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Concepts of Peace

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The Housing Crisis and Galtung's Concept of Peace

The housing shortage is a dire problem that has spread throughout the world. The rising property and land prices, as well as the decline of 'starter homes,' makes it difficult for people to find suitable housing (National Low Income Housing Coalition). This topic was recently brought up in a class discussion. After listening to my international colleagues, I realized that this issue was not only limited to the United States but applies to the rest of Europe as well (Kuiper and Carbonell). The Gen Z generation is struggling to move out of their parents' homes due to the rise of inflation and high property costs (Smyth). What was especially surprising was hearing that even my classmates working well-paying jobs in Washington, D.C. were having the same problem as those in less populated or well-paid areas. After thinking about this after class, I realized that the housing crisis reveals deeper issues, such as generational inequality and the challenges to socioeconomic mobility.

This topic is personal to me as I face many of the challenges discussed in class. Like many of my peers, I still live at home, uncertain about when—or if—I will be able to afford a home of my own. The constant rise in inflation and the competitive housing market makes my aspiration feel unattainable (Smyth). Many of my friends have similar fears, having moved back in with their parents after completing their college degrees to save money. As I prepare to move

into an apartment that will consume most of my salary, the idea of purchasing a home in the future feels unrealistic for many Gen Z'ers today.

Living in New Jersey, I notice that most new construction projects are high-end luxury apartments that are costly to rent, or multimillion-dollar homes that are out of reach for anyone just starting out (Daks). This, combined with rising inflation, the cost of living, and student loans, makes homeownership feel like a distant goal. There seems to be no middle ground anymore—no more affordable 'starter homes,' as even those are listed for hundreds of thousands of dollars (O'Dea). This imbalance traps many people in a cycle where homeownership feels like an unreachable dream rather than an achievable milestone for all.

The housing crisis is a global issue that highlights deep-rooted structural inequalities. In class, we spoke about Johan Galtung's concepts of positive peace and structural violence, which helps explain the wider background of this crisis (Ercoşkun). Galtung defines positive peace as equality, presence of justice, and fairness in a society, whereas structural violence refers to the systemic inequalities that prevent people from obtaining their basic needs to live (Ercoşkun). This is evident in the housing market today. In our class discussions, colleagues from various parts of Europe shared similar disappointments. For example, a lady who worked in Washington, D.C., despite having a well-paid position, expressed how the competitiveness of the housing market and lack of affordable houses creates a barrier to stability and security. This supports Galtung's idea of structural violence, where economic systems construct obstacles that prevent individuals from reaching one attainable personal goal, such as homeownership, and getting ahead financially (Ercoşkun). Similarly, in my European colleagues' case, secure suitable housing is a near-impossible challenge. One of my colleagues who visited their family in Iceland said they have similar difficulties. The same colleague who lives in Manchester still lives with

his parents due to skyrocketing housing prices. The constant trap of a lack of affordable housing keeps young people in a cycle of uncertainty.

The lack of affordable housing keeps young people in a never-ending cycle of uncertainty and contributes to a growing sense of hopelessness about their future. For many in my generation, the idea of owning a home, once a symbol of success and stability, now feels like a farfetched dream. The fear of being unable to escape financial constraints imposed by inflated housing prices and the excessive cost of living is palpable. The absence of affordable options keeps us dependent on our parents' homes. Without the independence granted from owning one's own home, we are prevented from achieving developmental milestones considered trivial by previous generations. As Galtung discusses in his theory of structural violence, such systematic exclusion and deprivation are forms of violence that perpetuate inequality and marginalize entire groups of people—in this case, young adults who are economically incapable of affording their own homes. The lack of affordable housing further compounds the generational divide, making it difficult for us to attain the same level of financial and social security that older generations had access to. Galtung's concept of positive peace is equally relevant here, as this ongoing housing crisis undermines peace within society. Positive peace, which refers to the presence of justice, equity, and stability, is severely threatened when an entire generation is denied access to one of the most fundamental human rights: a stable place to live. The failure to address this issue perpetuates a lack of opportunity and reinforces the social divide between those who can afford housing and those who cannot (Ercoşkun). As a result, the struggle to own a home becomes a social issue that impacts mental well-being and societal cohesion. Galtung would argue that this crisis reflects a failure in achieving true peace and justice in our society, as the current system actively marginalizes younger generations and denies them the chance to participate fully in society and contribute to its overall growth and stability.

As Galtung's theory of structural violence suggests, this systemic exclusion and deprivation are forms of violence that perpetuate inequality and marginalize entire groups of people—specifically, young adults who are economically incapable of affording homes. The lack of affordable housing deepens the generational divide, making it even harder for Gen Z to achieve the financial and social stability that older generations had access to. This issue ties directly into Galtung's concept of positive peace, which requires justice, equity, and stability in society. When an entire generation is denied access to one of the most fundamental human rights—stable housing—it undermines the very foundation of peace in our society.

The crisis is not merely an economic problem; it is a societal one that affects mental well-being, exacerbates inequality, and prevents many from participating fully in society. For example, in urban areas where rental prices have skyrocketed, young families are often forced into overcrowded or substandard living conditions, unable to uphold long-term security (O'Dea). The lack of affordable housing in rural areas compounds the issue, leaving many without access to essential services and entrenches inequality (O'Dea).

To summarize, the housing crisis is trapping Gen Z in a cycle of uncertainty and insecurity, fueling a growing sense of hopelessness about the future. For many in my generation, the dream of owning a home has become an increasingly distant and unattainable aspiration. The fear of being unable to escape the financial constraints of soaring housing prices and the escalating cost of living is overwhelming. With the absence of affordable starter homes, many of us are forced to remain living with our parents, unable to take the same strides toward independence and progress that previous generations enjoyed. Addressing the housing crisis is not just about economic policy—it is about achieving a more just and equitable society. As Galtung argued, peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, fairness,

and opportunity for all (Ercoşkun). To build genuine peace, we must confront the systemic inequalities within the housing market, ensuring that future generations can access the stability and opportunities that previous generations once had. Only then can we achieve the positive peace that Galtung envisioned.

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