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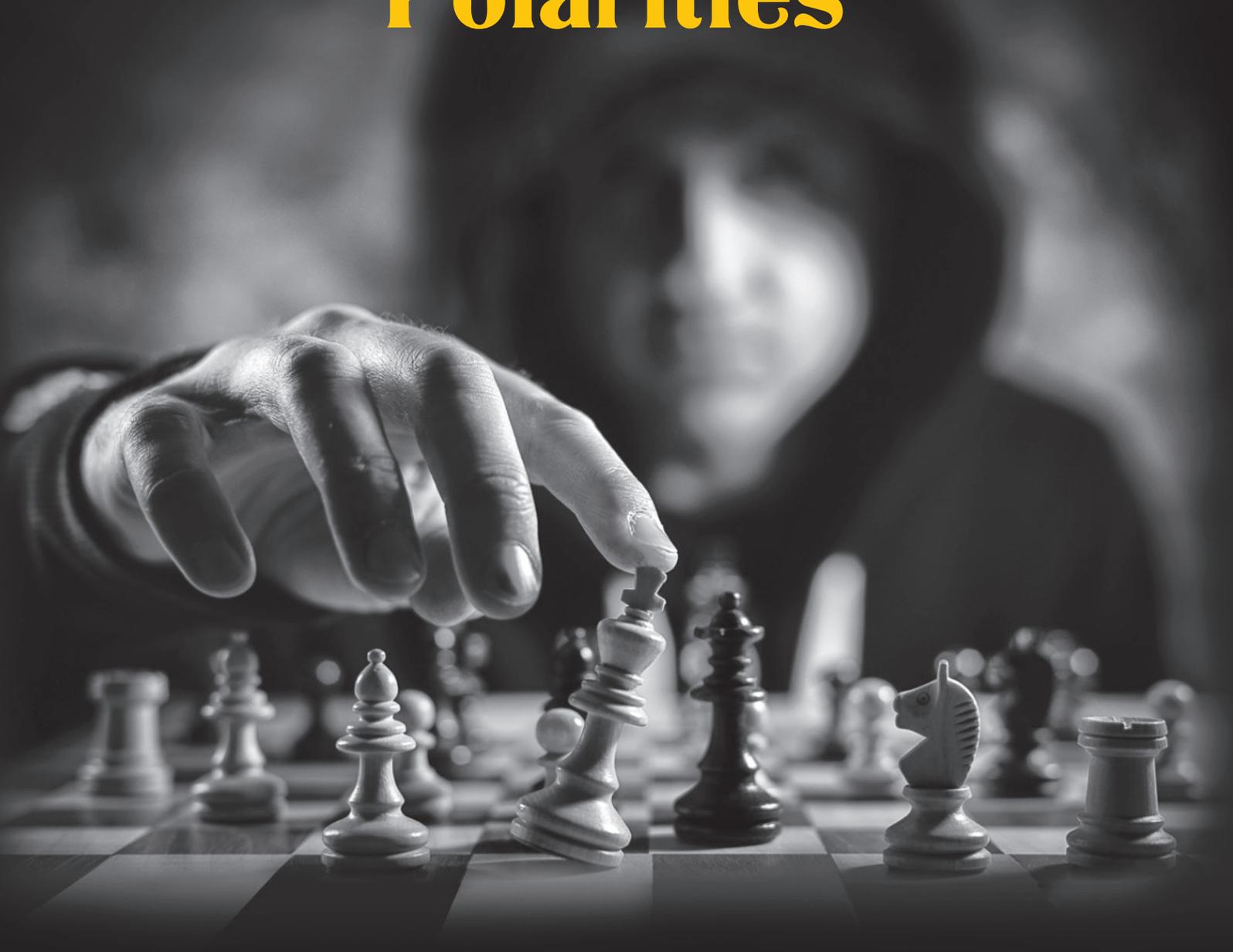
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Social JUSTICE

if delayed then denied

Pluralities and Polarities



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Plurality is a stark reality of our times, and polarities are a natural phenomenon that engulf modern human living...

Rev. Fr. Rohan Silva OMI

Plurality around us globally is being experienced unprecedentedly as the traditionally defined and demarcated boundaries have shrunk and those restricted ‘border crossings’ have become a cliché and a thing of the past. Travel had become a common feature in the last two decades and we did realize that how many thousands have found both their work places and permanent domicile outside their own country of birth, especially during the height of Covid19 with their clamour to return to the original abodes. Still many remain in the adopted countries wanting to return, which indeed is a new global scenario of human desire to move. This has led to a standstill of the subsistence of thousands of family units and also remittance-oriented smaller economies across the ‘developing world’ whose labour has been in demand also leading to new polarities.

“There is no blue print out there unless we create the model for us to survive during ‘our times’, but learning from ‘their times’ in order to gift to the ‘next timers’

It is hardly possible to find a mono-cultural or a homogenous society today though some prefer to safeguard their identity for the fear of losing it in the world of multiple identities alongside the enforcing heterogeneity. This tendency to atomize these societies with social and cultural dominance wrapped in the movement of the global financial capital and the push for structural adjustments to ‘fit in processes’ is evident. The smaller economies are struggling among these ‘pulls and pushes’ of the Market and the emerging but turned sour Indo-Pacific relations between several major power blocks. However, there is indeed immense possibility among these legitimate fears for those who value plurality as a strength to enhance their capacity to be relevant and a productive force while allowing the inevitable cross fertilization seeking progress in this specific encounter. It is not a compromise but a ‘give and take’ process with ‘checks and balances’ which might have to be the only agreeable geo-political axiom before us.

There is no escape that plurality is a stark reality of our times, and polarities are a natural phenomenon that engulf modern human living and it has been felt by the varying segments of the societies from Chile to Chittagong and from Darwin to Drammen. The obvious in this scenario might be an unavoidable conflict between groups, within groups, between regions and the worst

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of its editorial policy

Editorial



HUMANITY IS ONE, BUT MANY AT THE SAME TIME...

“

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”

PREAMBLE:

This volume 43 No.199 we have requested our contributors to focus on the notions of Plurality and Polarity as the world community embark into 2020, the third decade of the third Millennium. We are all aware that it began with the virus attack in the capital city of Wuhan in the Hubei province, China and the health experts named it (CO)rona (VI)rus (D)iscese of 20(19) = Covid 19. It indeed is still real and afflicting the masses in major parts of the world, latest being Melbourne and Toronto, and Sri Lanka’s early October apparel industry based cluster indicate that any place can come under attack by the vicious virus even though some countries have begun to speak and comment on a post Covid ‘new normal’ adjustments. The most affected areas now sluggishly recovering is the overall economic activity across the globe. The celebrated social life during 2020 Spring and Summer seasons of the world that go through six + months of cold weather in a regular year, suffered unprecedentedly in recent history just like the more vulnerable communities in the ‘developing world’. No one was spared.

REAL CONCERNS:

The recent India-China border dispute, South and East China sea tension with its neighbors, the unfinished battle over Kashmir

between India and Pakistan have made South and Far East a hot spot debate and controversy. The disparities United States' between the federal laws and state laws have re-emerged into a new discussion. European Union's new divided loyalties to US and China because of serious investments by the latter party. The presidential elections of the US with the severe challenged to the incumbent leadership for its failure to protect its citizens with a national strategy, US-Sino relations have intensified also over the Covid19 related issues and the military presence on the South and West China seas, EU is threatening legal action against the UK's violation of Brexit agreements, Russian leadership seeking 12-year presidency for the incumbent leader. Israel's obstinate attempt to contribute with the annexation of the West Bank with the US support, the Lebanese economic collapse alongside the explosion at the main harbor precincts, the petro-dollar dominated Middle East and heading for possible petro-Yuan, South American and African Covid 19 virus related health vulnerability leading to already suffered economies are only a part of the litany of global anguish and unpredictability. The nations and people in human relations to economics, trade and travel and more conspicuously international relations and governance are polarized and in some cases at a tipping point in deeply plural world. The regions and the countries must contain political and social stability in the recovery plans, development and security to re-stabilize each of their countries at this point of history. It is in this real context we want our contributors and the readership to reflect seriously a way forward with their specific scenarios with enhanced pluralities and tensed polarities. The flying visit of the high ranking officers of the 'Beijing's power house' could raise

the newest of the concerns in the Indo-Pacific relations, particularly with India and the US interest in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

SRI LANKA FOCUS:

Sri Lanka's response to Covid 19 has been arguably admirable as declared by the UN institutions like



“The ‘flying visit’ of the high ranking officers of ‘Beijing powerhouse’ in early October, and Washington’s secretary of state and his entourage visiting South Asia which included a strategic hop-in and hop-out into Colombo in late October in the middle of Covid19, indicate that Sri Lanka might be in the middle of a decisive moment of sensitive international politics and even potential conflict unless Colombo remains far more intelligently nonaligned.”

the WHO as well as other world bodies due to its focused management strategy and strictly regulated health related quarantine policy which curtailed the spread into a large scale social infection.

But it was proven that even Sri Lanka remained vulnerable with the latest spread of the infection in early October. There is a lot more experience now gained by the health and security personnel to handle it this time around. Hopefully they are able to managed it a second time. Political analysts and other international observers have assessed that the overwhelming electoral mandate to the party that the president (elected in Dec 2019) represents gained at the general Election August 2020 (belated due to Covid19) was de facto, the orderly management of the epidemic without growing it into pandemic. The apolitical president with his style of governance, his military training and the lingering connections, the military involvement in a health calamity alongside the health professional made him a likable leader among the masses so far. The mandate he and his government received it seemed like the way he managed to handle it while many nations still struggle and desperately attempt to make ends meet with means at their disposal. Some argue that a ‘strong leadership’ paved the way to would save the country and its people from the disastrous disease that disabled most developed countries while some other dismiss such claims. It is now proven that with less than 14 fatalities in a country like is Sri Lanka has reached certain model of containment and management. However, full term governance with the mandate provided with constitutional amendments and a wounded and sluggishly moving economy with a colossal debt to settle is an uphill task to the incumbent regime with legitimate uncertainties of the minority populations within the country. The fractured opposition with the historically popular right of centre party (United National Party,) being absent in the parliament, religion and its political influx into civic life, rights groups alongside the socially and politically conscious groups are

conspicuously clamoring against polarizing politics and governance. Hence, there is a real challenge for the newly elected president with his well mandated government to deal with the polarities and the pluralities of the polity of this island-nation at this point of time. Looking at the region of South Asia and the Far East is also in turmoil as some sociologists observe and researching whether the world might be too connected and that this very connectivity has led to these emerging pluralities and polarities. Their findings should be interesting fodder for discussion and debate on the subject.

WHAT THEN IS PLURALITY?:

It's a state of being plural, being numerous or in large numbers. It also indicates more than half of the whole, majority, multitude, a diversity that cannot be by passed. It's a social reality of the present world, because there are hardly any monolithic society around us today. In social studies analysts have found that while some groups consider plurality as a value, while some others shun it as a threat to one's identity. From bio diversity in the natural world to the cultural, ethnic, language, civilizational and religious identities are a mosaic like richness among human communities that we could investigate in scholarship and research.

Some argue strongly that such plurality should be harnessed and enhanced to harvest their maximum potential but in sincere engagement with that which is plural. So that people to people relations both among them as well as within each plurality could be appreciated. This potential is untapped because of fears and prejudices against the 'other'. The creation of 'the other' without appreciating the 'otherness of the other' has indeed made obvious conflicts and polarizations

between different groups and within even among the homogenous groups per se. To be plural could be uncomfortable because it causes uncertainty and fear, therefore they feel that it is better to subscribe to what is known and that which provides assurance to 'me, us and ours' rather than 'them and theirs' which is perceived as danger. This is real to many and they live by this conviction and wish that such be



“we want to suggest whether in society there is a possibility of 'non-polar position' or an attitude which can be maintained and not belonging to any polarity. This last position (non-polar) is like the Buddhist perspective of the middle path (*majjhima patipada*) avoiding extremes or polarizing views and positions”

accepted by all as the absolute truth. However, in the real world it does not work as they desire and most likely end up in conflict and dissension - polarity

UNDERSTANDING POLARITY:

It's simply understood as having two opposite tendencies or opposite electrical or magnetic charges unless it is problematized. The word originates perhaps from the geologically physical regions of the North and the South poles of the

landmass of the planet earth. However, the word has gone through complex transformation in international relations and diplomacy where there is a position of unipolar (centering of single power) approach, secondly the bipolar view (two economic power blocks working or opposing), thirdly the tripolar operationalizing (military, economic and political power in union or in conflict).

Fourthly the multipolar tendencies (having one or several objectives but with different agenda for trade and commerce, security and intelligence sharing). Lastly, we want to suggest whether in society there is a possibility of 'non-polar position' or an attitude which can be maintained and not belonging to any polarity. This last position (non-polar) is like the Buddhist perspective of the middle path (*majjhima patipada*) avoiding extremes or polarizing views and positions. These views, perspectives and approaches have penetrated into every strata of human behavior and into all other phenomena. More so with the Covid19 pandemic which, de facto has displaced everything people held so far as important to them. Hence, there is a new reason to rethink and review how best the 'people to people relations', institutions and new social infrastructure may be redesigned.

NEW CHALLENGES:

The Challenges of Covid19 have been enormous globally. No country, region, people or state was spared, hence there is a need to search together for solutions while each country attempts to cope, handle, care and control the virus. There are no victors in the fight against this 'silent enemy' that began in Wuhan moved all the way to Western Europe, New York to Brazil and now back in India, and the battle against the virus is far from over it

emerges sporadically across the population until a reliable vaccine is devised.

Various governments and states obviously headed the pandemic control strategy with their health institutions, experts and other means at their disposal. Some performed comparatively well while others have managed but at a heavy loss of human lives. And as we write this editorial, the struggle continues with further losses reaching the global fatalities to over a 1.3 million and those infected into 41.3 million with a recovered population of about 28.1 million as we go to press.

It is in this context that the world's governments, financial institutions, civil society groups, regional economic alliances, banks, aviation, tourist and the apparel industries, social movements and political parties are all struggling to recover and discover at the same time new areas of conduct, ways of functioning and relating to each other. Hence, we at *Social Justice* in this volume wish to explore with contributors as well as the readership to think through some of these processes and be of value to the development of ideas at this time of social and political recuperation for global communities with the pandemic still challenging their very core.

It is in this context that we reached out to our colleague in the Global South, **Diego Irazaval CSC** from Santiago, Chile who tells us the importance of plurality of his part of the world. A perfect hybrid of the natives, the 'slaves' sold, bought and brought by the 'explorers', the white Europeans and out of which emerged a melting pot of South America is a profound plurality. Irazaval is right into it as 'a hybrid' himself challenging his own identity in par with the

polarities out there from Punta Gallinas (Columbia) to Ushuaia (Argentina). Who is that 'other' in Chile, he queries, aren't 'all others' part of this same but strange hybridization? Certainly an incisive reading but he prefers to go back to roots, a form of spirituality to be



“Humanity is One but Many at the same time. The challenge before all parties concerned from governance to leisure is as to how we accept the oneness of each and the manyness of the rest without simply 'othering' the 'other' because the 'other' is different – this de facto, is the discussion on plurality and polarity inescapable”

embraced through 'relationality and care' because the roots too are also founded in pluralities and polarities.

One of our former editors, **Oswald Firth OMI** writes from down under (Adelaide) and makes strong references to post-Covid19 scenario and confronts the aftermath impact of the pandemic even if it has led communities to more severe pluralities and polarities. While he contours the movement of the virus from Wuhan via Europe to the US then into Brazil, in fact migrated with political implications even though a disease is a disease – Firth

indeed reflects on useful pointers as the readership is also global and plural. He highlights pope Francis, "... for weeks it has been evening... value the ordinary... pandemic could redeem...", but the appeal is that we must build hope upon hope for a new beginning and community based solidarity even though they are severely plural and sensitively throbb in polarity, hence must be tenderly handled.

A versatile diplomat **Palitha Kohana** reiterates to the reader the global symbol of plurality and polarity within the global institution of the United Nations (UN) where he worked for several years. He is in fact well placed and suited to write this piece, and with an informed clarity, focusses and argues that the UN had been fundamentally strategic for creating a better world desiring a wholesome human conduct for equitable social living since the end of WWII but yet he consciously reminds the reader that in other several instances the UN indeed has failed by the most vulnerable and the hard to reach populations across the globe because also of political reasons. He also shares with the reader that the UN has harvested the best out of individuals whose skills to the global utility which otherwise would have been born local and withered local too.

One of our current co-editors, **Joe William** himself a senior trainer, provides the reader with the case study of Sri Lankan polity and of a possible thinking and a direction for social transformation as a response to both the pluralities and polarities encountered by its diverse communities. He argues that conflict resolution and even conflict management alone would not suffice as such basically attempt a temporary breathing space and could even be impediments to truth

seeking and reconciliation. His suggestion is that conflict transformation is geared fundamentally towards to unravel the root of the conflict and to deploy conflict itself to transform those actors in multi polar directions with diverse perspectives for a consensus of 'win-win' paradigm. His eight pointer formula is worth paying attention to.

Interestingly our guest poet, **Dilantha Gunawardana** titles his poem *Potpourris*, may be it's the poet's alternative 'one word' for our 'sophisticated theme' - *Pluralities and Polarities*, alluding to some satire and invites the readers to think global.

WRAPPING UP:

We as editors are confident that you will encounter some serious and interesting material by our contributors to think through on what you already have read, heard, seen and experienced in your own milieu wherever you are in this global village. Most of you reach this magazine via a link we have created because we only print about 100 hard copies just enough for our library deposits and those who still desire to hold on to an 'actual copy'. This is how we seem to have moved on into this century with 'cloud infrastructure and storage'. Looking back our concerns and issues remain pretty unchanged basically, but appear with different frills and coatings. Hence, we must both recognize the core and the coating to hold the whole with wholesome clarity, objectivity and justly.

We as humans were with pluralities and polarities as described in any mega narrative of the origins of human beings whether it be religious, socio-anthropological including the evolutionary discourses and archiological discoveries. Humans were plural and

functioned in uni-polar, bi polar, tri polar, multi polar and even none polar behavioral patterns. The present generation of this third Millennium humans genetically are more complex and their sophistication with evolved brain capacity to read and make sense of molecular biology, cloud technology



“from bio diversity in the natural world to the cultural, ethnic, language, civilizational and religious identities are a mosaic like richness among human communities that we could investigate in scholarship and research”

to cyber warfare with ease and imagination. In the last one hundred years humans have taken leaps that they did not dare in thousands of years, like from discovering fire to the discovery of the wheel to the chip. All the innovations in between these thousands of years have made human more intricately competitive and their pluralities and polarities to have expanded and made a composite array of behavior and understanding the nature of reality.

Such scenario should also push humanity to contain plurality as a natural ingredient of being human and to realize that by virtue of this very plurality is the *raison d'être* for polarity which could pave the way for dissension, division and conflict unless those involved understand,

contain and deal with them appropriately. Interestingly our four contributors dwell on this very core issue that we still grapple as humans but from each of their perspective.

Humanity is One but Many at the same time. The challenge before all parties concerned from governance to leisure is as to how we accept the oneness of each and the manyness of the rest without simply 'othering' the 'other' because the 'other' is different – this de facto, is the discussion on plurality and polarity inescapable.

We have attempted with our contributors to give you a glimpse of the discussion that has been around us and more poignantly during the dark moments that we all are going through in 2020 with the global health crisis – We have failed on many fronts as regions and countries because of many auxiliary issues we have prioritized but we cannot allow us to be defeated by a virus. People and communities must rise like phoenix not in a fictional world but in a real world with hope and aspiration to build resilient communities; pragmatic, wise and insightfully able to read the signs and not brag, but be prepared as responsible leaders and prepare people to face the modern challenges of calamities of all kinds. This indeed is learning plurality to face polarity at every level.



WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY OF THE PREVIOUS VOLUME SOCIAL JUSTICE - MAR/APR 2020 (BELATED -MAY/JUNE)

The March/April 2020 (belated) issue of Social Justice dedicated to the theme of *People Building and Dreaming Future* is very much relevant to the current concerns of almost every nation of the world. No doubt the personal quality of individuals determines the quality of a nation but people building is the most challenging goal which requires the right direction, right strategy, right culture, right decisions, right system, right policies, right communication, right education, right paradigm, and right leadership.

This volume beautifully highlights the need for people building, challenges the reader to attain this specific goal and to deploy effective strategies for people building and dreaming future. The suggested approaches in several articles to people development, scope and examples, pragmatic methodologies though in the context of Sri Lanka, still seems to me applicable across the borders. Certain social dynamics can contribute to nation building and the correlation between personal transformation and social change, the role and responsibility of the political leadership for the development within a conducive democratic system for social justice, equality, respect for diversity, inclusiveness, and dialogue.

It's an enormously important issue that is being addressed in your

esteemed magazine. The message is loud and clear that the responsibility of political leadership is to create a culture in Sri Lanka where people could flourish and grow to the best of their potential and eventually tender their best to society. I have enjoyed reading and learned many things about the Sri Lankan society. I congratulate the editorial team of 'Social Justice' for continuing to produce such a beautifully crafted and a useful volume to engage those near and far like us.

Hafiz Abdul Ghani, former Dean of Humanities, currently working as Associate Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies at Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan.



I applaud this edition of 'Social Justice' (March/ April 2020, belated) for the timely theme chosen on *People Building Dreaming the Future*. I believe that is the core of a People building process. In this sense the article on the Hizmet model of education attracted my attention. It argues well on the possibility of a holistic education which can be applied in most cultures, not only the Islamic, as it is grounded on plurality and critical engagement. The writers of this specific article draw inspiration

from Fetuallh Gülen, a Turkish scholar-imam now self-exiled in Pennsylvania. The writers argue that this holistic education is based on a secular philosophy, which involves the family in the process and makes a thorough investment on the teachers' formation of the young for the building of an ideal moral agency to empower the ordinary people to be the builders of their own destiny, with freedom, self-determination and autonomy. Secondly, my attention drew to Sr. Rasika Pieris' dreams of a future that should move to a plurinationalism that can accommodate the political grievances of the minority communities and nations. Dialogue, inclusion and respect for religion while critiquing caste, ethnicity, gender, class would be useful towards social change and for people building and dreaming a shared future.

From Brazil I send my congratulations to the editorial team of 'Social Justice' for this relevant and courageous work in the areas of social justice, right political reading and human rights in Sri Lanka and further afield.

Luiza Etsuko Tomita, teaches feminist theology and subjects in religious studies. Obtained her D.Th. Methodist University of São Paulo and MA (Biblical Studies, Pontificia Faculdade de Teologia N.S. Assunção), São Paulo. She was also the former president of EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World

Theologians 2011-2017) and lives in São Paulo, Brazil.



It is timely indeed that the theme of the March/ April, 2020, (belated) of ‘Social Justice’ *People Building and Dreaming Future*, which recognizes the urgent need for such a venture after the disappointing failure that was the *Yahapalana* (good governance/ Sri Lanka) rule (2015-2019). The theme aptly follows the previous theme, *Alliances: Frictions and Factions*, (previous volume) that examined critically the Sri Lankan reality and raised concerns very convincingly, was followed up *People Building and Dreaming Future* (last volume) geared to the common good and sustainable integral human development could be challenging and tedious. Such obviously is a crucial life-line for survival in the context of a globalized power-driven and politico-economic control upheld by a system, where the developing countries are sieged by its well-crafted neo-colonial structures paralyzing local economies. These indeed have disrupted the socio-cultural realities and are at the beck and call of the hegemonic thrust of the global powers and their geo-political intrusions that could easily lead to the fragmentation of these societies on diverse horizontal lines, destroying human and inter-cultural relationships. The magazine deals with these issues upfront and deserves readers’ attention.

People Building and Dreaming Future originating from the ordinary, common folk, the poor, that form the real majority of Sri Lankan society too. This scenario is also found in many contexts globally across all ethnic, caste, religious and cultural boundaries

and Sri Lanka joins in solidarity to strive and seek justice for a better world which I believe is the objective of the magazine. This volume is very concrete, (down to earth) and thought-provoking and I hope it would inspire readers to be engaged in this *People Building and Dreaming Future* endeavour. The work is commendable and must be encouraged and is in the right spirit of some of the pioneering editors of this magazine with whom I have worked for several years.

Marlene Perera FMM, is a religious sister of the Franciscan Missionary of Mary (FMM), currently retired, a social scientist and a theologian, taught sociology for several years also a member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT/Sri Lanka) and was its the Asian coordinator of women’s commission for five years. Her ministry had been both within the urban and rural setting for several years and now lives in a suburb in South of Colombo.



The recent volume (belated May/June 2020) *Social Justice* is composed of a few intentionally collected set of articles focusing on how human communities be formed and nurtured, developed and strengthened justly. The current volume is thematised as *People Building Dreaming Future*. I have to state here honestly that I salute the gigantic effort of my respected mentor and the editor-in-chief of the magazine, Prof. Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi whom I have come across as a teacher in practice help grow others. I am privileged to share this thought here, that I am

such a typical example from Nigeria, West Africa, supported by his intellectual acumen. *Social Justice* is academically a pioneering piece of work, with an excellent community approach and deals with timely issues. Reading its analysis and ideas it contains as well, testing them in practice, could definitely change the mind set of people. Most of the perspectives and ideas deliberated in the magazine are socially and politically guided and socially alert and indeed help the reader to adopt if necessary into their own context.

The models of ‘people building’ which the *Social Justice* promotes, it seems to me is a worthy attempt all the way from Colombo, Sri Lanka to share with the rest of the world like me in Nigeria. My recommendation is, that *Social Justice* should be released online and whenever possible in hard copies to various institutes of higher learning across the globe. I wish the editorial team many more themes to rally our thinking in the years to come.

Shuaibu Umar Gokaru is an academic with a PhD in Islamic History and Civilization, (University of Malaya 2017), Malaysia. Currently, is a lecturer in the Department of Islamic Studies (Bauchi State University, Gadau, Nigeria). His areas of expertise include Sokoto Caliphate Literature, Islamic Science and Religious Studies and lives in Bauchi, Nigeria.



Relationality: A Challenge to both Plurality and Polarity

Diego Irarrazaval CSC



Preamble

Individuals and groups in the Americas are ensnared by neo-liberal and neo-colonial traps. However, many communities attempt to survive with dignity and honour. People are able to create healthy relationships and negotiate them within asymmetric societies. They move in and out of modern patterns of marginality. There is resistance to violence, and there are alternatives beyond widespread disjunctions. Some of these unending contestations, opposition across the

regions can be unpleasant and harmful even though there is value in the basis of contestations by the people against manipulative power brokering and economic affluence.

As we journey through history, we have been given insights into basic needs such as land and water. Chilean poet Elicura Chilhaulaf refers to cosmic joy and justice:

*“I feel the first drops falling on the fields
Let this water soak me!*

I hear myself say, dancing amongst the flowers.

*When I wake up I will rise
Touched and held up by the scent of lavender*

If the Earth belongs to nobody, then those that claim to own it are oppressors”. (1)

Fertile reciprocity, on one side, and unhealthy polarities, on the other side, are the concerns of this article (which develops a South American perspective).



“Human imagination pushes us for ethical alternative and actions; a shift from progress to care; and fragile routes of faith without disjunction”



Connectedness

Unceasing longing for ultimate concerns (and contemporary technologies) allow us to be here and also there; to have intercultural identities; to suspect any either/or, truth/myth, right/wrong, we (equaling *good*) and they (equaling *evil*). This perspective does not imply relativism since symbolic actions that damage people and the environment are unacceptable. At stake are subtle and cruel forms of disjunctive behavior, intolerance of those considered enemies. Languages of faith announce that we are not owners of the ‘Other’, nor owners of the Earth. A plundered universe, our ‘Common Home’, demands ecological and political conversion (Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015) so that all may enjoy a bountiful and polychromatic coexistence.

Human imagination pushes us for ethical alternative and actions; a shift from progress to care; and fragile routes of faith without disjunction. The South American viewpoint in which relationality goes together with sustainability helps the populations to engage creatively in a process of decolonization of very thinking and searching for symbols, stories and rituals to readjust their path to freedom. It has a focus on connectedness and integral care. It surpasses strategies of destruction of our planet and destroying the same or more in each of us whether we belong to the global South or the global North. To imagine and weave alternatives is a priority and a value in itself. Unfortunately, many only see a ‘planetary crisis’; that breeds fear and apathy. Such had sent warnings for a catastrophic future, futility of having ‘no alternative mechanism except the *status quo*’ is a dangerous

path and we in South America would not buy it once again like we did in the 15th century when the Spanish (1494) and the Portuguese (1498) seafarers travelled to the West looking for the East. A mistaken direction which led to a ‘programmatically civilizing agenda’ with severe pogroms and plunder that significantly victimized most parts of the global South. We now smile but with courage want to tell the new forms of dominance to assess their strategies before they plunge, because our people have assessed their first plight and do not wish a second telecast.

Alternative Coalition and a Praxis

While the planet is undergoing chaos, each day there are demands for compassion, joining in the struggles of the poor in the Global South and communicating symbols that enhance hope. This happens among the fragile creative populations throughout the world. Several coalitions bring about each World Social Forum (WSF) which take place since 2001. The next one is scheduled in Mexico 2021/2022. Within the context of the WSF, the World Forum on Liberation and Theology (WFTL) has regularly met simultaneously. In the Americas, in the midst of the Covid19 pandemic, networks of social scientists, as well as ecological and political leaders, have begun to proclaim a *Social Charter* with ecological, economic and intercultural dimensions, in order to nourish social hope in post-Covid-19. Its thrust is to build dignity and a common horizon of transformation, questioning mere reforms to capitalism, and confronting concentrations of wealth, and the destruction of the environment. (2)

Interestingly the draft of a *Social Charter in the Americas* has nine

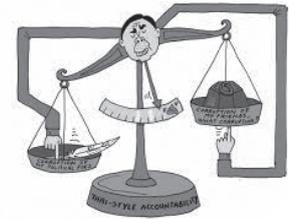
concerns: 1) tax reform for the sake of solidarity; 2) an end of foreign debt, and an economic reconstruction; 3) systems of human care and just employment; 4) adequate food for all and universal basic income; 5) care of water and land that implies no extractivism; 6) trustworthy communication and information; 7) sustainable local and regional programs; 8) interaction at all levels; 9) world market autonomy. All of this may seem to be unrealistic wishes, yet, several organizations have agreed to consider these goals. What seems crucial is to have a course of action in each of these huge concerns. There is a need to have a ‘road map’ to verify that steps taken lead us to comprehensive goals.

An ethical discernment of these, and other urgent needs, has not only humanistic and non-discriminatory principles; but also displays challenges of “care”. Taking care of the environment includes justice owed to millions whose existence and historical dreams are endangered. This perspective moves us to be critical of abuses by elitists (academic, religious, political) who have in their hands most of our available resources. Obviously, this implies replacing empires and their corresponding structures of power, and giving birth and nurturing interactions that are symmetrical and life-giving.

These ethical and socio-political factors go hand-in-hand with ethical claims for accountability, cultural humility and dialogue, spiritual courage and communal feeling. Moreover, they go beyond a type of neo-liberal pluralism, dualistic polarization, miraculous solutions. They also enhance peaceful hearts; and empower marginalized people; and foster harmony with all living entities.



“Social and political factors go hand-in-hand with ethical claims for accountability, cultural humility and dialogue, spiritual courage and communal feeling”



They help us to endure sickness and to foster hope. In the midst of ambiguities, we choose transparency.

What has been underscored here is that socio-economic transformation is linked to basic forms of care. Such concerns are highlighted by the *Social Charter* in the Americas. It is supposed to contour key ecological and intercultural dimensions requiring complementary input by the social sciences, philosophy, theology and the arts. When there is concern for authentic pluralism, and when grassroots programs foster critical enlightenment, flexibility is a vital step on a long journey.

Paradigm Shift Towards Interactive Care

There are plenty of naïve good wishes ‘to change the world’. Such noble desires are framed in deceitful language: Within Western societies, and in the Global South, few elites benefit from “progress”; almost everyone struggles with the dichotomy of consumerism and ‘happiness’; and most of us are disenchanting. Such a catastrophic situation is unfortunately not only due to external imposition and alienation; but also part of our subjective and communal enterprises in the South. Institutional politics, education standards, economic management, and even most religious and ecclesiastical policies accept myths of progress.

However, among marginalized populations, daily hard work means survival and is reflected in horizontal compassion, intimacy among relatives and friends, festivals of all kinds and the grassroots organizations. In Latin America, it is often said that marginalized people are the most generous - as it so happens in the midst of the Covid19 tragedy - and

also the most joyful, in spite of structural injustices. Therefore, in spontaneous connections, and in day-to-day activities, we appreciate alternative values and goals amidst ambiguity.

It should be emphasized that the need for a ‘paradigm shift’ has been debated for several decades. It may be described as a proposal of an eco-human relational model of existence. It implies moving forward into what is already taking place. It is not that one way of doing science or politics becomes useless and another one is invented. It is not a competition between past and future. It is not either/or: either diabolic economy or an egalitarian interchange of goods; either pluralism or authoritarianism; either modern rationality and science or local level technology and wisdom.

Theological Input

Among Latin American theologians, Leonardo Boff has for decades offered insights and courageous proposals. After describing religion as connectedness or binding (*religare*, Lat.) he states: “Either we continue in our model of civilization (and along a path headed toward a planet-wide cataclysm) or we shift directions - a new paradigm - and in so doing safeguard *Gaia*, her sons and daughters, and our common future”; and, writing on the ethic of care, he adds, “Spirituality, and not religion, helps to have alternatives in a new paradigm of civilization”. (3) Thus, spiritual paths transform civilizations. In this way, there may be a shift of direction, a revolutionary compassion among humans and other entities in a ‘common home’.

Exactly why does humanity move into wholeness: being with others, trusting the Other? An insightful intercultural

thinking is being developed by Josef Estermann based on his experience in Peru and his research of Western European philosophy. The fundamental principle (*arjé* Gk.) is that everything and everyone is due to relationality. All is related to all. It is a relationship occurring in multiple dimensions (ethical, ontological, holistic, esthetic, spiritual, etc.). Nothing is only of itself and self-sufficient. Relationality is the heart of the universe. Transcendent immanence is neither dualism nor a monistic phantasy. This must be acknowledged when we approach the mysteries of creation and incarnation.

To paraphrase Estermann, among Andean people, as well as other autochthonous communities, God is a relational entity. No cosmic reality, no particular entity, exists in and of itself. The Cartesian illusion of a *cogito ergo sum* seems absurd; being is relational; ontology is inter-ontology. Estermann writes, “Reality (as a whole) exists as inter-related beings and events Ontology is a reasonable relationality God is *relatio relationum*.” (4) This discourse arises within indigenous Andean communities, allowing us to delve into, and understand, layers of symbols and celebrations of cosmic harmony.

Based on everyday existence (with its injustice, struggles, festivals, wisdom), Latin American voices have been sharing ethical claims. We abandon widespread individualistic absolutes and engage in ethical relationality. This implies, in the words of Jose Luis Gonzalez, “an option that seeks the other, new and different . . . so that we as Latin Americans may open horizons of possibilities; it also implies a paradigm of care, of revolutionary tenderness, since -according to Leonardo Boff’s thinking- “care offers justice to the downtrodden and

acknowledges the Earth as mother of all” (5). These claims reject systemic suffering and nurture shared hope.

It is a long-term and fascinating paradigm shift. As has happened for centuries in other parts of the world, neo-colonial events are moving us in the direction of material and subjective progress. At the same time, people’s narratives and rituals offer other guidelines and values. What is experienced is a struggle against evil born of dreams of peace forged by justice. For many of us, this is perceived in indigenous mythical narratives and communal festivals (6). However, internal and external violence, resignation to modern fate, and other factors, undermine people’s rightful dreams and actions.

Peoples' Talents and Visions

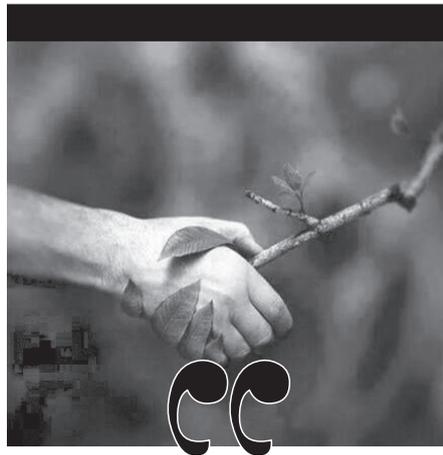
There is a deep and long historical dilemma. Progress—as a moral absolute and secular deity—frames modernity with its techno-science and narcissistic logic. However, from the Neolithic to the present, life endures through mutual care; it seems to be the way to survive on our damaged planet with our unceasing wars. Mutual care is not a mere intersection of socio-economic and gender dynamics; nor is it merely nice behavior. Rather, it means less systemic violence and more reciprocal nurturing among humans and our environment.

How does this take place?. Fragile communities have few resources, but they abound in creative gifts and talents; responsibility, by mostly women; labor in favor of the common good; art that implies empathy with nature and concern for the ultimate; several kinds of friendship, love and solidarity; and procedures to decrease violence and reach reconciliation.

In the indigenous Quechua civilization, it is called *yanantin* (helping each other), a complementarity among different (and at times incompatible) entities. In African contexts: village and family meetings, conflict resolution, building consensus. These are priorities in Swahili *hakuna matata* (no worries, no problems). Nigeria and Western African have forms

of social mediations; and rituals of reconciliation.

Regions in Asia with Buddhist traditions propose a middle path (*Majjhima patipada*/avoiding extremes), facing hardships with forbearance. Peace-building by Muslim women have been very



“ plural routes of faith, as well as routes of unbelief, are grounded in a healing dynamic of care. As we, suffering humanity, survive on a damaged planet, mutual care implies the gift of life without barriers. In other words, everyone and everything is at home in the mystery of connectedness”

important in Indonesia, Egypt and elsewhere. Confucian values, like *yueh* (harmony), do not enforce right/wrong pseudo-ethical dualism; rather, it seeks restorative justice. Politics in Asia has been gifted with the Gandhian nonviolent (*Ahimsa*) resistance and strategies of harmony. The latter is “the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia.” (7). This implies spiritual resistance since Western exaltation of human autonomy details rejection of God’s salvation. Once again, here we have

resistance to harmful disjunctions.

In other words, alternatives do exist, and they are carried out (more or less) by frail human associations and programs. Cultural values and spiritual inputs are not only welcome, they are absolutely necessary. These manifestations of relationality surpass, but do not eliminate dualisms and the either/or that endanger human survival.

Wisdom through Plural Faith Routes

Our hearts and heads are daily invaded and spoiled, formatted with indifference toward other people’s suffering. We are also misled into warfare between “good” and “bad”. Moreover, there are conflicts between cultural and religious symbols. So reflective action is challenged by global structures of emotional and social tension (where some are winners and most are losers.) On the other hand, indifference, unfair competition and denial of rights of those who are different also happens among those of us who claim to be at the service of liberation, yet are spoiled like others.

Everyone is tainted by global factors such as an omnipotent market place and commerce; secular education and social media full of either/or propositions, and discriminatory institutions at the hands of the powerful elite. These are also obstacles when one tries to understand primal religions, contemporary faith routes, and syncretic postmodern trends. Moreover, throughout the world, western hierarchical patterns of Christianity refuse partnership with plurality of faiths. Such obstacles are enormous. Therefore, many leave aside options of faith that include plurality and relationality, or they become agnostics with human values.

What is most meaningful for several areas of the world is (non-Western) Christianity, even though churches have neo-colonial programs. Afro-Christian elements are rooted in traditional, primal, indigenous, urban cultures. African rituals and ethics can grow within independent Christian



“unending contestations, opposition across the regions can be unpleasant and harmful even though there is value in the basis of contestations by the people against manipulative power brokering and economic affluence”



denominations. An evangelistic narrative declares: “Christianity as the religion of the poor of the earth . . . By his Cross, Jesus desacralized all worldly power, relativizing its inherent tendency, in a fallen universe; to absolutize itself . . . The Cross desacralizes all structures that rule human existence and history (family, nation, social class, race, law, politics, economy, religion, culture, tradition, custom, ancestors) stripping them all of any pretensions of ultimacy . . . Since the roots of sacralization in African tradition lie in religion . . . it is as religion that the Christian gospel is able to meet the African in depth” (8). This evangelistic interpretation presupposes intercultural benefits, and it leans towards fundamentalism.

Asian traditions show how wisdom arises from the poor, the marginalised and their quest for life. A systematic Indian theologian Anthoniraj Thumma (who participates in social movements) emphasizes his Asian experience: “articulation of the divine, the interrelationship between the divine, the human and the cosmos . . . People encounter the divine more often in the secular sphere than in the religious practices . . . The secular is sacred and theological in itself . . . The wisdom of the weak is cosmic, relational, life-oriented, mystical, political, soteriological” (9). Therefore, experience is not an either/or. Polarity between ‘we’ and ‘they’ does not enhance the human condition.

Concluding Remarks

Wisdom exists in people’s talents and tasks, and is not a privilege of elites nor of religions that pretend to be winners. Those of us who specialize in science, theology or philosophy

may practice relationality with those who (being on the margins) live gospel values. Humility in the light of truth often goes together with experiences of vulnerability. Hopefully, this may happen among social and spiritual leaders.

Moreover, plural routes of faith, as well as routes of unbelief, are grounded in a healing dynamic of care. As we, suffering humanity, survive on a damaged planet, mutual care implies the gift of life without barriers. In other words, everyone and everything is at home in the mystery of connectedness.

Everyone is involved in unceasing interaction. A relational paradigm of care implies collaboration. This does not happen miraculously. Rather, it is a holistic ethic which empowers those who are victims of myths of progress (that lead to frustration).

A weak humanity is capable of wisdom and life-giving connections. For this to occur, a paradigm shift is urgent. As in ancient cultures, the new paradigm of care has ethical, political and spiritual dimensions. Such a shift will foster connections among us in Asia, Africa and the Americas. It takes place in an unpredictable global *kairos* engulfed in sickness and injustice. As articulated in the prophetic, primal poetry of Elicura Chihuailaf, all are healed when able to receive drops of water, to wake up and rise, to be touched by flowers of relationality, to struggle and to enjoy a ‘Common Home’.

Endnotes.

1) Elicura Chihuailaf, *De sueños azules y contrasueños*, (Santiago: Universitaria, 1995).

2) See <https://pactosocialdelsur.com>.

Institutions in Africa, Asia, North-South, are considering a ‘Global Green New Deal’, which is different from so called green programs where systemic change is absent. (Retrieval of website, September 10, 2020)

3) Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the earth, cry of the poor*, (NY: Orbis, 1997), 74; and *El cuidado esencial, ética de lo humano, compasión de la tierra*, (Madrid: Trotta, 2001), 21. Other interdisciplinary approaches: Jean Gardiner, *Gender, Care and Economics*, (London: MacMillan, 1997); Dietmut Bubeck, *Care, Gender and Justice*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), Valeria Esquivel, *The care economy in Latin America* (El Salvador: UNDP, 2011).

4) Autochthonous world views and western-Christian civilization have not only different epistemologies, the former is life-giving and the latter has colonial and destructive standards; see Josef Estermann, *Filosofía Andina*, (La Paz: ISEAT, 2006, 123-150, 245-275, 295), and inter-cultural dialogue is also crucial (309-319).

5) José Luis Gonzalez, *Ética latinoamericana*, (Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1986, 219-220), Leonardo Boff, *El cuidado esencial*, (Madrid: Trotta, 2002, 156-7).

6) Festivals that refer to Mary (as is the case of Potosi and Oruro in Bolivia) are bearers of ritual wisdom of marginalized people, see Dietmar Mussig, *Die Jungfrau im Silberberg: Ein kolonialzeitliches Marienbild aus Potosi als Zeugnis andiner Theologie*, (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2020).

7) Felix Wilfred, *Margins, Site of Asian Theologies*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 118; other official catholic guidelines in Vimal Thirimanna, *Sprouts of theology from the Asian soil* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2007). Intolerance also happens; but it is not what Christians choose in Asia.

8) Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa. The renewal of a non-western religion*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 126, 245-246.

9) Anthoniraj Thumma, *Wisdom of the Weak. Foundation of people’s theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 43, 27, 29.

THE UN @ 75: NAVIGATING THROUGH PLURALITIES AND POLARITIES

Palitha Kohana



Introduction

A modest mention must be made at the outset of this discussion on the founding of the League of Nations (1920-1946), an international diplomatic group developed after World War I (1914-1918) as a way to solve disputes between countries before they erupted into direct confrontations. Some argue that it provided a good precursor model though it became dysfunctional with the new challenges of the World War II as if to give way to a new world body. UN arguably might be the 'handsome and the active child' of the League of Nations indeed has matured now into 75 years amidst world's polarities and pluralities.

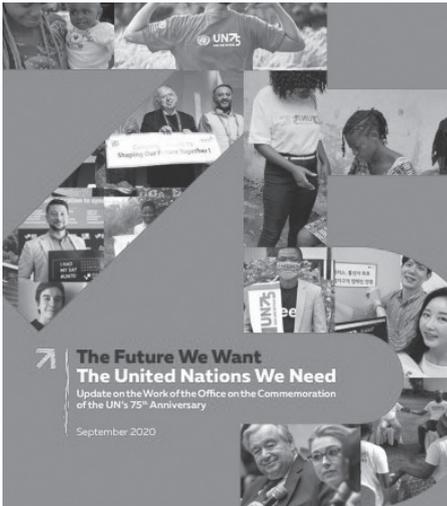
Sri Lanka has been a member state of

the United Nations since December 1955 when it secured admission following an East-West deal. In the ensuing years, it has played a role way above its size in UN circles, especially as an active member of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) of which the late premier of Sri Lanka Sirimavo Dias Bandaranayaka was an iconic pioneer. Sri Lanka provided leadership to some of the high profile initiatives of the Organisation. Among them the negotiations on the Law of the Sea Convention and its subsequent protocols, the development of international law, particularly treaty law, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)'s New International Economic Order (NIEO). Sri Lanka has been also contributing with its tri forces to the

UN peacekeeping missions since the Congo mission in the 1960s.

Old Enough to be Energetic

As the UN enters its 75th year, faded photographs stare down at corridors emptied by Covid 19 and ageless memorabilia faintly glisten in the semi darkness. Almost a sad reflection of the lofty dreams and silken aspirations of its founders perhaps not fully realized. Three quarters of a century at its Charter mandated tasks, of "saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, reaffirming faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, establishing conditions under



which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom..." (UN Charter 26 June 1945). It has been legitimately asked, as the UN toasts its diamond jubilee, whether it has been a success so far. Has it contributed, as designed, to making the world a better place for humanity, for all its people, for the environment and for future generations. Its 75th year is certainly time to honestly take stock and review its performance and assess whether it has done justice to the hoary expectations of its pioneering founders and their vision.

A Binding Charter

The UN Charter which was signed in 1945 by 50 states, encapsulated the hopes of a world hopelessly devastated by war and 60 million people from all walks of life displaced. It encapsulated the hopes of humanity and honestly aspired to avoid future wars and make the world a better place. The right wing media, in particular in the West, has tended to aim their critical spotlight on the UN's failures and its staff costs, which, incidentally, is less than the annual budget of the NY Fire Department.

Unusually this year, the deadly menace of the grim reaper, Covid19,



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hangs over the world as we write with its murderous scythe viciously decimating hundreds of thousands of lives. The General Assembly was held via Zoom technology as NY city still reels from the Covid19 assault with thousands dead already and second and the third spikes under way we go to press. The rude law enforcement officers, the chaos on the sidewalks, the blocked off streets, the hustle and bustle and the drama of the UN General Assembly would be conspicuously absent.

A Reality Check

With the creation of the UN, humanity went through a 'reality check' of the Cold War when the two superpowers of the day confronted each other in deadly earnest and with constant rhetoric threatening annihilation but did not fire their weapons or run the risk of mutual nuclear annihilation. The use of well-functioning conflict management mechanisms assisted in avoiding a mutually devastating catastrophe. It perhaps was more due to the unrelenting efforts of sagacious diplomats working in foreign ministries chipping away patiently at encrusted national positions obstructing the common good and visionary leaders rather than the efforts of the world body itself. Such individuals have a role to play again as we career towards more deadly confrontations forgetting the goals of the founding fathers.

But, during those years of surviving dangerously, the UN and other mechanisms provided the fora for a range of patiently negotiated disarmament and arms control

initiatives, despite the difficulties posed by the pointed barbs of manipulating political sharks and their manipulative strategies.

Polarizing Arms Race

The world witnessed the conclusion of a nuclear nonproliferation treaty in 1968, a biological and toxin weapons convention in 1972, a chemical weapons convention in 1993 and the comprehensive test ban treaty in 1996. The arms trade treaty was signed in 2013. There are indeed major and significant achievements, given the circumstances entrapped in hard to bend political positions. In addition to the multilateral agreements, significant bilateral arms limitation and disarmament treaties were also concluded and the international community gratefully blessed them.

Eventually, one super power forced the collapse of the other through sheer economic pressure. During the period of the Cold War, the UN could play only a low key role, if any at all, in resolving the bloody conflicts and proxy wars instigated by the super powers, as the resolution of most required their concurrence and people, women, children and other non-combatants, perished by the thousands. It was, nevertheless, convenient to blame the UN for the carnage.

The end of the Cold War restored the faith that the world body would be able to make more purposeful progress to realize humanity's dreams through genuinely cooperative efforts. The traditional protagonists

were no longer occupying the global stage. Sadly, it did not take long for some humans to discover newly minted enemies and villains, and today we are witnessing a worryingly full blown confrontation between the emerging Asian power offering an alternative model of political and economic development. China, and the US, had been the arch proponent of free enterprise capitalism and the global hegemon for almost a century and now it's acutely confrontational phase is loud and clear.

New Polarities

Arising of new polarities cannot be dismissed as regional difficulties or as part of the 'new normal' phenomenon. The world needs to find ways and means of dealing with these balkanizing tendencies among the regions and within the regions. It is almost theatrical if not for the uncertainties that are being foisted upon humanity and the whispered suggestions of a possible military confrontation. The strategic South and West China sea has been the theatre of this power muscle display which de facto is an unnecessary and almost a display of the inability to deal with pluralities among nations. The current confrontation spans military matters, trade, technology and even food, and is almost a replay of the 1980s when the US eyeballed the Soviet Union. The gauntlet has been thrown at China by the remaining superpower, the US, which was curiously its strategic partner since 1972. China is now designated the newly emerging strategic challenger to the US, economically, politically, technologically and militarily.

The US administration's 2017 National Security Strategy has identified Russia and China as revisionist powers seeking to undermine US global interests and is rapidly disengaging itself from China in multiple ways, including militarily, in trade, and diplomatically. While the increasing hostility between the two powers has encouraged some countries to side with the US for possible gains, the majority of the countries of the West Pacific and Indian Ocean regions will be required to balance their positions with tremendous sensitivity as the giant ships of state of the confronting powers send surging waves of instability crashing on to their shores. Such moves by the smaller and medium size nations with their cultural, social and political history of pluralities must determine as to how they could manage the emerging polarities which could destabilize their economic and social equilibrium. Again the world is likely to witness a UN that is rendered impotent due to the Veto wielding two giants and the Russian Federation being unable to agree on many of the contentious issues. The hope of collaboration and cooperation for the benefit of humanity has almost evaporated in a torrent of hostile actions and vitriolic comments rarely seen in diplomatic exchanges, indeed a desperate moments of contestations of pluralities and polarities because of a failure to 'imagine the new'. Sri Lanka, unless it maneuvers itself with great sagacity, is likely to be dragged into the confrontations in the Indian Ocean, particularly with Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) becoming more operational

and the island-nation is bound to be the centre of attraction.

Trump and Polarities

Since he took office in January 2017, President Trump, despite the golden early contributions during the establishment of the UN, has been less than helpful to the Organization. He has either de-funded, withdrawn from, or denigrated several UN agencies and affiliated institutions, This includes the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to name a few.

With regard to human rights, one could contend that although the aspired utopia of 1945 has not materialized, yet the world is a much better place today than in those dark days of the first half of the 20th century, largely due to the efforts of the UN and the global community. Some such polarizing debates on human rights have been brought to a consensual paradigm of enlightened negotiations even between most plural cultures and social pluralities. The horrors of the Holocaust are behind us and the world has persevered through the Gulags of the Soviet Union, the brutal suppression of the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the drenching Agent Orange rain in Vietnam, and the bombing of neutral Laos. Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and other places, where thousands of civilians were simply forgettable collateral



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damage, are still with us. Massacres, genocides, deprivations, occupation of others' lands etc. continue to occur but not on the same scale as previously. On many occasions, the UN has been reduced to ringing its hands in mainly feigned anguish as the big powers restrained it. The US, a high profile member of the UN Human Rights Council, sadly has withdrawn from it, perhaps resenting the political pluralities it had to confront but indicate also the lack of creative frontline leadership that the current regime had been reluctant to be engaged. The US must engage, and not create a 'fortress America' displacing the vision of the founding leadership of its 'heritage of freedom and pursuit of happiness' and not succumb to the polarities that the US has brought upon itself.

Openness to Plurality

The UN has been the convenient punching bag on many intractable global political issues such as the still unfinished business in the Korean Peninsula, the morass that was Congo, the paralysis in blood soaked Rwanda, its inability to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as old as the UN itself as some argue as the mother of all conflicts to an end, its ineffectiveness as the member state of Iraq was invaded, in the face of valid legal objections raised by many, the agony dawned on Yemen, largely as a result of non-cooperation by the Veto wielding powers. The polarities are stunningly immense but there is always the human possibility to strike a deal with right understanding of the value to pluralities if deployed even as a tiny tool.

Nevertheless, the general acceptance of common standards since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), is more widespread and violations happen less blatantly. (Some may disagree with this assertion). Most people live in lot less fear today than in the inter war years, certainly in the West. The economic, cultural, civil and political rights of individuals, the rights of women and children,

of refugees and migrants, of indigenous and differently abled persons and of workers are more advanced today than ever before. These self-evident pluralities have been identified and scientifically approached with distinct treatment of each in their own contexts even though every solution pursued might not have been achieved. History's main violators have become the champions of the UN adopted standards. But credibility is still a long way away as the selective and politically motivated application of



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global disapprobation has tarnished the legitimacy of UN standard setting instruments. Sadly human rights remain a political tool rather than a vehicle for making the world a better place and remains one of the most contentious issues leading to entrenched polarities.

Plurality of Issues and Treaties

Consistent with the objectives

of the Charter, the UN has been seminal responsible for the unprecedented development of the international rule of law. The Secretary-General's office is the repository of over 550 multilateral treaties, the vast majority of them negotiated under the auspices of the UN. They cover almost every aspect of human interaction, including the environment, the oceans, aviation, trade, transport, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, organized crime, the outer space, shipping, road rules, etc, and set a complex network of global standards for the conduct of individual states as never before. Sri Lanka played a significant role in advancing the UN's counter terrorism (CT) agenda along with other affected countries, and should continue to do so. It's a mosaic treatment of the plurality of human nature and behavior and when mismanaged obviously leads to polarity of immense complexity. The UN thus far has remained the body which depicts that plurality as well as the polarities of its very membership indicating that humans must always strive to achieve their highest potential.

It was under the auspices of the UN, in particular under Sri Lanka's Shirley Amerasingha's chairmanship, that the law on the seas and oceans has been codified. The oceans, which impact on many aspects of human existence, are a much more clearly regulated space than ever before. Two protocols to Law of the Sea Convention have been brought into force and a third on biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction, proposed by a committee co-chaired by me (Palitha Kohona), is now being negotiated. Similarly, the Non Aligned Movement, of which Sri Lanka has been a prominent member, often punching way above its weight, originally intended to be the group not aligned to the East or the West, has tended to pull in different directions with no cohesive non-aligned focus. Nevertheless, it remains a platform of group strength for the weak and the meek. Some have dropped out of this



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group. India, an original Non-aligned stalwart, today is participating in military exercises with the US, Japan and Australia (The Quad) designed to confront and contain China indicating a severe polarity.

Versatile and Fragile

The UN and its agencies have been though successful in mobilising the international community on various issues and on some other fronts proving itself as being versatile but has also become vulnerable and fragile in dealing with the starkly stubborn ideological perspectives between the states within the member states. However, the scourge of terrorism surged across borders inevitably became a threat to many countries, the UN was able to establish treaty based and Security Council sponsored rules and to mobilize states and resources to counter this threat. Expertise was assembled, resources were mobilized, information was collated and shared, training was provided to countries that needed it, and awareness was raised to a high level. In the absence of the UN and its agencies, it is doubtful if these collective advances could have been achieved at a global level. The occurrence of terrorist acts in the West helped to focus attention on this threat even further. Much more remains to be done. The confrontations of the moment may deny the world of future opportunities to collaborate should such threats raise their ugly heads again.

Similarly, the global response to health challenges such as the AIDS

pandemic, the swine flu and avian flu threats that had the potential to cause havoc and the Ebola epidemic were countered due to the existence of the UN, especially the WHO and now Covid19. Despite the criticism piled on the WHO by the US, it is the first and last resort as a world body for many vulnerable economies and countries stricken with poverty in the current crisis. The UN has developed an impressive ability to raise awareness rapidly and mobilise member states to respond quickly to threats of this nature. The ability to create stability with the disabling effects of certain polarities among member states could have diluted the credibility of the UN when it speaks with authority with expert opinion and guidance. The WHO dealt with the Covid 19 pandemic in a much more impressive manner than many better resourced countries. The manner that the world body has responded to natural and man-made disasters has saved countless lives and alleviated much misery.

Conclusion

The UN has been successful in restoring normalcy to a number of global situations that threatened to cause untold violence, misery and regional instability. Cambodia has emerged as a stable and increasingly prosperous country after decades of conflict, largely as a consequence of the Australian initiated, and UN brokered peace and the subsequent peacekeeping operation.

Timor Leste, after a quarter century of conflict, has established itself as a peaceful member of the international

community. South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy and majority rule was painstakingly facilitated by the UN despite the obstructions posed over many years by some Veto wielding members of the UN. The role of the world organisation in guiding the former Yugoslavia’s successor states to peace, after the initial explosion of violence, was not insignificant. Even the complex legal issues relating to succession were dealt with imaginatively by the world body, especially its Treaty Section and the Office of Legal Affairs.

As the world moves forward there is an increasing clamour to reform the United Nations to reflect contemporary political and economic reality. The most difficult challenge will be to reform the Security Council which substantially reflects the power structures of the post-World War II global scenario. UN @ 75 is a classic example of a world body with pluralities and polarities but managing its way despite the precipices, valleys, plains and not without hurricanes, avalanches, Tsunamis and tornados - *Ad Multos Annos! Chirang Jayathu !!*



Post COVID19: Ironing out Polarities to embrace Plurality as a Value

Oswald Firth OMI



Preamble

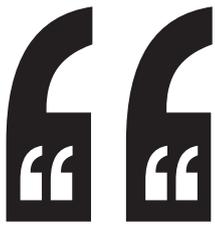
Whether we like it or not, the entire world has gradually evolved into two polarized positions, with America at one end of the spectrum and China at the other. While claiming to be sovereign and independent, simmering below the surface, there is ample evidence that nearly all countries sign agreements with one or the other superpower of which the general public of those countries may not be cognisant of. However, the polarization may not occur in favour of the US or China merely within the international

political community as many nations increasingly struggle internally with polarization that manifests itself in the areas of race, religion, class and culture. In economic terms, the world has continued in its shameful classification of 'rich' and 'poor', an archaic relic of pre-Covid19 globalization seemingly a cliché and is now being challenged. As Pope Francis surmises, we have a greater virus to cure than the pandemic that globalization has left behind, "that of social injustice, inequality of opportunity, marginalisation and the lack of protection of the weakest."

(Tablet 5th Sept. 2020). All these concerns only lead to demonstrate the vulnerability of humans in the face of natural disasters as well as pandemics like the Covid19.

Contesting Polarities

In recent times, however, these polarizations, while being menacingly existential, have been shifted to the back-burner and in their place the world is grappling with the arrival of the Wuhan menace, Covid19, which is still running wild inflicting its viral venom on over 27 million people



“polarization may not occur in favour of the US or China merely within the international political community as many nations increasingly struggle internally with polarization that manifests itself in the areas of race, religion, class and culture”

worldwide and causing nearly 900,000 deaths in nearly every country in the world taken collectively. Polarization in all its forms is no more claiming the headlines, at least not at this crucial moment of the world’s contemporary history, relinquishing its place instead to the global pandemic where polarity is replaced by plurality where numbers of those infected and those dead take centre stage and become the core concern of the world.

No country has been spared. Daily news bulletins in the media were and still are loaded with numbers and graphics on how many cases this invisible enemy has infected, how many have recorded positive, how many deaths with their age brackets have occurred within a 24 hour period and how the numbers have spiked, and when a possible downturn in numbers can be expected and hopes for a flattening of the curve. Statistically an interesting data analysis but medically an administratively an untold historical and institutionally a catastrophic failure. The unpreparedness and the callous and snobbish ways of certain states (mis)handling of what could have been managed is now more evident to the public. Hence, new polarities have emerged within the political circles right across the globe. Sri Lanka’s most recent mandate at the hustings seems like has been given to the current regime on the basis of how it managed the pandemic internally but the early October 2020 re-emergence of the virus among the population is once again proven its strange mutation patterns and the sheer unpredictability.

Is Covid 19 Political or Apolitical ?

Covid19 has no political preferences, it infected and killed those in liberal democracies as well as those governed on communist-socialist policies and principles. Having said this, reporting on the pandemic and its victims

may have various predispositions and preferences depending on each country’s political prejudices. In this case, there is no economic recovery without successful virus containment, and each country is bound to decide at what point the virus has been considered controlled so that economic recovery could begin and then the health issue transforms into a political issue. Some numbers cannot be fudged. According to Amnesty International, at least 7000 health workers – doctors, nurses and hospital based support aides have died from Covid19 worldwide in the past five months. The death of health workers had been scandalous and could have been easily avoided had the sectors and governments been fully aware of the insidious travel of the virus with its hard to detect mutations.

One reason why Covid19 deaths are under-reported is that governments have realised the bigger the case load and mortality rate they report; the more reputational damage they suffer. The end result is that governments began to hide the real scenario. Subsequently the public lost trust in most governments. Other media filled the gap with amplified data and wiring them across the globe with politically nuanced and lopsided views which further damaged the states. When an elected government lies when the public believes that it is the case, then the media takes over control. The case in point was the US and the UK with their liberal media. They are still in control with their pounds and dollars in the industry.

The fact remains that the virus is still raging heavily in parts of the world to which Asian countries pay little attention to. Brazil with 125,000 deaths, Peru 30,000 and Mexico 70,000 are the worst performers in a continent – Latin America – suffering gravely from Covid19. India, with four million infections and 70,000 deaths, is one among those battling incessantly to curtail the spread of the virus. The US which has nearly 6.5 million

infected individuals and over 190,000 deaths could cost Donald Trump the presidency due to his lackadaisical attitude towards the virus. He certainly goes on record as a president who was elected by the very plurality of the US but could not or failed to handle the polarities that the plurality brought about. The US public might have decided their next leadership by the time this article is being published. Though Covid19 was yet another virus remained politicized but by its spread from Wuhan to Westward via Japan, Korea all the way to Lombardia in Northern Italy then engulfing Spain and France, then crossing the Atlantic into NY indeed made it into a deeply divisive political category. Today it has become a political slogan to power and rule, strange but a true and just like the 9/11 set the direction for the first decade of the new Millennium, so could Covid19 direct the third decade of the same Millennium.

Economies in Crisis

The bearing Covid19 has had on the economies of many countries has been monumental. One decisive area which is bound to affect governments’ economies is unemployment. Australia decided to reserve a huge fiscal support package of over \$10 billion to launch a ‘Job Keeper’ programme which will prevent the loss of at least 700,000 jobs. Covid-19 has made business investment weak causing more social and economic polarities. With lockdowns no sensible person would want to invest in business. Many poor countries had to provide daily wage earners social assistance for their families to survive. The longer the situation goes on, the less effective becomes each dollar/rupee spent on social assistance. This economic polarisation will lead to deepening of the already fragmented societies into debt and dependency.

Those who suffer most due to the

pandemic are those in the informal sector, like those operating small restaurants, coffee bars and tea kiosks. Every rupee/dollar spent must transform into a more effective job creation. Specific measures will be needed to support business and employees, substantial incentives to reboot weak corporate investment, enhanced infrastructure initiatives, skills training, etc. As things are, a country's success will be assessed not on the way it will handle its economy, but on the medical front on how it will reduce the number of infected cases and deaths. This can be achieved by lockdowns and border closures, but of course at the cost of economic recovery. However, with time, Covid-19's impact will be felt on the economy when unemployment rises, more businesses begin to shut and tax reforms begin to be highly contested. These new polarities will emerge as most challenging agents to the governments unless they are willing to embrace them not in the way they previously handled the old issues within those well-defined pluralities. It almost has become or seems like that it's the pluralities that lead to polarities. But the governments and other social bodies must handle and manage both at their own level. Pluralities must not be mistaken as polarities. Plurality is a value which can be deployed to handle that which polarises the plural community.

Covid 19 Under Control ?

What is specific about this pandemic is that it has the deadliness of Ebola and the speedy transmissibility of Covid. The world has known deadly pandemics before during our own historical times. In the 20th Century smallpox killed 300 million people. In Europe, the bubonic plague killed

a third of the population. The Spanish flu is said to have taken the lives of anything between 20 to 50 million people.

But everything about Covid 19 is not bad news. Pessimists would say 'we need to learn to live with the virus'. Treatment of the infected has got much better than six months ago. Dexamethasone and other drugs, steroids for example, have reduced the level of mortality even among the oldest. Behavioural changes have contributed to reducing the rate of infection. This includes 'physical distancing', remaining in-doors and working from home practice.

There is less emphasis on ventilators. There was justifiable fear that oxygen producing aerosols would infect hospital workers. This was a major concern. However, hospital workers now have protection gear that are much more sophisticated and medically designed. Research has shown that the more common means of the virus being transmitted takes place by droplets, which either fall on someone or some surface, which a person then touches with his/her hands, then touch one's face which is responsible for the spread of the disease. There is sufficient evidence that '*social tracking*' provides the best chance of keeping the disease under control which some countries have experimented well with an excellent success rate.

It is now widely accepted and promoted through the media that the four ways of avoiding the spread of Covid are physical distancing, good hygiene, especially hand hygiene, surface cleansing and finally face-masks. Masks are about the best protection against the rare droplets that might land on the wearer's face.

The best protection against the spread of Covid19 is, beyond reasonable doubt

is a vaccine. A different race is taking place for this unique vaccine which is also a billion buck earner. Hence the interest or the greed is festering. There are some 170 Covid vaccines that are being developed and experimented around the world. There were strong rumours that Russia and China had successfully produced a vaccine that could kill the virus and that the Russian President Vladimir Putin had submitted to the device with success. However, these appear to be airy talks that do not carry much credence. The frontrunners in this enterprise are the Oxford University and AstraZeneca, a British-Swedish Pharmaceutical Company, working in tandem to harvest the virus protein that can provoke the production of antibodies. Such medical and scientific investigations also show the plurality of human attempts to find a vaccine, but the very human effort has created severe polarities of solutions as numerous as 176 vaccines.

Lessons Learnt Confronting Polarities

Given the fact that the world was unprepared for Covid19, what lessons does pandemic pose for us particularly to embrace pluralities and confront polarities? Here there are elements that are either positive or negative.

1. What immediately comes to mind is 'lockdowns' or border closures. Lockdowns have often become territorial prisons, where people within the closures have become virtual prisoners where they are prevented from socialising with their known and loved ones. Today, the talk is more about '*hot spots*' than about lockdowns. This means that entire nations or states need not



"Sri Lanka's most recent mandate at the hustings it seems like has been given to the current regime on the basis of how it managed the pandemic internally. But it does not mean that it is a triumphant government unless the regime is capable of managing its pluralities and polarities of ethnic and religious minorities within"

be made to pay the heavy price of losing their freedom and subject to restrictions where the virus has left them untouched except in the 'hot-spots'.

2. The need for a politics of compromise and consultation than one of isolation, favouritism and confrontation. It is best that in a country under siege by Covid 19 that restrictions to prevent the virus spread be applicable to all equally and justly with no concessions to favourites, exceptions being for humanitarian reasons.
3. The pandemic has given people the spectacle of empty streets and ghostly cities, of human proximity wounded, of physical distancing. It has deprived them of the exuberance of embraces, the kindness of handshakes, the affection of kisses and turned relations into fearful interactions among strangers. The neutral exchange of faceless individuals shrouded in the anonymity of protective gears creating a new sense of polarity and strange anonymity. Limitations of social contacts that have led to isolation, despair and even anger, abuse and various forms of antisocial behaviour.
4. When compared to the predicament of poor countries, the plight of the so called 'developed' world looks more a fairy tale. Only in rich countries can people afford the luxury of 'social/physical distancing'. In countries that are not so fortunate, 'physical distancing' of one-and-a-half metres on either side is just an impossibility due to necessity and the non-availability of space in small, crowded rooms. The contrast between the two situations throws into relief a strident paradox which dramatically demonstrates the disparity and disproportionality in wealth between poor and rich nations. On-line learning and on-line ordering of commodities, especially medication for the sick, among the more affluent only exacerbated the disparity and the hitherto unknown polarities.
5. Certainly, in most countries the common good of public health needs were to be balanced against economic interests. During the early stages of the pandemic, most countries focussed on maximally saving lives. Hospitals and especially intensive care services were insufficient and were only expanded after enormous struggles. Remarkably, care services survived because of the impressive sacrifices of doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel, more than technological investment. The focus on hospital care and quarantine centres and hotels, however, diverted attention from other care institutions. Nursing homes, for example, were severely impacted by the pandemic and sufficient protective equipment and testing only became available at a later stage. These medical polarities became profusely evident to the world community. Governments were severally exposed to their inability to handle the plurality of the medical skills of their own health personnel due to petty politics and cheap popularity.
6. The elderly people in the evening time of their lives particularly in care homes across the globe is one of the sectors most affected. Their suffering has been even more pronounced, for the physical frustrations coupled with a limited quality of life and the lack of opportunity to receive visits from family and associate friends.
7. We cannot sufficiently draw the attention of humanity to the reality of zoonosis, a phenomenon well known to scientists as a vehicle of many diseases. Even if we beat this virus with a vaccine that would not be the end of our troubles. The way we practice globalization means zoonotic diseases, which jump from animals to humans, will accelerate. There are more human beings rubbing up against more wild animals, and the increase demand for meat, especially in first world countries, means that an infection in one part of the globe is quickly carried all over the world. Undoubtedly, international transportation, mass mobility of people, business travelling, and tourism can only aggravate possibilities of spreading a virus also indicates that we are yet to manage our intricate pluralities among us from appetite to satiation, from desire to happiness.
8. We have witnessed the most tragic face of death, some experiencing the loneliness of separation, both physical and spiritual, from everybody, leaving their families powerless, unable to say good-bye, even to provide the basic piety and dignity of a proper burial, a polarity among the beloveds created by the deadly virus unable to be managed by the so called developed humans.

Tenderly Human to Pluralities

On 27 March 2020, Pope Francis spoke to a near empty, rain drenched St. Peter's Square, Vatican. He began with a passage of Mark's Gospel on Jesus calming the storm: "When evening had come," and the Pope said that with the pandemic in mind, and its sickness and death, and with the lockdowns and closures of schools and workplaces, it has felt like "for weeks now it has been evening."

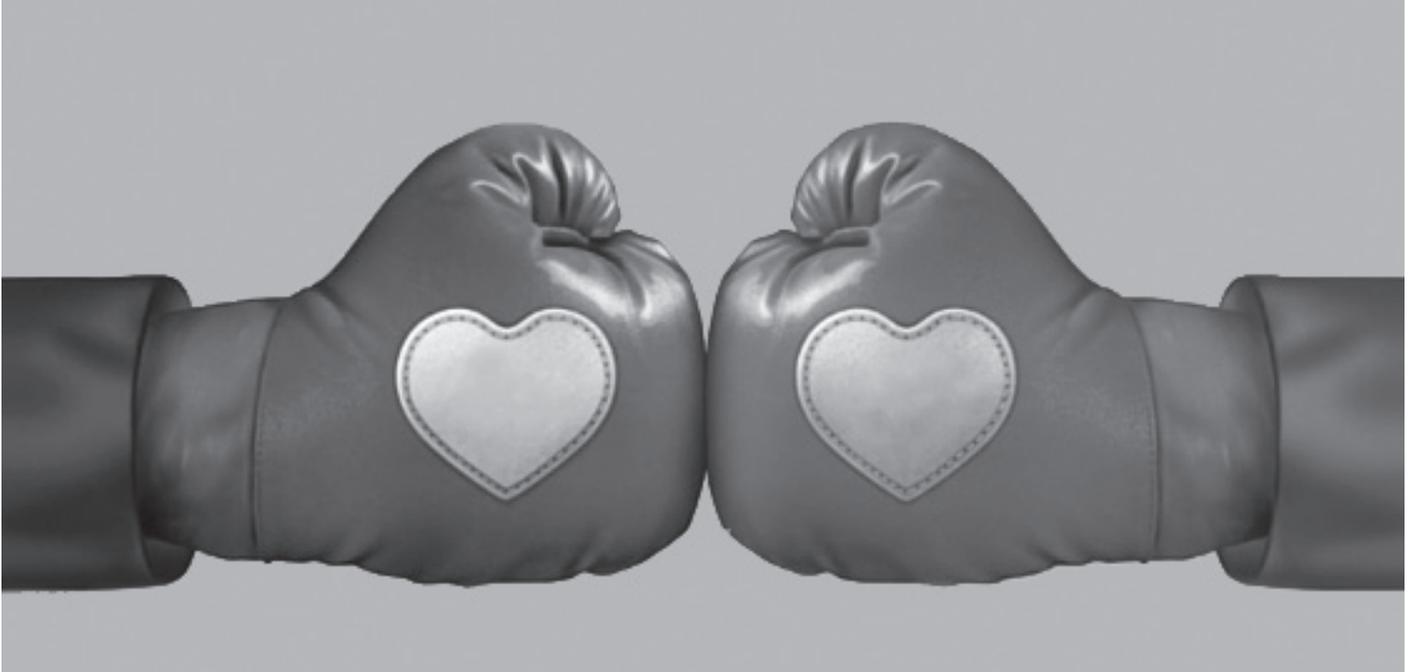
Pope Francis said "the Holy Spirit could use the pandemic to redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people - often forgotten people - who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines," but are serving others and making life possible during the pandemic.

The Pope listed "doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves." His view of plurality is evident from his message and to see through polarity and to make sense of both for wholesome living. Deep awareness of both realities would be an enlightened path to seek resolution and meaning here and now.

Understanding Pluralities and Polarities:

A Quest for Conflict Transformation in Sri Lanka

Joe William



Clarifying Concepts

*Pluralism*¹ in political science, is the view that in liberal democracies power is (or should be) dispersed among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups and is not (or should not be) held by a single elite or group of elites. Pluralism assumes that diversity is beneficial to society and that autonomy should be enjoyed by disparate functional or cultural groups within a society, including religious groups, trade unions, professional organizations, and ethnic minorities.² The challenge is how we view pluralism, understand, value it and see it reflected in our everyday lives. It must be reflected in the choices we make, not as a distant ideal or academic theory. What we

witness today is a narrowing of narratives and perspectives that do not enable people to see how diversity positively shapes their world. Given the silos in which we live, we must acknowledge that living and breathing pluralism every day is not simple. Against this troubling backdrop, it is imperative that we are proactive, practical and convincing. We know that the value of positively managing diversity is high and that, truly, it is at the foundation of any social system.³

Secondly, the *polarities* have always existed in nature. Just like night and day, cold and hot, sun and rain, sleep and wakefulness, sea inflow and outflow, the phases of the moon, birth and death. The law of polarity is the

principle that everything has two 'poles': good and evil, love and hate, attraction and disconnection. Think of the North and South poles on a globe or a battery with its negative and positive terminals. Everything in the universe has an opposite. Everything is dual. And it's what allows us to experience life to the fullest and appreciate the good in the world.⁴ Is there a single law that explains how the universe works? It's a complex world we live in – and the human mind is even more complicated. But if there is one principle that comes close to making sense of it all, it's the law of polarity. Understanding the law of polarity is essential to living a fulfilling and a happy life. The energy you put out into the world matters – not only to

and for your relationships, but to all of your life goals.⁵

Sri Lankan Scenario

Sri Lanka has an ethnically and religiously mixed population living in close proximity in many parts of the country. However, there is limited social mixing between them and each community tends to live in their own silos contributing to an unwillingness or inability to shift from a focus on one's own community and the exclusion of other communities. Polarization of communities contributed to ethnic and religious conflicts because members of each community tend to look at their own problems only.

Schoolchildren are educated in separate educational institutions. Although the school syllabus contains information about the ethnic and religious diversity of the country, academic teaching alone does not deeply impact the thinking patterns of each community. The failure of the education system to inquire into the more controversial aspects of the country's recent history leads many, especially the youth to either have no knowledge or only a fragmented knowledge of the past. This leads to the danger of those who do not learn from history being forced to learn the same lessons decades if not centuries later.

Other challenges stem from the advances in technology in which information proliferates and in which the media consumer can choose the type of information that is acceptable. This leads to the phenomenon of the echo chamber where the media consumer prefers to consume news and information that conforms to that

particular individual's predispositions and biases. This reduces one's ability to think critically outside of one's own community. Underlying the physical violence are long held prejudices, suspicions and fears. Even where there is no actual conflict, there is tension simmering beneath the surface that can easily be harnessed to unleash violence.

Much of the prejudice and attendant hate and suspicion is often either sowed or fueled by politics. Since independence, the principle of political platform has been and continues to be one that is framed in ethnic nationalism. The country is in the grip of a new political configuration. Following the General Elections voices are being raised that focus more on the fear and mistrust of those of other communities. It is important that political leaders should rise to meet this challenge. Country's leadership ought to recognize its pluralities and not allow it to grow in to form polarities. It is in this direction that diversity blooms and plurality harnessed.

Factors Debilitating and Limiting Pluralism

I will share some practical initiatives undertaken by the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka (NPC) into an intellectual and academic frame that will be beneficial to all who would be grappling with issues around pluralism and conflict transformation in Sri Lanka. NPC carried out consultations from October 2016 to December 2018 with multiple groups in eight districts countrywide. These groups were consisted of religious leaders, community leaders including local politicians, the media, women, youth and persons with disabilities.

The consultations were carried out through a two-tier process – local and national. The contributors, approximately 800 were representative of diverse ethnic, religious, age and interest groups. The consultation was carried out on two themes:

1. Factors debilitating meaningful pluralistic coexistence; and
2. Changes necessary to promote, uphold and nurture pluralism.

Based on the views expressed by the abovementioned groups in eight districts a Charter for a Pluralistic Sri Lankan Society was released at a national symposium in January 2019.⁶

Ethnically divisive politics has pervaded public life from the time of independence. We are constantly challenged by the inability to evolve into a cohesive Sri Lankan identity. The primary reason for this is the continued contestation of ethnicity for dominance and hierarchy instead of equal citizenship based on pluralistic values. There is also little structured, focused effort to enable different communities to understand and appreciate each other's religious teachings. Language discrimination or insufficient affirmative action in relation to Tamil language continues to be a key factor significantly debilitating pluralism. Culture is also a sphere where there is contestation for predominance and linked to the establishment of a hierarchy based on ethnicity and further consolidated by caste structures. There are many lacunae in the legal structure concerning issues of ethnic or religious differences which inhibit pluralistic values.

Other areas limiting pluralism are an



Polarization of communities contributed to ethnic and religious conflicts because members of each community tend to look at their own problems only



The law of Polarity is the principle that everything has *two poles*: good and evil, love and hate, attraction and disconnection. Think of the North and South poles on a globe or a battery with its negative and positive terminals

understanding of literature, history and archeology. Literature is a primary source in understanding the facets particular to a community or a culture. Literature can address the heart and build bridges across mental divides. However, in Sri Lanka insufficient importance is given to literature as a source for bridge building between communities. History is at the center of contestation for dominance by the major ethnicity. The history that is taught is limited to one tradition and ethnicity and has been interpreted to support the preeminence of the majority group in the country. The Sri Lankan State has largely focused on the archaeology of Sinhala history. There is evidence to suggest that Sri Lanka was cosmopolitan and diverse in terms of ethnic composition since ancient times given its location as a maritime hub.

From an economic development perspective, a practical determiner of the ethnic conflict is that certain regions have been over resourced while others are under resourced. There has been an ethnic dimension to the unequal allocation of resources. While there are policies in place to support people with disabilities, their reintegration particularly in the former war zones is an uphill task.

Building and Fostering a Plural Sri Lanka

Political leaders and State officials have a key role to play in building and fostering the naturally plural society in which there is equal voice irrespective of numbers. They should also ensure that members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain and develop their traditional culture or special interest

within the sphere of a common citizenship. Respect for Human Rights is of key importance in order to maintain such a plurality. It is important that the state acts with justice and equity at all times in serving the people. Some specific propositions in this direction are being suggested:

1. All provisions in the Constitution for power sharing should be implemented in full without favor to any particular religion/ community or region. Ensuring there are adequate legal frameworks at district and provincial level to enable the sharing of marine resources, drinking water, and land equitably across populations;
2. Religious leaders have a key role to play in embedding the concept of pluralism in the larger community. They necessarily need to be trained in the idea of pluralism so that they in turn can share their learning through the lens of social cohesion and religious coexistence;
3. Adopt special mechanisms to include youth in the country's development process. Youth were the primary victims of the insurgencies of 1971-72, 1987-1990 and the ethnic war from 1980-2009. There is a need to include youth through an equitable process that takes into account education and skills;
4. Article 14(1) (a) of Chapter 3 of the Constitution guarantees the right to free speech and expression. However, if it is to be enjoyed in

the intended spirit of the provision, it is necessary for the State to ensure safe space. As social media has become a principal source of information for the public, legal action against hate speech should be swift and adequate;

5. The State should create sufficient awareness concerning the powers and functions of the Independent Commissions among State officials and the public to maximize their effectiveness and create the environment necessary for them to function freely. Truly democratic institutions are essential for ensuring peaceful, just and egalitarian societies;
6. Adequate resources should be provided to enable persons with special needs to fulfill their basic needs. Institutions should be established at district/ provincial level to strengthen education, health and welfare services to these sectors;
7. Deal with deficiencies in the implementation of the Official Languages Policy;
8. Establish a Pluralism Commission on the lines of the Independent Commissions, whose members would be appointed by the Constitutional Council, and whose mandate would be aligned to the observations and propositions sketched out above.

Managing Polarities

Newton's Third Law of Motion, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction" sums up the law of

polarity perfectly. It means that forces come in pairs: negative and positive, action and reaction, masculine and feminine or like the Yin and the Yang of the Sino philosophical tradition. One cannot only nurture certain energies within oneself, but also use the law of attraction to draw other energies to oneself – like a magnet.

One of the questions asked of us is why is it that some problems never seem to go away? May be they are not problems to be solved, but, instead, are dilemmas to be managed. Polarity is a state in which two ideas or opinions are completely opposite from each other; in a diametrical opposition. We are experiencing a world of constant and an increasing polarity. Often it is black and white, us and them, right and wrong. There is no middle; there is no gray, just polarity.

As individuals, as allies, as humans, we need to be able to hold both things: both the good and the bad, the easy and the hard. What if through compassion and empathy and human interaction we are able to learn to hold two things? And if we can hold two things, we can hold four, and if we can hold four, we can hold eight, and if we can hold eight, we can hold hundreds. To work with polarities, you need to be able to see both perspectives clearly and at the same time. The trick isn't to solve a polarity or to make a choice and move on. Instead, you handle a polarity by first, recognizing what it is, and second, learning how to mentally and practically move through the ebbs and flows a polarity presents.⁷ The more you are attached to "your side" or "your value," the more you are unable to see the

potential downsides attached to it.⁸

Based on the principle of contrast between the two *polarities* you need to look at the situation in a more creative way and reverse the funnel to see all the opportunities in front of you. Firstly, there might be that the new opportunities will not only help you to change the perception of a problem but also what might result is that there is no problem anymore. Secondly you will find inspirations to react in an entirely new way, without giving into the routine way of reaction.⁹

Conflict Transformation

In conclusion I would like to argue that theorists and practitioners have identified conflict transformation as a preferred term and goal rather than conflict resolution or conflict management. Conflict resolution implies that conflict is bad and to be avoided, ended or resolved. Conflict management, in some ways, objectifies those in conflict as things to be managed and controlled; it implies that conflict is long-term and must be maintained and constrained rather than getting to the root of the conflict itself. Conflict transformation means that conflict is not be expected to disappear or remain long-term as is, rather, it is the expectation that conflict will change and evolve with time and intervention. It is an acknowledgement that conflict is an opportunity for making change. Without a doubt, clashing mind-sets will occur in a diverse and pluralistic society such as Sri Lanka, still communities must find a way to live together.

Conflict Transformation is a multi-dimensional task.¹⁰ Conflict

transformation theorists argue that contemporary conflicts require more than the reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes. The very structure of parties and relationships may be embedded in a pattern of conflictual relationships that extend beyond the particular site of conflict. Constructive conflict is seen as a vital agent or catalyst for change. People within the conflict parties, within the society or the region affected, and outsiders with relevant human and material resources all have complementary roles to play in the long-term process of conflict transformation. This suggests a comprehensive and wide-ranging approach, emphasizing support for groups within the societies in conflict rather than for the mediation of outsiders. It also recognizes that conflicts are transformed gradually, through a series of smaller or larger changes as well as specific steps by means of which a variety of actors may play important roles. In the words of Lederach, "Conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily, see 'the setting and the people in it as the 'problem' and the outsider as the 'answer'. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting."¹¹

The challenges posed by pluralities and polarities have remained with our governance structures since Sri Lanka gained Independence from Britain. Even after seven decades, an inclusive Sri Lankan national identity



Conflict transformation means that conflict is not be expected to disappear or remain long-term as is, rather, it is the expectation that conflict will change, evolve with time and with the considered interventions



One of the questions asked of us is why is it that some problems never seem to go away? May be they are not problems to be solved, but, instead, are dilemmas to be managed

(composed of its natural plurality) has not emerged due to the preeminent position given to the ethnic majority and their religion. Therefore, it is important that a shared national identity should be balanced by an emphasis on equality-based plural thinking for its citizens. Such a paradigm needs to be accompanied by trust building between communities by setting up platforms for such mechanisms to be established enhancing and expanding the space for positive interaction and the dispelling of divisive and demonizing narratives of each other based on prejudice and misinformation.

It is in this context that polarity emerges as a pair of interdependent positive concepts that need to work together for sustainable and optimal effectiveness i.e. *Consistency & Flexibility*.¹² A polarity, or paradox, is a situation in which opposing forces within a system, pulls at each other to keep things balanced. Leaders often have a positive view of one side of a polarity and a negative view of the other, or at least are *biased* toward one side. That is, one side is privileged and the other becomes discounted, devalued, judged or ignored. They tend to over-value one and neglect or fear or devalue the other.¹³ Understanding that over-privileging one pole over another will also *jeopardize* their preferred pole over time.¹⁴ These are the challenges that the proponents of the 20th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution need to be aware of.

Finally, I would like to refer to the sixth chapter in the latest Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis – *Fratelli Tutti* (fraternity and social friendship,

Oct.2020), in which he suggests that a pluralistic society encourages dialogue; respects the dignity of others in all circumstances; integrates differences thus guaranteeing a genuine and lasting peace; and recognizes other peoples' right to be themselves, maintaining an atmosphere of friendliness. "No one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights."¹⁵

Endnotes:

1. In this article I am using Pluralism as it is synonymous with Plurality despite belief among some that words ending with *ism* have a negative connotation.
2. See. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pluralism-politics#info-article-history>, (retrieved, Sept. 12, 2020)
3. Keynote Address, Meredith Preston McGhie, Aga Khan Council Leaders' Dinner, (Toronto, Ontario, Feb. 22, 2020) See. <https://www.pluralism.ca/event/keynote-address-by-meredith-preston-mcghie/> (retrieved, Sept. 18, 2020).
4. See. <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/ask-tony/polarity/> (retrieved, Sept. 18, 2020).
5. *ibid*.
6. See. https://www.peace-srilanka.org/images/pdf/2019/Pluralism_Charter_Jan_2019_Booklet_English.pdf (retrieved, Sept. 5, 2020).
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8. See. <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/using-polarity-thinking-to-achieve-sustainable-positive-outcomes> (retrieved, Sept. 20, 2020).
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CONTRIBUTORS

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Diego Irazazaval CSC is a theologian, has been involved in social and church programs (Peru and across the Americas (1975-2004), and now lives Santiago, Chile. A member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT); has been in its leadership roles (1995-2006) and currently is a senior advisor to the EATWOT. Was a member of the board of editors of CONCILIUM (2005-2017). He authored several books, among them *Cultura y fe latinoamericana* (1994); *Inculturation* (trans. Orbis Books, 2000); *Raices con Alas* (2017), (trans. Roots with Wings, Santiago: San Pablo, 2018). At present he is engaged in an on-line graduate course on Spiritualities of autochthonous (native) and mestizo (mixed heritage) people in Latin America.

Dr. Palitha Kohana is one of Sri Lanka's former Permanent Representatives to the United Nations (2009 - 2015), Former Foreign Secretary, Sri Lanka (2007 - 2009), Head of the UN Treaty Section (1995 - 2006). Chair, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Sixth Committee, Legal (2013). Co-chair, UNGA Working Group on Biological Diversity beyond National Jurisdiction (2009 - 2015). He was recently designated as Ambassador of Sri Lanka to China.

Dr. Joe William (see his bio-sketch under editorial team)

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Fr. Jeevantha Peiris is a priest of the diocese of Ratnapura, completed his BPh. (Urbaniana 2002), BTh. (Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, Rome 2005) & Clinical Psychology (Universita' Europea di Roma 2008). Currently based in Doloswala, a rural estate in Nivithigala (Ratnapura District), working with the low country estate labourers for their socio-political and economic wellbeing

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Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi teaches history of religious thought and practice and the origin of religion at the School of Religion and Philosophy, Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), Pakistan. Alongside its editorial team has produced their second academic volume of the South Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy (SAJRP, Minhaj ul Qur'an Publications). He continues to teach at the Universities of Colombo and Kelaniya as their visiting lecturer (contextual theology MA), (Christianity, Hindu Dharma and Islam) for their undergraduates. Also teaches at the Theological College of Lanka (TCL), Kandy as its tutor in theology.

Guest Poet:

Dr. Dilantha Gunawardana is a molecular biologist by training, is a freelance poet. He moves between science and poetry, is a senior lecturer at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Dilantha has published his poems in many reputed journals and magazines, including Canary Literary Magazine, Cordite Poetry Review, Boston Accent Lit, Forage, Kitaab and a few more. He also has produced two anthologies of poetry, *Kite Dreams* (2016) and *Driftwood* (2017), both by Sarasavi Publishers (Colombo), and is currently working on three poetry anthologies.



From Page 02 >>>

*Publisher says***Plurality is a stark reality...**

“Polarity must be handled not as a ‘negative wave’ needing ‘mere tolerance’ but as a terrain for understanding across the lines of difference for encounter of ‘stimulating commitments’ and a ‘radical option to be hopeful’, and such might provide us a glimpse of new areas and zones to work and contentment as persons”

of all would be between sovereign countries. Opposing camps in politics, economic strategies and the sophisticated military capabilities are proven to be now more lethally dangerous and easily could give way from such sweltering tensions into full blown armed conflicts which is no longer affordable to where humanity has come to now. Humans it seems like have reached to a point of its self-destructive capacity level but the path to turn the wheels towards preservation of all and the whole is also a gripping responsibility bestowed on humans with no escape route.

The world scenario has suddenly faced with a global crisis today with Covid19 pandemic which is attacking societies at their core, killing people, mounting human suffering to unspeakable levels, and ending peoples’ lives with despair, desolation and despondency. Sri Lanka though managed it well during the March/ April attacks, yet has come under its early October infection cycle and a new social spike has emerged as we write. The government has the experience to re-handle it but the mutative nature of the virus demands a new strategy and taking people with proper health advice to face the latest upsurge.

The levels of frustrations incurred to the populations led it to not just a health crisis but turned out to be a human, economic and social crisis with adverse implications across the world communities. No single assessment of the damage is possible as such also is intricately woven into a web of concerns and issues

into the future which is pushed to a deeper unpredictability. The outbreak has affected all segments of the population and particularly had been and is detrimental to those social groups in the most vulnerable situations, the poor, the elderly, the homeless, those without access to clean water, refugees, displaced and the migrants. The States and governments are struggling, and it seems like a vaccine might be the solution to the spread but until such time the real situations at the ground level must be properly addressed through policy with effective strategy to contain the spikes and minimize the loss of the human capital which is the most precious. We are aware that even if the vaccine is administered the social crisis across the globe created by the pandemic is bound to increase inequality levels, exclusion, discrimination, and the global unemployment ratio in the medium and the long term.

We therefore, are in the midst of historic circumstances and challenging times that will change many aspects of our world and how we might think and do everything in the future. There will be major and significant impact obviously on the global economy, geopolitics, and how each of our regions and societies learn to function and relate to each other.

It is clear that these abiding global impacts and sensitively evolving relations remain highly interdependent and are drastically changing the current and the future global movements and scenarios.

They are solidly and assertively compelling us to be in solidarity not only to combat the virus, but also to rethink, review, revise and redesign a better world order. For this herculean task, it is important to conceive plurality not only as ‘simply diversity’ but also as a ‘gifted space’ for energetic and considered engagement. Secondly, polarity must be handled not as a ‘negative wave’ needing ‘mere tolerance’ but as a terrain for understanding across the lines of difference for encounter of ‘stimulating commitments’ and a ‘radical option to be hopeful’, and such might provide us a glimpse of new areas and zones to work and contentment as persons.

The pluralities and polarities that we encounter simply need not drive us to divisive trends, conflict and war alone, and I am glad that some of the reflections by the contributors of this volume will indeed help the readers to think and reflect through such hurdles and pursue to be men and women of courage, perseverance and innovative thinking in which ever the fields they are called upon to be active. There is no blue print out there unless we create the model for us to survive during ‘our times’, but learning from ‘their times’ in order to gift to the ‘next timers’.

Potpourris

The early man 48000 years ago
 Made weapons that could tear apart
 Into animal flesh. Hunting being a yet
 Another polarity, hunter against the hunted.
 Still Neanderthals, Denisovans and
 Homo sapiens, all crossbred making
 A true hodgepodge of genetics, brain sizes,
 Skin tones, bones, complexions and
 Pathologies that earmark the first
 Signs of modern man.

Hagia Sophia is now back to a mosque.
 Notre Dame will be repaired someday. St Paul's
 Cathedral was rebuilt after the great
 Fire of London and World Trade
 Center is now a 9/11 memorial museum.
 The message is change is inevitable,
 Whether it is forced, ambushed, or neglected,
 It could be nature's wrath or evolution's poster
 child, Or mankind's abominable deeds that
 Draws polarity against plurality.
 How you only need to look at Angkor Wat
 To exemplify the beauty of coexistence
 In the serenity of polytheism.

Sri Lanka, where true cinnamon sells
 The authenticity of a spice island, which
 Is grown in native gardens, shipped
 by Muslim traders, a many toned cosmopolitan
 Identity that stays true to its own origins
 And narrates a serendipitous story.
 What the Portuguese traded, the Dutch
 Made into a garden crop that the English would die
 for. A spice of many aromatic ingredients,
 And an identity that draws a palate
 Into a nation's truest flavor, the polarity
 Of colonial trading routes and a local practice
 That carves with a sharp *Kokaththa*
 To make quills which are rust brown
 And an intense focal taste.

How the whole world is awakened by
 A vulnerability to a little virus thrice the size
 Of dengue. The multinational chase of
 A vaccine to induce the polarity of
 Immunity against an innate susceptibility.
 They say love is a strain of counter-immunity.
 And love today transcends color
 Asymmetry and IQ, our own need to let
 Cupid send a colorblind arrow.
 Love can it more pluricultural? Learning,
 As it infects and elaborates a heart's muscle
 With inventories of chemistry, that
 Used to be polar but now stands on
 Its own, letting palindromes in.

Plurality is Us. Polarity is You and Me.
 And how sweet when polarity
 Becomes plurality. The future summons
 Us, we buckle up on history.
 Plural thought echoes as the dissonance
 Of diversity. Love thirsts a pair
 Of lips into collisions. A kiss on lips
 That articulates polarity, when
 Caressed on cheek, becomes a plurality.

So black against white
 – Yes black lives like George Floyd do matter,
 Flat-earthers against heliocentrics,
 Christianity against Islam,
 Haves against Have-Nots,
 Mainland China against the USA,
 Virus against many vaccines.
 Still we are all a global village,
 A constellation, a solar system,
 A global movement, and still we can
 Be like Syria, Lebanon, Burma,
 And so forth.

Spare a memory for
 The fetus that died in Hiroshima
 In 1945. Spare a celebration,
 For the Muslim woman who married
 A Christian man from North Beirut,
 Against the will of her family.
 Spare the soul that has never
 Known true love but watches
 The movie "The Titanic".
 Spare a thought for the turquoise dot,
 That at present is overpopulated,
 But has never known
 World peace! ■

Dilantha Gunawardana