

# **Everyday Archive of Global Capitalism**

## **Visual Reflections**

**Basisseminar (BA) Economy and Society**

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## Emergency Button



The picture was taken in a German nursing home in Drais. It shows a bed with a button that signals that whoever pressed it needs help. While this can be a great help and an important system to keep the elderly in the home safe in case of emergency, there is a question about the dynamics of the care system that can be raised by a scene like this.

For the families of the people attending the nursing home, taking advantage of the around-the-clock care offered by the workers there, this button and the everyday services can be a great relief. A lot of families do not have the resources to take care of an elderly relative full-time without help. However, drawing from the ideas of feminist IPE discussed in class, this type of labor can be regarded as highly problematic. It combines multiple aspects that continue to reinforce stereotypes and hold

up patriarchal structures. For one, a lot of the people taking over paid care work like this are women, more often immigrant women. Adding to this the work continues to be undervalued and paid little (Brassett et al., 2023).

To allude back to the button from the picture, there is a need for around-the-clock availability in this field. Keeping this in mind and furthermore looking at the hard tasks that are being performed (physical and emotional care), there is a clear need for higher wages. Part of the problem is also the ageing of the population and the import of cheap labor from other countries to fill the gap. Furthermore, through the financial crisis and the attempt to try and limit national debt, cuts are being made in the social sector, the need for the money and the work however, remains. Families who can't find a spot in a



nursing home, have to take on the tasks themselves, which in heteronormative families often times results in the women of the family taking over a greater share of the care work. Additionally, they might turn to imported labor as well, Stay at home nurses or nannies from other countries. Which again results in the exploitation of mostly immigrant women.

From looking at the button as a helpful tool in the care sector one can see that if you peel back the layers of the object and look into the people who are involved in the process of responding to the button being pressed, there is an obvious inequality that comes along with it. The actors in this sector are mostly women who are getting the short end of the stick because of the way sexism effects economic procedures and circumstances.

## ***Diet Coke***



At first glance, a cola can might seem like just another everyday object something you grab on the go or drink without thinking twice. But when you take a step back, it's surprising how much this tiny can says about the global economy and the way our lives are shaped by it. This can is everywhere. No matter where you go in the world, you're bound to find it on a beach in Portugal, a market in Brazil, or even in the middle of nowhere.

It's a perfect example of globalization. A company started somewhere in the U.S. now sells billions of cans in almost every corner of the planet. But while it connects people through a shared product, it also raises questions. Are local cultures and traditions being overshadowed by the global dominance of brands like this? When everyone drinks the same thing, what happens to regional diversity?

Then there's the story behind the can how it's made and who makes it. From mining aluminum to processing sugar, there's a whole supply chain involving workers from different parts of the world. Some of those workers are treated fairly, but many aren't. It makes you wonder: How much of the money we spend on products like this goes to the people who help create them?

Another thing I can't ignore is the environmental side. Sure, the can is recyclable, but that doesn't change the fact that producing billions of them every year takes a huge toll on the planet. Mining, manufacturing, transportation it all adds up. And then there's the waste when these cans don't get recycled. It's a reminder that the convenience we enjoy comes with a cost we don't always see.

What really gets me, though, is how a cola can is more than just a drink it's a feeling. The ads make it seem like opening one is like opening happiness. But that's the power of marketing. It's not just about quenching thirst; it's about selling a lifestyle, an experience. That's how big corporations stay at the top they don't just sell products, they sell dreams. So, this little cola can?

It's not as simple as it looks. It's a symbol of globalization, labor, environmental challenges, and even cultural influence all wrapped up in aluminum. It's amazing how much of the world's economy can be reflected in something we often take for granted.

## Toilet Paper

One of the great potentials of I-Peel lies in its potential to throw light on the many tendrils of economic systems running through every area of our lives. And as nice as it would be to reserve at least some last bastion of privacy and seclusion, even the restroom is not of limits. So let us embark on a journey to uncover how toilet paper brings the world into our restrooms.

Historically the first uses of paper for toiletry purposes can be traced to China, with reports of this dating back well into the 6th century CE. Mass production there started in the 14th century. In Europe, however, the use of toilet paper was not widespread until early modern printing culture ensured a steady and plentiful supply of discarded paper.



While initially newspapers and other pre-used papers were used for purposes of hygiene, modern commercial toilet paper was patented in the USA in 1883. And in the 1890s the modern toilet paper roll was introduced. Contemporary toilet paper is usually made from pulpwood trees, although bamboo or sugar cane byproducts play a certain role too. In the last years among growing debates and consumer awareness on the topic of sustainability, an increasing amount of toilet paper is produced from recycled wood pulp. Still, it is estimated that the number of trees felled for the purpose of toilet-paper making has risen to about ten million a year.

International market dynamics and globalization have helped accelerate this trend. It is the 863rd most traded product globally with its trade volume quintupling from about \$1 Billion in 1995 to about \$5 Billion in 2022. During this period, in line with trends caused by labour costs and the global financial crisis, China replaced Italy as leading toilet paper exporter, with Germany retaining their second-place 9% market share. As Germany imports just as much toilet paper as it exports there is a high chance the toilet paper sitting in your restroom is from China, Italy, or Poland.

The culturally unifying force of international trade, as discussed by adherents of liberalism, can be seen by rising demand for toilet paper in countries without a history of its use. Nigeria and India are reported to struggle fulfilling an ever-rising demand in face of rapidly growing populations and increases in toilet paper usage. Some cultural differences in these matters can be seen in sewage systems propensities to cope with flushed toilet paper.

How embedded toilet paper is into global dynamics could be seen especially well at the start of the COVID 19-pandemic. When panic buyers caused shortages of toilet paper amidst fears of lockdowns and possible supply-chain disruptions.

## Make-Up

The following text will focus on women who wear make-up. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that make-up holds significant cultural value across various groups, including the queer\* community, goth, and black metal subcultures, irrespective of gender. However, as the societal perceptions surrounding their use of make-up differ substantially from those associated with "mainstream" make-up practices, they will not be considered in the following analysis.



For many individuals—predominantly women—make-up plays a crucial role in daily life. It can be a medium for creativity and self-expression. Conversely, societal pressures compel many to wear make-up in order to conform to prevailing beauty standards. In contemporary society, where conventional notions of beauty provide advantages not only in the pursuit of romantic relationships but in almost all areas of life, this pressure underscores the significance of make-up. Moreover, the colour cosmetics industry constitutes a major economic sector, with global revenues of 99.4 billion dollars in 2024 (Statista), and it continues to grow due to rapidly changing trends.

Given its predominantly female consumer base, analysing this topic through a feminist framework can be insightful. Several questions arise: Who determines current make-up trends and, by extension, prevailing beauty standards? Who benefits financially from these trends? Why do many women report feeling more confident, competent, and capable when wearing make-up? (Dellinger & Williams; 1997) What are the financial and temporal costs associated with beauty products, and how do these expenditures impact women's emancipation and well-being? Why does society place such a strong emphasis on women's physical appearance?...

Make-up transforms beauty into an acquired skill rather than an inherent attribute, leading to the perception that "ugliness" is personal failure. In the context of neoliberal ideology, which emphasises individual responsibility for personal success, the pursuit of an idealised appearance necessitates substantial investments of both time and money. Those unable to afford such expenditures may find themselves at a disadvantage in accessing „pretty privileges“. (Chance; 2023) Furthermore, the psychological well-being of women can be affected by these pressures.

Another framework one can use to analyse make-up is its production. A significant number of glittering make-up products contain mica, a mineral found worldwide but predominantly sourced from North India. Although many mica mines in the region were closed in the 1990s due to safety and environmental regulations, unregulated extraction persists. Labourers, often working under hazardous conditions and for minimal wages that fail to meet basic living standards, continue to mine mica illegally. Women and children constitute a substantial portion of this workforce. Consequently, examining the production side of make-up raises broader ethical concerns related to human rights, global supply chains, and the enduring impact of colonial exploitation.

Exploring the production aspect of make-up thus raises broader ethical concerns, touching on human rights, global supply chains, and the lingering effects of colonial exploitation. From a postcolonial perspective, it becomes evident that people in former colonies still endure exploitative working conditions to provide raw materials for former colonial powers. This highlights how colonial structures continue to influence the modern global economy (Bhambra;2021). Bhambra further argues that Western welfare systems developed through the wealth accumulated from colonization. In contrast, former colonies such as India lacked the opportunity to build similar welfare systems due to economic impoverishment and destabilized states. Consequently, workers in these regions are compelled to endure harsh conditions, as the state fails to ensure a basic subsistence level.

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## Cash



I decided on using this picture for our archive of everyday IPE as it shows something everyone knows, everybody wants, and in this case, a lot of people have touched—cash.

Currency itself can be seen as a reminder of nationhood or to symbolize national identity (Brassett 2023). In the case of this picture, as the currency is the Euro, it can be looked at as a physical reminder of a shared European Identity which has slowly but surely been evolving since the founding of the European Union in 1993. Germany started using the Euro in 2002. Even though the used currency changed, one thing that did not change is the German culture surrounding money. Here, in the heart of Europe *cash is king*.

Cash, especially the type of cash, which is acquired through moonlighting or tips, is a personal matter for me. It is one of the reasons why I can attend university, was able to be tutored in high school and how I was paid at my first job. When taking a closer look at the way cash is distributed throughout our society some paradox things can be noticed. Cash is money, which exists physically, often without a paper trail and can therefore be hidden or sometimes even forgotten. In the grand scheme of things, cash tends to be obsolete, yet it can be a matter of survival for a lot of people.

Children (in Germany) learn about money, the exchange of it, the logic of spending and therefore economy, through cash. A weekly allowance, a 10 EUR bill as a birthday present, Grandparents sorting through their wallet for “reds” (copper money) so the piggy bank can be “fed”, are just a few examples of many on how cash is currently essential in the process of learning the importance of money and how to navigate through a capitalistic society.

While taking a closer look at all these little anecdotes I noticed that each and every one of them seems to have a cultural connotation. I therefore decided to link my chosen picture to week 7 topic—Cultural IPE.

In the reading of week 7 the authors urge how everyday activities can be seen as cultural, because culture itself has the tendency to embed itself into factual practices or rituals (Best & Paterson 2010). Furthermore, I would agree with Brassett (2023), that cash can serve as a physical reminder of nationhood, which in itself holds cultural significance.

Nowadays credit card readers are available in most stores and bakeries, even in Germany. Especially younger Germans have started to use their credit and debit cards much more frequently and embrace the usage of digital finance applications like PayPal with more enthusiasm and less scepticism than their older counterparts. Which leaves me wondering if there might be a cultural shift approaching and if so, what consequences it may entail. Will Germans fully lose their love for cash? Will people who currently rely on moonlighting to make ends meet, suffer? How will the educational approach change when teaching kids about money?

My picture, and therefore cash, could have also easily been linked to Feminist IPE or European IPE. I am already looking forward to dive deeper into the indications cash might have for the field Political Economy.

## Fairphone

When I applied to be an educator and counsellor for young volunteers, I did not consider public relations and social media to be a key part of it (It wasn't in the job description). I expected even less to have to do said social media work using the most impractical piece of technology ever created for such a purpose: The "fairphone" with its shaky, cloudy 12 MP camera.

In theory it is a great idea. Finally, a phone not designed to break after a few years and built with recycled or responsibly sourced materials. Usually, materials such as cobalt used in typical cellphones are sourced from mines in the global south under precarious working conditions. Workers in these mines often face dangerous environments: poor ventilation, exposure to toxic substances, and a lack of protective equipment. Accidents are common, and the long-term health consequences are devastating. (Amnesty International, 2016)



However, these working conditions are not just a matter of negligence or corporate greed; they are deeply embedded in the historical and ongoing dynamics of the global economy. Many of these mines are in countries whose economic systems were shaped—and in many cases destabilized—by colonial exploitation. The profits from these resources flowed to industrial powers in the Global North, while the Global South was left with weakened institutions and economies dependent on resource extraction. Today, multinational corporations continue to profit from these resources, while local workers and communities bear the brunt of the costs. (Bhambra, 2021)

Even more ridiculous: It isn't actually a fair phone, but rather a fair-er phone. In a blog post titled "We have big plans for fair materials by 2030" they write: "For each of these 23 materials, we now aim to dig deeper into our supply chains and engage with suppliers, workers, miners, recyclers and communities to determine what needs to be done." (Fairphone, 2024) I don't want to imply that the company is lying or "greenwashing"; their blog definitely shows efforts to monitor working conditions and improve them. The fact that they have been at this for more than 10 years and can't even specify when and how exactly they are going to reach a way to source materials in an entirely fair and transparent way shows, how deeply ingrained exploitation is in the industry and former colonies.

So as I grappled with the clunky Fairphone and its grainy images, I couldn't help but think about the contradictions it embodies. While the ideas embodied by its ecological and supposedly "fair" materials sound great it is a deeply unappealing piece of tech which is still shockingly expensive and therefore inaccessible to the average consumer. (Unequal access to technologies: Another issue which would be interesting to view through the lens of IPE) To create a true eco-revolution, we need to stand up for disenfranchised workers all over the world and recognize how their exploitation is rooted deeply within colonialism and capitalism.

## Feminist Movements Through a Capitalist Lens

Unfortunately, I couldn't get my hands on the physical versions of the magazines in which these campaigns were published. Nevertheless, I chose these pictures because they reflect a multifaceted societal concern, namely feminism under a capitalist lens.



During the early 20th century, corporations were widely known for advertisements that promoted the concept of nuclear family ideals and depicted women confined to strictly domestic roles, such as being “in the kitchen, serving food” (image 1). However, these campaigns gradually pivoted as feminist movements gained momentum through its second wave. As early as 1928, women were permitted to partake in cigarette consumption, an act that, to some extent, mirrored the societal status of these women, symbolizing wealth and privilege.

In 1989, Edward Bernays, often regarded as the father of modern day propaganda, launched the infamous “Torches of Freedom” campaign for tobacco marketing initiatives, in which women were photographed smoking on the streets as a resemblance of resisting societal stigmas and fighting its hierarchies. This campaign strategically incorporated women on set to push for the tobacco companies’ agendas, in expanding market access to new consumer segments: women. Marx touches upon these acts in capitalist societies in his *Communist Manifesto* and states: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (Marx & Engels 2004: 11).

The central issue lies in the exploitative nature of this approach, in a manner of disregarding and overthrowing the sum of hardships social movements have endured and setting “freedom” parallel to a “cigarette”. Feminist movements, which symbolize, in their core, resilience, resistance and concession are co-opted and rebranded, under the guise of empowerment and liberation, to promote smoking—completely overseeing its severe health risks and complications. This phenomenon underscores the intrinsic nature of capitalism, which pivots ideological stances into a marketable product. On this stance Marx elaborates: “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.” (Marx & Engels 2004: 10). Bernays himself acknowledges the intertwining of modern-day

businesses (capitalism), everyday life, and public sentiment remarking : “Modern business must have its finger continuously on the public pulse. It must understand the changes in the public mind and be prepared to interpret itself fairly and eloquently to changing opinion.” This statement reflects how businesses engage with public sentiment and influence everyday life by monitoring, molding and structuring public opinion into a profitable, collective behavior.

Therefore, it is to be considered that capitalism aligns with Baudrillard’s concept of *simulacra* , which further elucidates this dynamic. Baudrillard argues that simulacra represents the duplications of an image that lost its essence. Within the framework of capitalism, corporations adopt the concept of simulacra and rip the substantial element of social movements, rebrand, ramify, and reduce human interactions and social behaviors into commodities available for merchandise. In this sense, capitalism serves as a system of symbolic manipulation, transforming essential phenomena into lucrative entities.

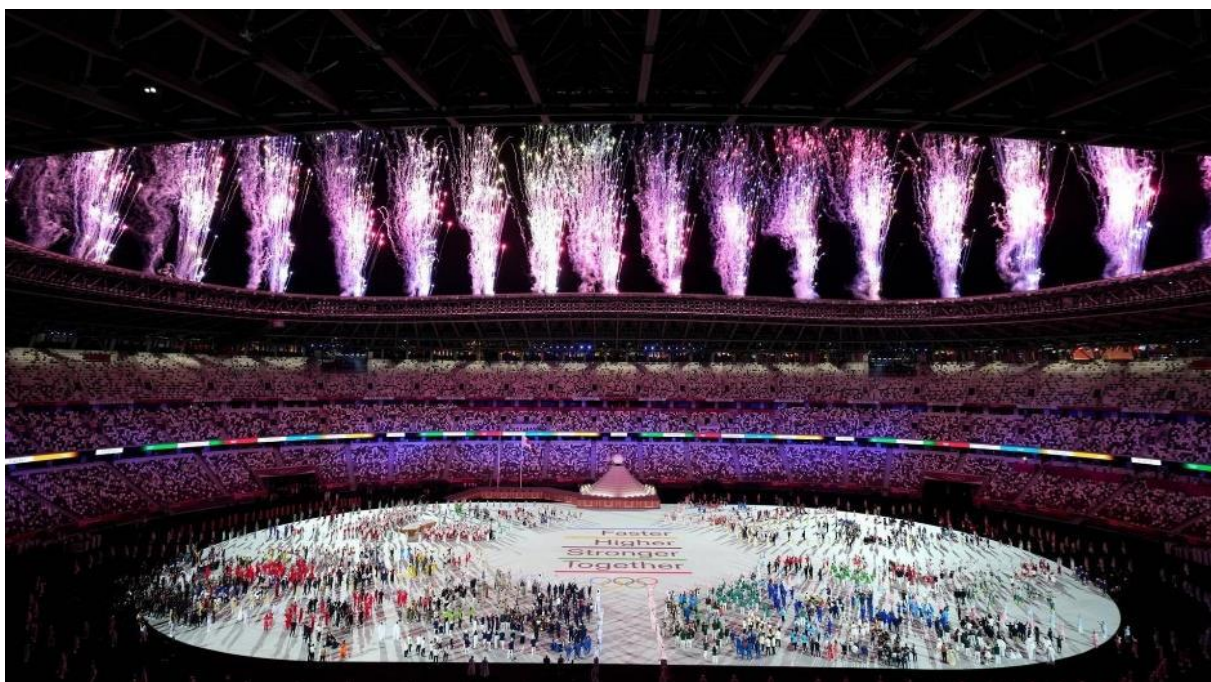


## Sport Events

Fair to say I didn't take the pictures myself. Still, I chose a topic everyone is stumbling over at least a few times in a lifespan. Sports. Everyone knows it. Some really hate it. But some love it more than can be explained. I mean why would you and your companions go on trips through Europe for 90 minutes of football. It just doesn't make sense. But it brings people together more than many other things in life. But is it rational to give sports and specifically major sporting events such a big role in your life? German public broadcasters spend Billions of Euros on the TV rights for these events. But then they talk about merging some niche programs because they don't have enough money for them. The budget for sports is ca. 237,5 million euros a year on average between 2021 and 2024 (ARD). Even though ARD says that it is only 71cts per month per household, people that aren't sports fans might find this number outrageous. But people that aren't sports fans may find this number outrageously high and who can blame them.



To understand we first must understand what impact major sporting events like Olympia, or the Football World Cup, can have on one nation. It brings sponsorships from the wealthiest companies from all around the world to countries that often are not at the center of worldwide media attention. Like Botswana, which everyone was talking about, even if it was only a short period of time, when Letsile Tebogo won the 200m sprint at the 2024 Olympics. Or Germany, when it won the 1954 World Cup. The whole nation drew motivation from this single event to think "We are back again". Shortly thereafter the "Wirtschaftswunder" really jump-started.



The text talks about “that particular cultures and more precisely inter-cultural symbolic exchanges are appropriated for corporate purposes” (Best & Paterson 2010). That is also applicable to the world of sports, that has vastly changed over the course of the last decades. Everything is about staged pictures that are intended to create an effect. That is also what made sportswashing so popular and successful. Just look at the world cup in Qatar in 2022. The organizers wanted to show that Qatar is a country that can make anything happen and everyone is welcome. The pictures they showed were spectacular and made it look like it being a great destination for a vacation. Still, women’s rights are not remotely close to being the same as men’s rights. Also, the fact that thousands of guest workers died building the stadiums was not discussed or even criticized by FIFA officials. And 1.5 billion people watched the final between France and Argentina.

I would really like to get a deeper look into how sports can unite people again. As an event that cares about the problems we face in society and economy today. That it is leading by example to bring people together.

## Rewe App

Going grocery shopping is a core part of everyday life. Whether using regular checkout or self-checkout machines, shoppers often encounter the question from the cashier or on-screen prompt: “Do you have our app?” which seems like a harmless interaction, you’re rewarded for loyalty with coupons, personalized offers, and points.

However, this practice reflects a broader 21st-century trend where user data has become a highly valuable resource. By signing up for these programs, users voluntarily provide personal information, purchase habits, location data, and device details. This data is leveraged for targeted marketing, retail optimization, and sometimes sold to third parties, while the rewards offered in return are only a fraction of the value extracted from the data.



This dynamic reflects the broader neoliberal capitalist system that increasingly intrudes into everyday life, transforming interactions into opportunities for data collection. Such practices reinforce global inequalities by cementing competitive individualism into daily routines, making consumers a part of their exploitation. Loyalty programs monetize human activity, extracting valuable data while offering minimal benefits—impacting those close to the poverty line more significantly. This further grows the divisions within the lower classes, as privacy becomes a luxury for those who can afford it.

When relating my visual reflection to the topics discussed in class, I found connections to a couple of themes, but I chose Cultural IPE and both lectures for that week. In the text by Brassett et al. (2023), I found the mention of the value that data holds particularly interesting, even though they were specifically referring to social media data: “social media data carries immense value for corporate marketing, political strategy, credit rating, and other ways of knowing and governing society” (p. 187). I argue that this applies to virtually all forms of data, including the data collected by Rewe and similar apps. This data transforms attention and behavior into profitable resources for corporations, to the point where almost every action we take becomes a source of extractable profit.

Regarding the text by Best and Paterson (2010), I found it fascinating how it connects neoliberalism to consumerism and how this relationship works to normalize competitive individualism in everyday routines. They write that “[...] the shift to consumerism has itself played an important part in stabilizing this political form in the last two decades” (p. 17). Even the act of consuming has become competitive, with apps like these creating opportunities to “pay less.” For those with fewer resources, this is a necessity, while for those with more, it can feel frustrating to see someone else extracting benefits that they could extract as well.

## Football Stadium

This picture was taken by me on the 5th of October 2024 at an away game in St. Pauli at the Millerntor-Stadium. It is no secret that the football industry has a strongly commercialized structure (as to be seen by numeral of sponsorship displayed by the advertising banner). This sport has evolved from a simple game into a billion-dollar industry. For example, Inter Milan is owned by a Chinese businessman, while AC Milan is owned by an American businessman. Many clubs also have external investors from all around the world.

Football serves as a medium for social inclusion, forming many subcultures within society, such as the 'Ultras,' whose lives are heavily influenced by the clubs they support. For many people, football even fulfills a quasi-religious role, providing a "sense of belonging." If we take St. Pauli as an example, the active supporters of the club embrace a distinct political stance and general identity. St. Pauli has cultivated a „self-image of being the underdog, the non-conformist, anti-establishment, and leftist“ (Daniel & Kassimeris, 2013). But it is also clear that St. Pauli (and many other clubs) goes into a direction of commercialism with its self-image being presented clearly.

Interestingly, commercialization in Germany occurred much later compared to England or Italy. Even as recently as last year, an investor deal was considered a “no-go” for German fans, as demonstrated by numerous protests and statements from German 'Ultra' groups.

Over the past years, we have seen a clear clash of interests between the DFB (German Football Association) and German fan organizations. The DFB aims to pursue further commercialization by signing more deals with external investors to financially support clubs and enhance their competitiveness internationally. In contrast, German Ultras are determined to preserve and maintain traditional club and fan culture.

Outside of Germany, clubs like Athletic Bilbao demonstrate clear principles against neoliberal ideology. Since 1912, the club has adhered to an unwritten rule of signing only players born in the Basque Country or those who developed their football skills at a Basque club (López-Menchero, 2023).

It is important to mention that commercialism in football is clearly an ethical question that can have different views on everyone. The definition of “commercialism” in football can be diverse and questionable on everyone's behalf. The introduction of new technologies, such as the Video Assistance Referee (or VAR), might be just a part of a cultural evolution (digitalization). On the other hand, it could also mean introducing new markets and institutions for the football market (Best & Paterson, 2023).

Typically, left-wing and right-wing cultures differ in their “approaches to economic policymaking” (Copelovitch & Walter, 2023, p.30). However, this distinction becomes less clear when examining German fan culture. For instance, the Ultras of Dynamo Dresden, who have been linked to right-wing communities (Meyn, 2019), made a public statement opposing an investor deal proposed by the DFB in 2023 (<https://ultras-dynamo.de/2023/12/04/nein-zu-investoren-in-der-dfl/>).



## Suitcase

A suitcase is more than just a simple object that is used for travelling. It represents freedom and possibilities which reach across borders. If you take a look beneath the surface, it tells a story that shows aspects of the dynamics of the global political economy and the societies, we live in. The suitcase shows both privilege and struggle, depending on who carries it and why.

### Tourism: Privileged Mobility

For many people in the global north the suitcase is a symbol for the steady increasing levels of prosperity. For example, over 95% of Germans have travelled abroad at least once in their life and for many, travelling seems to be as normal as grocery shopping. Destinations like Spain, Italy, or even far-off places such as Thailand or Dubai, have become a common destination for those who can afford it. In this case the suitcase represents freedom, extravagance the ability to cross borders effortlessly.

### Migrant Workers: Forced Mobility

The suitcase can tell different stories depending of the place you were born in and your social status. For million migrant workers in Cities like Dubai the Suitcase doesn't stand for extravagance and freedom, it stands for hopelessness and desperation. These workers often come from poorer countries in South Asia or Africa, bringing all their belongings in a single suitcase as they leave their homes behind. Unlike tourists, their mobility is driven by economic necessity rather than choice. They work long hours under harsh conditions in construction sites or service jobs that sustain the luxurious lifestyles of others. Their suitcases are not symbols of freedom but of sacrifice and survival.

### The Inequality Behind Mobility

The stark contrast between tourists and migrant workers highlights the global inequalities that define modern mobility. Tourists benefit from open borders, economic privilege, and global consumer culture. Migrant workers, on the other hand, face legal restrictions, exploitative labor systems like the Kafala system in the Gulf states, and limited rights. While tourists carry their suitcases to explore new horizons, migrants carry theirs as they navigate systems that often exploit their labor and deny them dignity.



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## Water Bottle

A plastic water bottle might seem like a small, everyday object, but it tells a bigger story about how the global economy shapes our lives. As Bhambra (2021) explains, the modern global economy is deeply connected to the histories of colonialism. Plastic bottles are made from materials like oil, a resource often extracted from countries in the Global South under unequal conditions. This reflects a long history where resources from these regions are taken to support the industries and consumption of wealthier countries, perpetuating global inequalities.

Bottled water also shows how capitalism turns even the most basic needs into commodities. Water, which is essential for life, has been turned into a product that people must pay for. Brassett et al. (2023) discuss how global markets increasingly commodify essential goods and services. Companies profit by selling bottled water, yet many communities around the world lack reliable access to clean, affordable drinking water. This contradiction highlights the unequal distribution of resources in the global economy.

The environmental impact of bottled water is another part of this story. Once used, plastic bottles often end up polluting rivers, oceans, and landscapes. Local communities, particularly in poorer regions, frequently bear the burden of managing this waste. This problem not only affects the environment but also strains public health and local ecosystems.

A plastic bottle, then, is not just a convenient item for carrying water. It reveals how historical patterns of inequality continue to shape the global economy, how essential resources are commodified, and how environmental damage becomes a shared responsibility. Understanding the broader impacts of such an everyday object helps us see the deep connections between our lives and the systems of global capitalism.



## Car

My picture was taken in a parking lot. It focuses on the car I drive which is an Audi, a German car.

On Monday, January 20th Donald Trump was inaugurated as 47th president of the United States. Already prior to his election he made multiple statements regarding import and customs policies. Products from outside of the USA like German cars should be taxed with up to 20%. Whilst free trade is often preferred by experts and plays a major role in globalization, we have noticed the USA slowly turn from liberalism to protectionism.

This idea can be tracked back to one of Americas founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton, who wanted to achieve independence and security through boosting domestic production (Helleiner, 2023). His "Report on Manufacturers" was to encourage the government to boost the own economy and through that the power and security of America. To achieve this the government should encourage the "Spirit of Enterprise". In neomercantilist theory, the tax on German cars should have a positive effect on the strength, innovation and employment of the domestic car industry.



If we move from Hamilton to another neomercantilist thinker and look at Friedrich List, we can add one more aspect: National Spirit (Helleiner, 2023). It is very interesting that the USA expects other smaller countries in competitive branches to stay away from protectionism even though they themselves implement government subsidies in many different industries. But why that?

From Hamilton to Trump, the rising of protectionist tendencies seems to appear in times of national instability and insecurity. It seems almost as a tool for US government to boost the "Spirit of its People" by presenting protectionism as a miracle cure for all problems. Whether these are job insecurity, housing problems or poverty; all can apparently be linked to foreign production harming the US' own one. It will be very interesting to see how the threat of a 20% tax on German cars will play out: Are German companies willing to make a deal with Trump and move part of

their industries to the US or will the increased prices of cars like Audi anger the people and thus move the Trump administration to shy away from aggressive neomercantilist customs policies.

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