possible peace and security is an example of the sociological-utopian move. Instead of merely showing something, a coloring page may be “offer[ing] multiple, provisional and reflexive accounts of how we might live, suspended between present and future” (Levitas 2013, pp. 217–218), where the photograph references the present and the colored art speaks of a future peace arrangement. Different actors co-designing images could create many versions of what security and peace in Yemen are and could further be. This could contribute to utopia’s goal of constructing “a new matrix of needs, satisfactions and symbolic meanings” to address and transform “the existential”—here, elements of security and peace in Yemen (Levitas 2013, pp. 179–180).



## “Doing” security with images

While it is challenging to “identify any critical intervention that does not articulate some conception of what security does or what is at stake in engagement with ‘security’,” under-conceptualization of the *politics* of security, i.e., what security *does*, has been identified as another reason to question the utility of critical security studies (Browning and McDonald 2011, p. 238). Perhaps non-practicing of companionship in research contributed to overlooking that security may do “different things at different times and in different places” (p. 242, drawing on Ciuta 2009). Investigations of the politics of security then need to be context-specific and detailed. Thus, I zoom in on a selection of (in)security experiences to explore what images do and how they may *do* security.

To my intellectual companion, security is a state of being (feeling and being secure) rather than a set of policies:

Security means that you have the peace of mind knowing that when you are not home you don't have to worry that an outside force is ... damaging or destroying what you value the most...

The focus falls on *values*, which utopia-informed image-making can be especially helpful to explore. Seeing images as utopian tools to “defamiliarize the familiar, and ... to create a space in which the reader is both brought to experience an alternative and called to judgement on it” (Levitas 2011, p. 56), I explore through images what security- and peace- related values may be and how they can be constructed to form a hybrid composite of security within sustaining quality peacework. In this exploration, the content of images (what images *show*) is not of primary importance—it is rather the possibility to engage with it in a *process* of experiencing and transforming those values (Fig. 5).

### Shahi bhaleeb: legitimizing human values, needs and rights

Theorizing an ethics of security, Floyd found that human beings are “intrinsically valuable” and should be protected, while that which could satisfy human needs requires protection too (2019, p. 20). Finding what Yemeni people need and value—including through interaction with digital visual images—would then make clearer what should be supported in sustaining quality peace. While, as the photograph description suggests, my intellectual companion may have access to shahi bhaleeb, the wider realities of the conflict suggest a “ticking timebomb” of food insecurity in Yemen (UN News 2020). Researching local solutions to food insecurity, *Yemen Policy Center’s* Aiman al-Eryani notes that to prevent “future repetition of the existing situation, any



**Fig. 5** Tea coloring page. “It is a famous Yemeni chai latte (Adeni tea) also known as shahi bhaleeb. I see it connected to peace because every Yemeni house in every happy event like weddings, friends gathering, they must have Adeni tea. It somehow makes everyone happy and we enjoy drinking it.” (intellectual companion)

plan for Yemen’s development must involve investment in its farmers and in the infrastructure that is desperately needed ...” (2021, para.1). Yet, the agricultural “sector has been underserved by authorities, receiving a declining share of public expenditure” (para.2). Image transformations could be used to strengthen the question of agricultural investment on the agenda of an inclusive peace process.

If the image transformation of *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* is extended to more Yemeni citizens, other experiences related to food (in)security would add to a broader understanding of the grassroot realities, needs and aspirations. Given that around 70 percent of Yemen’s population resides in rural areas (al-Eryani 2021, para.2), their participation in *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* would result in a large amount of both photographs and transformed images relating to the need for a more robust agricultural sector. Since what is visible also appears legitimate (Möller 2020), the photographs and coloring pages pertaining to agriculture would further legitimize the need for local solutions to food insecurity.



The transformation of the images will not only be a manifestation of a human need for nourishment and nourishment's cultural/social significance, but a visually legitimized metaphor of exercising corresponding rights. These rights can be seen separately and context-specifically as a "right to [a certain type of] security" or dispersed within the system of human rights (see Floyd 2019, pp. 35–37), e.g., human rights for "security of person" and "a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being ..., including food..." (see Articles 3, 25 of *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948). With needs and values legitimized, the metaphorical exercising of the positive right for protection/support—including by imagining replenishment of what is currently lacking through digital visual image transformations—can contribute to peace as a metapolicy pertaining to all spheres of life (as seen in International Peace Institute 2017, refers to sustaining peace). Again, perhaps a far-fetched task for coloring pages alone, but digital visual work is nevertheless a start to imagining Yemen as something other than a humanitarian disaster—a place where local solutions, if known of and supported, could save lives and where people could thrive (Fig. 6).

#### Thamol: peace workers and security constellations

If *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* is about strengthening those actors who already work for security and peace, then the process, for better distribution of support, must also facilitate spaces for disagreement. These spaces could help to differentiate between peace enthusiasts and those favoring or benefiting from conflict, and they could make solutions for peace more distinct, clear and refined through digital visual "negotiation." The clarity would further help see which qualities/elements of these solutions could indeed add "quality" to sustaining quality peace, imagined collectively. Furthermore, instead of consolidating the narrow circle of those who already have the means to engage in peacework, *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* should empower those peace enthusiasts who have previously not had the resources/opportunities to join the circle. The hope of *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* is to make as many willing people into peace workers as possible and to support as many viable local solutions as possible.

The political is "dissensual, conflictual," an area of life that is better thought of as "conflict of worlds" than a disagreement between stakeholders (Rancière and Engelman 2019, p. 17), and what constitutes "peace" could form the center of (here, *constructive, productive and artistic*) disagreement. Coloring pages as utopian "provisional and reflexive models of possible futures open to criticism and debate" (Levitas 2013, p. 153), create opportunities for difference and for it to be expressed clearly—in the way an image co-creator would transform the original vision of peace and security. Transformation itself, however, as an act of changing, e.g., outlines is not the same as conflict or disagreement.



**Fig. 6** Thamol coloring page. Outline by the author of this paper. "To us somehow [thamol, Yemeni food of cultural significance] makes us feel home and peace it gives us this feeling" (intellectual companion)

It may be a way to relate one world to another, even *without* conflict/disagreement, by imbuing one's experiences into those of another. Two examples of such transformation of the coloring page above are featured in the virtual exhibition (see outro). Expressing difference constructively is possible because the architecture of participation in image-based *Imaginary Reconstitution of Security* functions not only on user input, but it is *designed* to foster peaceful visualization of difference by opening a photographic vision for digital re-vision based on outlines.

This *collective* nature of transformation would then reinforce Rancière's understanding of the "true principle of politics"—no particular expertise to lead, but a collective "competency of all" for mutual development (Rancière and Engelman 2019, p. 73). Individually, such ineffable experiences transform those experiencing into peace workers since "the experience of gaining ineffable knowledge ... is a way of being autonomous..., self-consciously receptive and able to say no, rather than passively accepting and conforming" (Kaltofen 2013, p. 45)—conforming to violence or to a peace arrangement enforced top-down or/and from outside. At the level of community, the arts-based practice alters the accepted distribution of "ways of doing and making,"



influencing the course of being (secure/peaceful) and of being visible (while secure/peaceful and while engaging in peacework) (Rockhill 2004, p. 8). This way, the transformation of images enables manifesting what “kinds of people we want to become” (Levitas 2013, p. xviii)—*participating people*—and what the communities we aim to build will foster (ibid.)—*participation in security and peace*.

Visions of that are multidimensional, just like the security and peace of my intellectual companion were communicated via *multiple* images. Each of those can be transformed differently by different people, and a peace process involving such visual transformation would ideally involve a plenitude of images from the start—resulting in a potentially large number of different visions/images created on the basis of the same photograph. What images are tools to build, then, is not security as one state of being for all (a violent enforcement of an artificially reconciled vision)—but a *security constellation* of many states of being and experiences. The goal of building such a “cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle” (Kaltfofen 2013, p. 46, quoting Jay 1984, pp. 14–15) is to comprehend and experience the complexity and fluidity of (in)security/(non)peace. The peace process would need to continuously adjust to respond to the changes of the security constellation’s ceaseless venture to “to say what cannot be said” (Kaltfofen 2013, p. 46)—to articulate experiences of (in)security/(non)peace.

Forming a constellation in the first place would let many actors engage in peacework by visibilizing their experiences/visions of and solutions for security and peace. Then, ensuring the constellation’s continuity—its constant movement (and *digital* image transformations do not have an end point), can also be seen as a sustaining way to ensure giving space to more and more actors and their ideas to support the already working ones. Here too, the digitality of image transformations would help the security constellation be sustaining. In the field of conservation of new media and digital arts, approaches of “endurance by variability” and “permanence through change” are chosen to emphasize the importance of sustaining qualities other than materiality, e.g., the ways different elements come together to create new media digital esthetics (Dekker 2016, p. 556, quoting Depocas et al. 2003). Similarly, security constellations, by being designed to be continuously altered by well-meaning contributors, could self-direct toward preservation of peaceful qualities of individual entries as the ways those qualities come together.

This way, participation makes a peace process and a corresponding peace arrangement more about *Yemeni people and their ideas*. Designing peace in Yemen then may need to focus more attention not only on sharing power between government(-like) stakeholders (as the December 2020 appears), but first and foremost on learning from the

people—by sharing a wide and diverse spectrum of experiences of (in)security/(non)peace—and supporting an increasing number of local peace thinkers/workers and their peace initiatives. The conditional prefixes (in)/(non) can disappear overtime as more actors/initiatives are supported to create more peaceful and secure communities.

## Outro: making art and making peace

Following the call for altering the style and esthetics of critique in critical security studies (Austin et al. 2019), I adopt an “exhibitionist” approach for further digital visual peacework. Seen as distant from judgmental reason, the approach embraces the collaborative nature of companionship in research (Austin et al. 2019), which I would like to digitally extend to the readers. To encourage architectures of participation in security and peace via digital image transformations, I created a virtual digital metaphor of a security and peace constellation—an interactive virtual reality exhibition “Imaginary Reconstitution of Security in Yemen: Making Art and Making Peace Together,” available at this link: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/605d027f042543aed16df6cf>.

Digital visitors of the exhibition can begin their art-for-peace journey with a guided tour, which includes the original photographs submitted by my intellectual companion and available-for-download coloring pages to experience the ineffable visions of security and peace. It also includes examples of how some of the coloring pages could be transformed to communicate individual experiences of those willing to transform the images. So far, these transformations have been performed by me, but I mean them as further invitations for digital visitors to download the coloring pages, engage with them and submit the results of their image transformation via the online form at the end of the guided tour. The submitted images can become part of the virtual exhibition and a security and peace constellation we can collectively create with Yemen in mind. The exhibition is meant as a continuation of the essay’s exploration, rather than its visualized summary, and so, it prompts further questions about participation, digital environments, cultural embeddedness and materiality of images as potential security-building tools.

To conclude, I return to the normative basis of the collaboration between my Yemeni intellectual companion and myself and the application of this project’s security constellation design to peacework. As stated earlier in the text, the intellectual companion and I “came together as creatives, colleagues in art, peace enthusiasts and young women from/in conflict-affected communities.” And while this project was in the cycles of reviews/improvements my community and home country—Ukraine—experienced the 2022 full-scale invasion. As part of my continuous peacebuilding



efforts—not least through *Color Up Peace* and my academic research—I set up a series of art-for-peace workshops for displaced Ukrainians, in person and virtually. The virtual version, developed in collaboration with the online education platform *Claned* and launched in July 2022, is a self-paced workshop environment in Ukrainian and English that features the virtual reality exhibition developed here. My hope in including it was, among other things, to highlight the experiences of my Yemeni intellectual companion as elements of sustaining quality peace in war-affected settings—to manifest that, like in Yemen, there are Ukrainian solutions for security and peace in Ukraine and that they need to be supported.

## Notes

1. No further information on these interactions is included to protect the identity of the intellectual companion.
2. Those can preserve original layers.

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