

**Instituttets/senterets vurdering**

Prosjekttittel:	<b>Re-imagining citizenship in times of transition: Popular culture, arts, and 'peace from below' in India and Myanmar</b>
Strategisk forankring	Forankret i FNs bærekraftsmål 16 «Fred, rettferdighet og velfungerende institusjoner», og mål 10 «mindre ulikhet», spesielt relevante. I strategiområdet Samfunnsutvikling og demokratisering som er sentralt i både UiT og HSL-fakultetets strategi, samt i CPS sitt mandat og strategi. Tett knyttet til internasjonalisering som er gjennomgående i UiTs strategier på alle nivåer, også for HSL og CPS.
Gjennomstrømming (navn på fullførte dr.gradskandidater)	Svært god, Wallace Rhea og Schaller har begge disputert på normert tid. Det er stort internt fokus på oppfølging av stipendiater.
Forankring i fagmiljø	Kandidaten vil inngå i et tverrfaglig forskningsmiljø med andre stipendiater, postdoktorer og seniorforskere som deltar med ulike prosjekter hvor fred og konflikt relaterte tematikker er sentralt ved CPS sin nyopprettet forskningsgruppe PEACE. Videre vil stipendiaten også bli knyttet til forskningsgruppen til det nylig innvilgede NFR prosjektet «Stateless in the Bengali borderlands: New technologies and challenges for identity and identification» (5 981 000 mill NOK v/ førsteamanuensis Mohammed Salehin). Prosjekteier er institutt for fredsforskning (PRIO) i samarbeid med CPS. CPS, SKK og Sesam har også en delt stilling i tverrfaglige metodologier (Ana Luiz Sanchez Laws) som vil delta som biveileder og sin kompetanse.
Rekrutteringsgrunnlag	Det er lenge siden det har vært utlyst stipendiatstillinger knyttet til tematikker om fred og konflikt ved HSL-fak, og spesielt knyttet til perspektivet «Peace from below» som CPS har utviklet siden senterets start.  Dette PhD prosjektet har en tilnærming som er både internasjonal og tverrfaglig orientert. Fagmiljøet i Norge har identifisert søkere fra alle samfunnsvitenskapelige fag og det er også gode relevante søkere fra MPCT programmet ved CPS. Samarbeidsuniversiteter i India, Bangladesh og Maymare har også identifisert flere aktuelle kandidater.
Kvalitet på søknaden (herunder evaluering av prosjekt/fagmiljø)	CPS har over flere år fått innvilget en rekke prosjekter med finansiering fra eksterne finansieringskilder (NFR, NATO, DIKU).  CPS har videre over flere år hatt gode Cristin publikasjonstall. I 2020 er det 10 vitenskapelige publikasjoner registrert i Cristin.  Prosjektsøknaden har en tydelig relevant faglig ramme knyttet til «peace from below» perspektivet som er sentralt for CPS. Dette vil være det første

	PhD prosjektet ved CPS som har fokus på fredsprosses som inkluderer et primært fokus på lokalt nivå.
Forslag til veileder(e)	Prosjektet er tenkt veiledet av tre veiledere. Mohamed Salehin (hovedveileder) og Ana Luisa Sanchez og Marcela Douglas (biveiledere). Hovedveileder er prosjektleder på det NFR finansierte prosjektet, og slik en drivkraft på et overnevnt nivå for dette prosjektet. Salehin har solid erfaring fra å drive feltarbeid og forskning knyttet til multietniske samfunn i Bangladesh, og nært liggende områder rundt. Ana Luisa Sanchez Laws, er en ny professor i metode og metodologi ved CPS (i en delt stilling mellom CPS, SKK og SESAM). Sánchez Laws, har solid forskningserfaring med å undersøke hvordan ulike kunstneriske uttrykk fungerer for å representere og dermed ofte gjenvinne legitimitet for å dempe eller fremme til taushet historier om politisk og etnisk konflikt. Douglas er forskningsleder for PEACE, og har bakgrunn som visuell antropolog og har erfaring fra å gjøre visuell forskning i en menneskerettighetssammenheng. Salehin, Laws og Douglas vil bistå som veileder for kandidaten. Både Salehin, Laws og Douglas har erfaring fra å veilede PhD-kandidater.
Instituttets rangering av søknaden	CPS sitt fagmiljø støtter denne søknaden.

## PhD proposal 2021

### **Re-imagining citizenship in times of transition: Popular culture, arts, and ‘peace from below’ in India and Myanmar**

In 2020, the Norwegian Research Council granted funding of approx. NOK 6 Million (starting in April 2021) for the project *‘Stateless in the Bengali borderlands: New technologies and challenges for identity and identification’*. The motivation for this project is the major crisis of statelessness we are witnessing in the Bengali borderlands, a region spanning lower Assam in India, Sylhet and Chittagong in Bangladesh, and northern Rakhine in Myanmar that hosts almost half of the world’s stateless people (including the Rohingya and Assamese Bengalis).

‘Stateless in Bengali’ intends to examine the implications of statelessness in the region, studying how people self-identify, and the strategies they use to survive. Aiming to understand the contemporary forms of discrimination that produce loss of citizenship, we examine the impact of new communication tools (smartphones; social media) and technologies of biometric identification (digital IDs) on the identity and identification practices in the region. As part of the project, we have secured one PhD who will be based at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. Using critical discourse analysis, this NRC-funded PhD candidate will examine both conventional media and social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) with a focus on “othering” and securitization of Rohingya and Assamese Bengalis by the religious ultra-nationalists, sub-nationalist independence movements and the government.

As part of the broader research project, we have identified one more aspect that needs to be explored in order to better understand the crisis of statelessness and loss of citizenship we are seeing in the Bengali borderlands. This aspect concerns how different actors, as civil society and grassroots organizations, make sense of their everyday protests against political oppression and statelessness in Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. How do actors express their identity and needs, in a regime that seemingly attempts to at best dampen, and at worst silence this expression? What strategies of defiance against exclusion from citizenship can we encounter in the cultural domain, and can these be connected to peace building and conflict transformation in the political arena?

To investigate these issues, a second PhD is required, for which we request funding at Faculty level. This second PhD will concentrate on discovering how different civil society and grassroots groups, especially supporters among artists, use popular culture and art to contest the legitimacy of the state, and how this practice of contestation affects political processes. This task involves analyzing different representations in popular culture and art where civil society and grassroots organizations generate legitimacy for their political causes and propagate their messages to end political struggles and statelessness. The source material is rich and diverse. Various forms of art and literature, film and media.

This proposed second PhD project will address the knowledge gap concerning increasingly fervent political mobilization within these marginalized communities. We see that a comprehensive study of Rohingya and Assamese Bengali identity, identification, and

statelessness must also include the methods and messages of ethno-political mobilization that emanate from within the Rohingya and Assamese Bengali communities themselves, which we argue may occur in contexts such as the arts and popular culture. We also see a need to better understand how this relates to concomitant mobilization in the societies from which they are excluded. These are the main gaps in knowledge that motivate us to expand the project to include this second PhD position.

The proposed PhD will mostly use publicly available audio-visual and textual materials (e.g. posters, wall writings, poetry, artworks) representing protest and activism regarding ending oppression and statelessness. For example, in the case of poetry, the PhD candidate will analyze works such as *'I am a Rohingya: Poetry from Camps and Beyond'* as well as selected 'Miyah' poetry for the Assamese Bengali Muslims. In case of street art and graffiti, the candidate will examine both online and on-site examples from the study's locations. This will be complemented by multi-sited ethnography (should society open after COVID-19 pandemic) and netnography (a type of ethnography that aims at understanding social interaction in contemporary digital communications contexts). We need, however, to stress that the more specific goals of this second PhD will continue to be developed in close collaboration with our partners in the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies in India, where fieldwork will be located.

With the rise of the religious and ultra-right populism in India and a military takeover in Myanmar, it has become crucial to understand how grassroots mobilization through arts and popular culture are working to create peace. As such, this kind of research has as goal to help us understand the 'peace from below' initiatives ongoing in the region, thereby enabling us to shed light on how and why countries that are undergoing transitions from autocracy to a more democratic system often fail to solve internal political and violent conflicts, a failure that then leads to oppression and statelessness.

Research questions addressed by the PhD position:

1. What cultural expressions aimed at reclaiming self-identity can we encounter in the cultural domain where Rohingya and Assamese Bengali communities are situated?
2. Can these strategies and expressions be connected to peace building and conflict transformation in the political arena?
3. How do these expressions function in terms of counteracting exclusion from citizenship?

The PhD project will be associated with the newly established research group PEACE at CPS that seek to understand the processes that bring societies together, and on ways in which peace can be built, maintained and spread. Many of the processes that aim to achieve or sustain peace often tend to exclude local communities. The PEACE research group focuses on local ownership and participation in peace processes, perspectives from "peace from below". How individuals, groups and nations navigate their way in divided societies. The PhD position in question is linked to the perspective "peace from below". Furthermore, will the PhD position be integrated into a strong research group of the Norwegian Research

Council granted funded project (starting in April 2021) *'Stateless in the Bengali borderlands: New technologies and challenges for identity and identification'*. This project got funded by NFR something that indicates an evaluation of the academic as excellent.

The PhD project with a focus on peace from below is anchored in the UN's sustainability goal 16 "Peace, justice and well-functioning institutions", furthermore in the strategy area Social Development and Democratization, which is central to both UiT and the HSL faculty's strategy, as well as CPS strategy. The PhD project is also closely linked to internationalization that is pervasive in UiT's strategies at all levels (also HSL and CPS).

The initiators of this application are associate professor Mohammed Salehin, project leader of the NFR funded project *'Stateless in the Bengali borderlands: New technologies and challenges for identity and identification'*. Salehin is affiliated researcher at PRIO, and has experience in conducting long-term fieldwork in multi-ethnic communities in areas of Bangladesh. Salehin is a native Bengali speaker and reader. Ana Luisa Sanchez Laws, is a new professor in methods and methodologies at CPS in a shared position between CPS, SKK and SESAM. Sánchez Laws, has previous experience in investigating how various artistic expressions in Panama functioned to represent and thereby often reclaim legitimacy for muted or silenced stories of political and ethnic conflict in this Latin American country. Furthermore, Sánchez Laws has also previously advised a candidate at University of Canberra, Australia whose work dealt with understanding the use of visual artistic expression online to generate social movements against internet censorship in mainland China. Marcela Douglas, research group leader for PEACE, background as visual anthropologist and have experience from doing visual research in a human right context. Salehin, Laws and Douglas will assist as supervisors for the candidate.

We will collaborate with partners in India, Bangladesh and Maymare as well as in Norway in order to recruit good candidates for this PhD position that have recently completed their master's degree in a relevant field.

