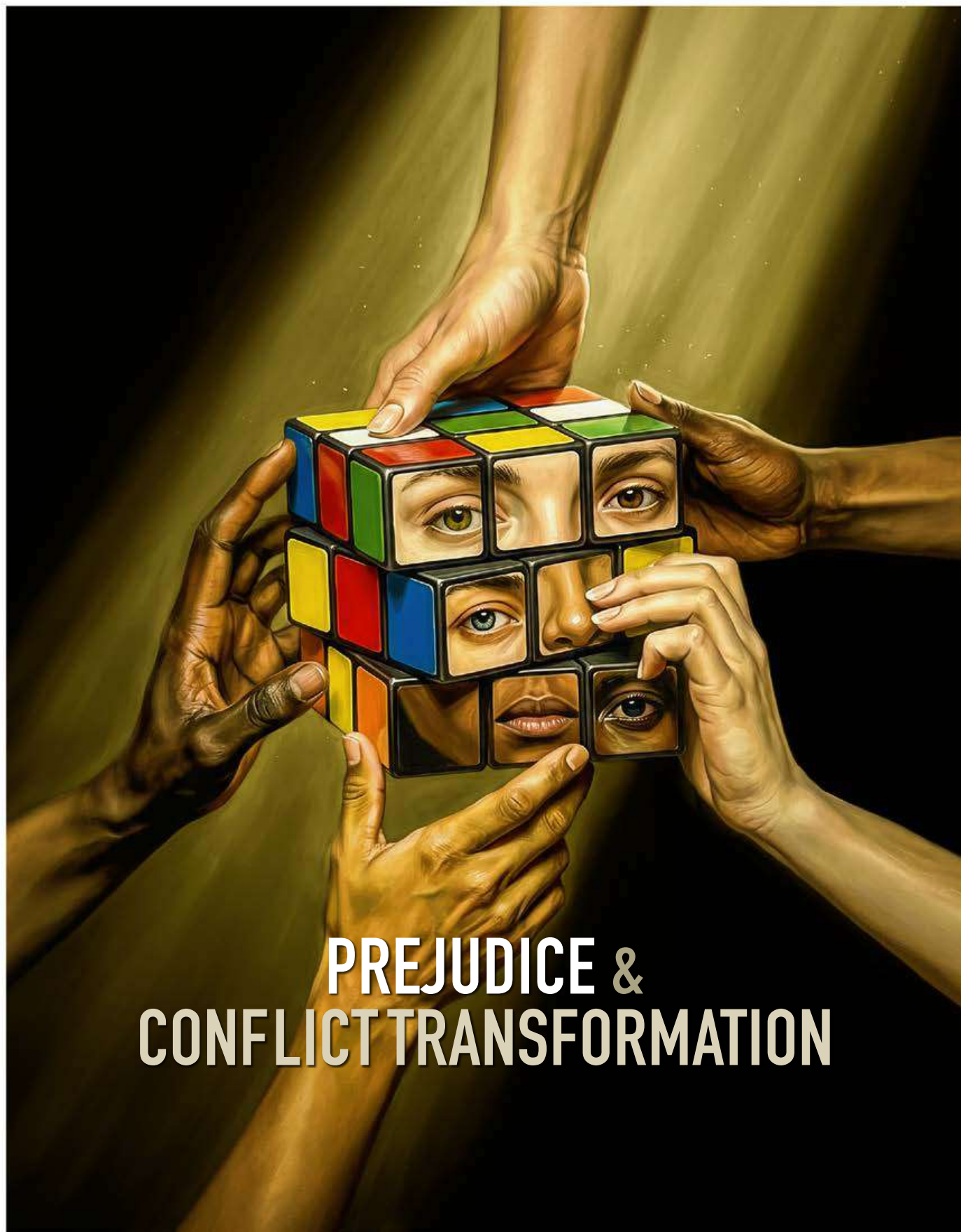


Bimonthly

Pax Lumina

Vol. 07 | No. 05 | September 2026

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



**PREJUDICE &
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**



A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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Behind every innocent gaze
lies a conflict unseen,
where prejudice turns trust
into temptation.



Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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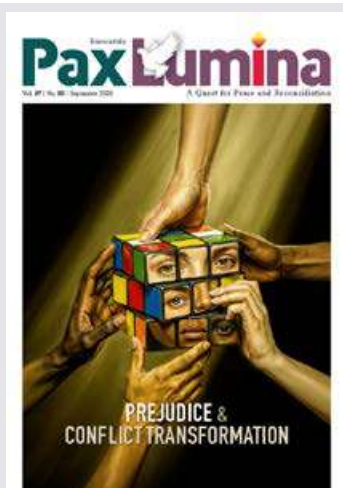
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PAX LUMINA WISHES ALL ITS READERS...

21 SEP | INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

**There is no way to peace;
peace is the way.**

- A.J. Muste



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PREJUDICE & CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION



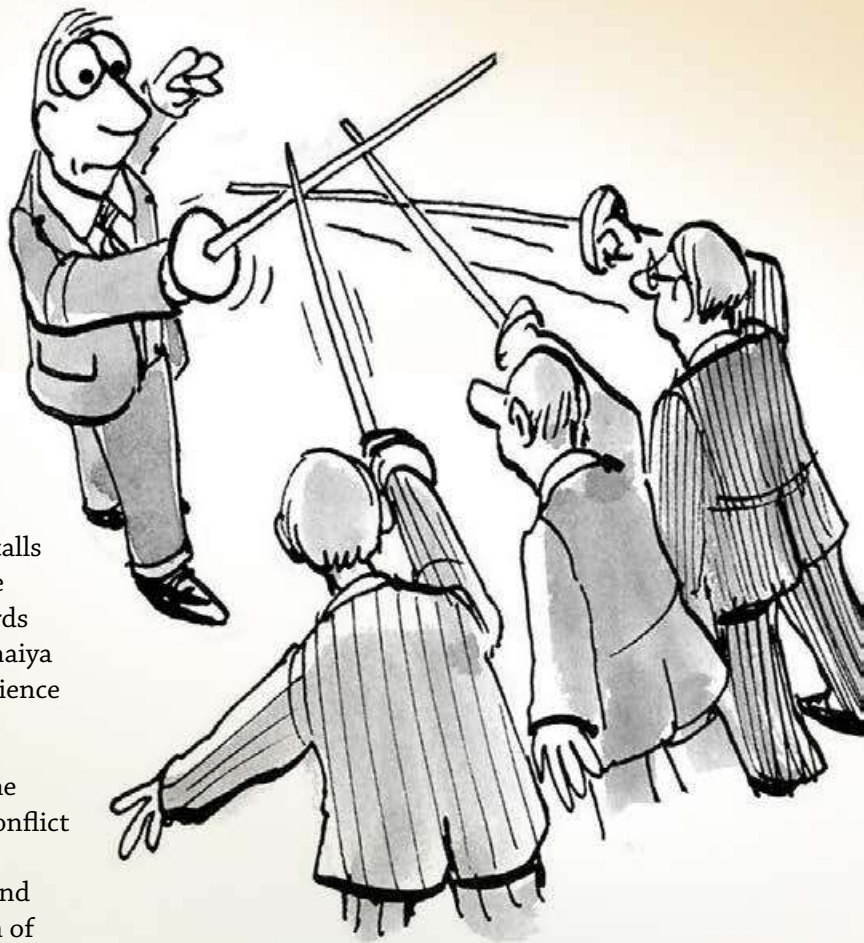
Editorial

Conflict often begins with perception. Beneath many of today's most persistent conflicts lie deeply rooted prejudices—assumptions, stereotypes, fears, and inherited narratives that shape how individuals, communities, and nations perceive the “other.” Whether expressed through discrimination, exclusion, dehumanization, or structural injustice, prejudice transforms diversity into division and difference into hostility. At a time marked by geopolitical rivalries, cultural polarization, forced migration, widening inequalities, technological disruption, and ecological crises, confronting prejudice has become an urgent prerequisite for building sustainable peace.

All religions uphold that “the equality of humans rests essentially on their dignity as persons.” Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, warns that where genuine encounter is absent, “a more insidious kind of violence can take root: the violence of those who despise people who are different.” John Paul Lederach’s conflict-transformation framework names the deeper task, not merely resolving disputes, but transforming conflict “into sustainable, peaceful relations and outcomes

The September 2026 issue of *Pax Lumina* focuses on the theme “Prejudice and Conflict Transformation.” The issue brings in reflections on how prejudice is formed, sustained, challenged, and ultimately transformed in diverse contexts. Contributors from various parts of the globe examine prejudice across cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, castes, generations, genders, political ideologies, and nations, while also engaging emerging forms of bias in the digital age, including algorithmic discrimination, misinformation, and online polarization. They also engage with critical reflections on structural, institutional, economic, ecological, and cultural prejudices that perpetuate injustice and exclusion.

The article from Mexico delineates how public discourse and State institutions reinforce the archetype of the ‘ideal victim.’ Mohammed Abu-Nimer from Washington, DC, explores how certain politicians and religious authorities manipulate religious identity to generate prejudice and justify policies of exclusion and discrimination.



George Yancy from the United States calls for the radical transformation of white embodiment as a necessary step towards overcoming anti-Black prejudices. Sumaiya Sabry from Sri Lanka shares her experience of humanising the ‘other.’

Contributions from Africa highlight the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon and conflict transformation in Malawi through the Catholic principles of human dignity and the common good. Colins Edozie Imoh of the University of Bradford, UK, argues that genuine peacebuilding requires moving beyond superficial remedies towards deep structural and cultural transformation, drawing on his reflections on the recent killing of Black Scholar Professor Jason Arday at the University of Cambridge.

Ghazala Jamil and Walter Fernandes write on spatial prejudices and conflict transformation in India in general, and the North-East in particular. Daniel Bar-Tal from Israel outlines how changing negative stereotypes, prejudice and delegitimisation can contribute to broader transformations in relationships between groups. Carlos Londoño explores the transformative possibilities of Artificial Intelligence in higher education in the Colombian context.

Artist Blaise Joseph introduces his practice of ‘Art Room,’ a creative space where knowledge is shared freely among diverse educators. Dominic Joseph and Sonny Jose use reviews of a poem and a film, respectively, as pathways for exploring conflict transformation. Drawing on their

research, Jorge Andrés Macías Quintero and Dragana Jevremovic show how moral judgement can serve as a mechanism for international conflict transformation.

The issue further urges everyone to examine the reciprocal relationship between prejudice and conflict. At the same time, this issue seeks pathways of hope. How can intellectual encounters, spiritual traditions, and responsible technologies contribute to transforming prejudicial mindsets? How can conflict transformation move beyond resolving disputes to healing relationships, reshaping institutions, and cultivating cultures of inclusion, dignity, and solidarity?

By bringing together diverse global perspectives, this issue of Pax Lumina hopes to advance a deeper understanding of prejudice and conflict transformation.

Justice Kurian Joseph
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CHALLENGING THE 'IDEAL VICTIM' ACTIVE RESPONSES TO GRIEF AND VIOLENCE



Photo courtesy: Marco Nucamendi

Drawing on qualitative research conducted in Mexico as part of our project within the Jesuit University System (SUJ), this article analyses how victims actively reject condition of passive victimhood. **By reclaiming their grief, they become politicised ‘victim-agents’ who contribute to peacebuilding from the grassroots level.**



Introduction: **The Construct of the "Ideal Victim"**

A persistent yet often unexamined prejudice underlies many conflicts: the expectation that victims of violence remain passive, submissive, and incapacitated. In contexts marked by severe security crises and systemic impunity, such as Mexico, both public discourse and state institutions reinforce the archetype of the ‘ideal victim.’

Individuals affected by violence are expected to remain helpless and await judicial or state intervention silently. Judicial processes further depersonalise their suffering, reducing human loss and trauma to administrative case numbers and neglected archives.

This administrative approach depoliticizes grief, framing harm as an isolated personal misfortune and detaching violence from its structural roots. When survivors deviate from this prescribed role by organizing, reviewing files, or engaging in public protest, they frequently encounter institutional mistrust, intentional delays, or even criminalisation.

Addressing this prejudice is crucial for authentic conflict transformation. As Regina Bateson notes, victims of crime do not merely withdraw into apathy; instead, they engage in processes of meaning-making, transforming private trauma into a public commitment to prevent repetition.



Drawing on qualitative research conducted in Mexico as part of our project within the Jesuit University System (SUJ), this article analyses how victims actively reject condition of passive victimhood. By reclaiming their grief, they become politicised ‘victim-agents’ who contribute to peacebuilding from the grassroots level.

From Damaged Objects to Politicized Survivors

Traditional legal systems have historically marginalized victims, treating them primarily as sources of evidence within state proceedings.

When institutions fail to investigate, provide protection, or offer reparation, it is understandable that individuals may retreat into private grief. However, many experience a transformation in which personal grief evolves into collective determination.

This transformation means a critical shift from passive recipients of harm to politicised survivors. As Johannes Langer observes, victimhood is both socially and politically constructed; when victims organise, they become agents of structural change. Rather than allowing their suffering to be subsumed by bureaucratic processes, survivors assert control over their cases, challenge institutional hierarchies of empathy, and mobilise to address the underlying causes of violence.

Grounded in Action: What Survivor Agency Really Looks Like

Survivor agency is not merely theoretical; it is displayed in daily practices. This observation is grounded in our qualitative fieldwork and life-course interviews with victims, survivors, and

grassroots organisers throughout Mexico. By tracing both personal and collective trajectories, our research identifies four practices through which affected communities redefine the co-production of peace, justice, and truth:

- **Citizen Science and Grounded Expertise:**

In response to state inaction and dysfunctional forensic systems, survivors actively reject passive roles. They become self-taught investigators, acquiring expertise in criminal procedure, cartography, geolocation, and community registries. For example, in central Mexico, mothers searching for disappeared relatives conduct field searches, developing collective forensic knowledge. As one founder of a searching collective stated: *"When they disappeared my son, I gave birth to another child: the collective... in the collective, the search becomes bearable; it is about drawing strength, rebellion, and shedding fear."* Through the generation of independent data and the discovery of clandestine graves, organised families challenge the State's exclusive control over truth.

Mothers of Mexico's missing search for truth and justice in clandestine mass graves.



Through shared kitchens, accompaniment, and emotional support, these networks repair the social links damaged by violence. **This solidarity extends beyond individual cases, evolving into collective protection for all those affected.**



• **Auditing the Justice System:** Instead of remaining silent, survivors actively engage with their legal processes. They meticulously review judicial files, expose procedural negligence, and draft their own legal paths. This proactive approach is evident among families affected by systemic road violence who reject the classification of incidents as mere ‘accidents.’ For instance, when prosecutors attempted to close a fatal hit-and-run case in southern Mexico, the victim’s sister memorised the Criminal Code and identified procedural omissions until the case was reopened, stating: *“Justice is like a fragile, transparent bubble; the victim has to push it, entrench it, and blow gently so it doesn’t break.”* By transforming individual struggles into accessible models, survivors convert bureaucratic obstacles into mechanisms for public accountability.

• **Defending Territory and Living Memory:** Survivor resistance frequently connects personal loss to broader struggles against environmental degradation and institutional erasure. In communities opposing resource extraction or historical silencing, individual grief evolves into collective defense of shared resources. Grassroots advocates recognise that legal restitution is insufficient if it fails to address systemic causes. As one organiser whose family has resisted both state violence and extractive projects stated: *“The justice promised by legal norms is no longer enough; we have to give justice real content and pedagogical meaning so tragedy does not repeat.”*

Grounding justice in living memory transforms truth into an educational and political safeguard against repetition.

• **Mutual Care as Peace Praxis:** Grassroots networks establish alternative systems of protection, demonstrating that genuine peacebuilding is grounded in everyday acts of care. Through shared kitchens, accompaniment, and emotional support, these networks repair the social links damaged by violence. This solidarity extends beyond individual cases, evolving into collective protection for all those affected. As one searching mother in western Mexico observed: *“Unconditional accompaniment happens when we sit together, because we share the same sorrow, and we go out to find everyone, not just our own.”* This ethic exemplifies what Irene Comins-Mingol describes as the poietic, resilient power of care, a daily practice that restores fractured societies from the ground up.

Conclusion: Moving Beyond Paternalism Toward Grassroots Peacebuilding

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved while state institutions and society perceive victims primarily through pity, suspicion, or enforced silence. Imposing the ‘ideal victim’ archetype undermines political agency and perpetuates violent structures.

Addressing this prejudice requires that the legal system, universities, human rights organisations, and faith-based networks critically examine their own practices. Frequently, even well-intentioned actors perpetuate paternalistic dynamics by treating victims solely as research subjects, charity recipients, or fundraising narratives.



Genuine peacebuilding requires an ethics of accompaniment: collaborating with affected communities, providing technical and communication resources without supplanting their leadership. This approach involves recognising and validating the grounded expertise that survivors have developed through collective resistance.

When grief is reclaimed and transformed into collective resolve, affected communities do not pursue retribution; instead, they demand structural accountability, memory preservation, and relational healing. With authentic accompaniment, politicised survivors illustrate that peace is not solely a top-down agreement among elites, but an ongoing, resilient practice constructed at the grassroots level.

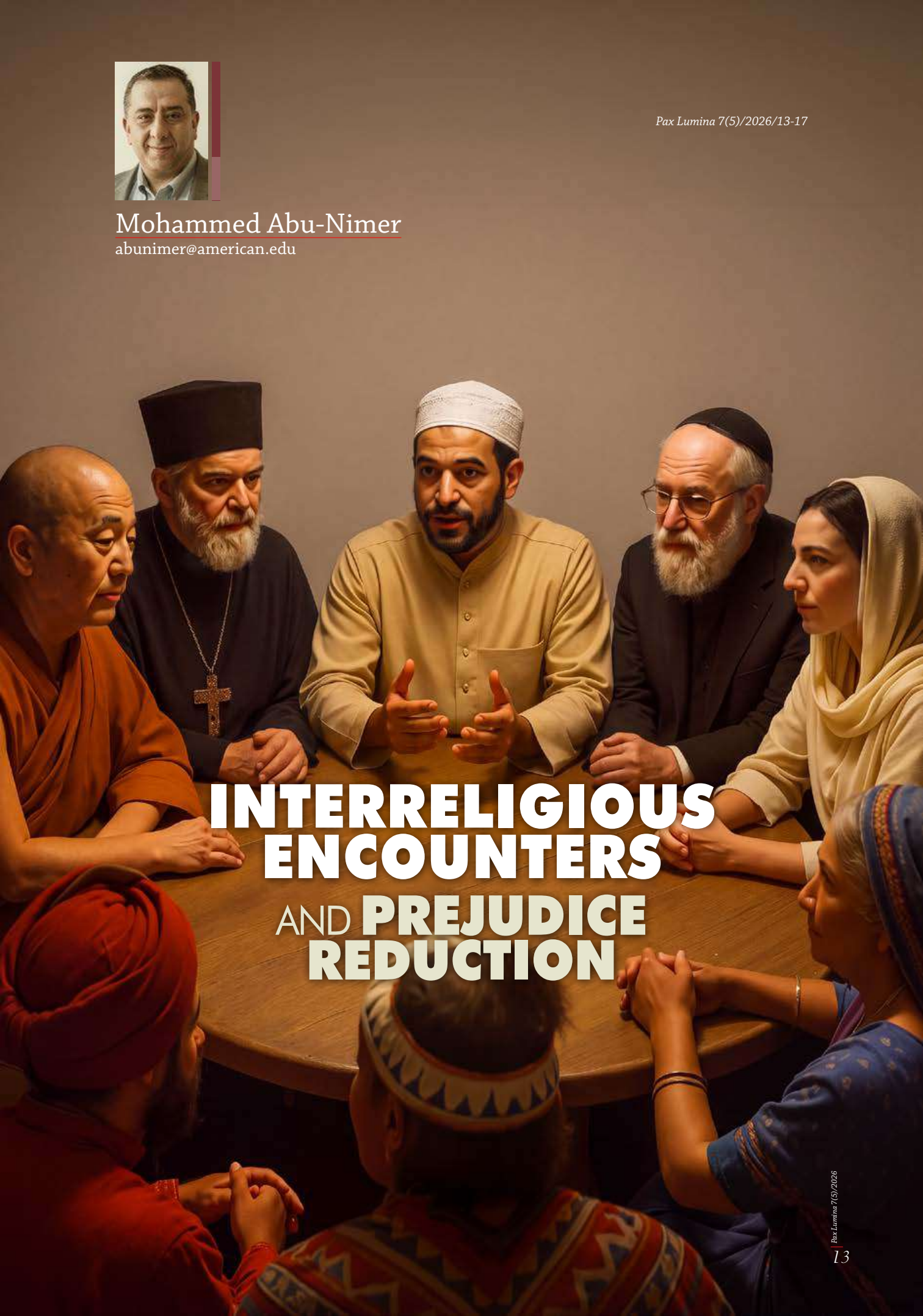
Tadeo Luna de la Mora is a Professor at Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla, affiliated with the Laboratory for Peace with Reconciliation (ReconciLAB) of the Jesuit University System of Mexico (SUJ). He holds a PhD in Law (Criminology) from Pompeu Fabra University. This article is part of the research project "Victims as Peacebuilders: Trajectories of Resistance and Transformative Actions," funded through the "SUJ Call for Scientific, Humanistic, and Technological Research." The author expresses sincere gratitude for the support.

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A large, circular photograph showing a group of people from various religious backgrounds sitting around a wooden table. In the center, a man wearing a white kufi and a tan kurta is gesturing with his hands while speaking. To his left, a Buddhist monk in orange robes and a Christian priest with a white beard and a black mitre listen intently. To the right, a Jewish man with a white beard and glasses, and a woman in a white headscarf, also listen. In the foreground, the backs of two people are visible: one wearing a red turban and another wearing a patterned headband. The scene is lit with warm, soft light, creating a sense of a serious but peaceful dialogue.

INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS AND PREJUDICE REDUCTION

Is it possible to change negative prejudice through interreligious encounters? Can human beings change their own perceptions and adopt a new set of beliefs about others? **From religious and educational perspectives, the answer to both questions is clearly yes. In fact, this is a principle common to all faith traditions and educational approaches: change is possible.**



Human relations are determined mainly by perceptions, as social science theories have repeatedly shown. Our perceptions are formed from an early age through our cycles of interaction with parents, peers and other adults around us. The more we are exposed to different perspectives over the course of our lives, the less likely we are to develop an absolutist view of the world—that is, the more likely we are to make space in our own thinking and beliefs for other possible views.

A well-known saying attributed to Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i eloquently captures this notion: "My opinion is correct, though it may be wrong; and the opinion of others is wrong, though it may be correct."

Social science research has also established a clear link between lack of exposure to the other, prejudice and discrimination, and susceptibility to justifying or supporting violence against others. Merton, a sociologist, offered numerous examples of people who rationalised their discriminatory actions toward "different others" through a well-established set of prejudicial beliefs formed earlier in life.¹

Having also worked in and studied interfaith relations for over four decades, it is clear to me that certain politicians and religious authorities across all faith groups have manipulated religious identity to generate prejudice and justify policies of exclusion and discrimination. We have likewise witnessed an intensification of this process as religious and political actors have increasingly used social media and technology to deepen a politics of identity rooted in fear of the other.



Is it possible to change negative prejudice through interreligious encounters? Can human beings change their own perceptions and adopt a new set of beliefs about others? From religious and educational perspectives, the answer to both questions is clearly yes. In fact, this is a principle common to all faith traditions and educational approaches: change is possible.

Unfortunately, due to rising polarisation, political populism, and regional and national armed conflicts affecting global and local economies and politics (Iran -US- Israel, War on Gaza, Sudan Civil War, and Ukraine-Russia war, to name a few), the field of interfaith dialogue and interreligious peacebuilding faces serious challenges to its credibility and even its relevance. What, then, is the role of religious and interreligious agencies in such a context?

Again, research on intentional and structural human encounters tells us that, when the right combination of conditions exists, encounters with the other can produce transformative change in participants' perceptions. The main ingredients for producing positive change and reducing prejudice can be summarised as three sets of activities that target: (1) change in thinking, by providing new information; (2)

change in attitude, from negative and fearful to positive and trusting; and (3) change in behaviour, from selfish, defensive, and aggressive to collaborative and cooperative, achieved by doing constructive things together.²⁻³ These changes correspond to the 3H model of change: head, hand, and heart.⁴

In interfaith encounters, we add a fourth dimension, spirituality (belief in divine intervention), which requires each participant to speak from their own faith and spiritual identity while remaining open to changing that perspective.⁵

In interreligious and intrareligious relations, developing this kind of critical, self-reflective posture toward one's own faith tradition and its hermeneutics is essential, and it often determines the success or failure of interfaith dialogue.

These dynamics play out clearly in interfaith relations: a lack of exposure to other religious perspectives, combined with an absolutist view of the pathways to truth, constitutes fertile ground for negative and mythical generalisations about other faith groups. Ignorance of other faith traditions is encouraged and reinforced when a tradition deprives its own children and followers of the opportunity to learn about others'

Research on intentional and structural human encounters tells us that, **when the right combination of conditions exists, encounters with the other can produce transformative change in participants' perceptions.**



pathways to truth and salvation. This approach to interreligious relations feeds prejudice, which can easily escalate into behavioural discrimination against other religious practices, as explained above.

When participants arrive at an interreligious encounter holding an absolutist view of the world, grounded in their interpretation and understanding of their faith, they are often shocked to discover that others hold their own truths as well. A sense of defensiveness commonly emerges among such participants in the early stages of the encounter.

However, when the dialogical container for these interactions is well constructed — in ways that allow trust to build and positive experiences to accumulate — new learning about the other faith, and about other individuals, begins to develop.

A new understanding of one's own faith can develop as well: what was once experienced as absolute truth is replaced by an understanding that there are multiple pathways to truth, each deserving recognition and respect.

Although this process of change at the individual, perceptual level in interfaith encounters can take place within a few days of intensive interaction, a comparable shift at the collective level — from institutional prejudice against other faith traditions to a pluralist institutional outlook — can take years, even centuries.

We have seen aspects of this change unfold across all five major traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A well-documented example is the change that took place in the 1960s in the form of the Second Vatican Council, which opened the gates of salvation beyond the Church.⁶

As stated above, change at the individual, micro level is possible and has been documented in thousands of studies; institutional change, however, is more challenging and far slower to achieve, if it happens at all.

Reducing religious prejudice at the collective level requires institutionalising inter- and intrareligious encounters within every faith tradition. This means ensuring that every Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist child is exposed, from an early age, to the values and beliefs — both shared and distinct — of other faith groups.⁷ It also requires that religious leaders and clergy must themselves model, for their followers, ways of reducing prejudice and abandoning absolutist perspectives about others.

We cannot expect the elimination of prejudice against other religions when religious leaders remain silent or complacent in the face of injustice, and when they distance themselves and their institutions from movements for social and political change. In doing so, their implicit message is one of tolerance for bigotry, prejudice, and violence against others. When religious actors, agencies, and leaders instead

take a visible stand against oppression, injustice, mass atrocities, and war crimes, their followers can feel supported and empowered by their faith representatives.

Such institutional change can strengthen resilience against prejudice and reinforce both individual and collective immunity to the manipulation of religious identity in the service of violence — a social disease that has spread widely around the world over the past four decades.

These are precisely the changes needed to revive public trust in the efficacy of interfaith dialogue and its transformative potential.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Professor, Abdul Aziz Said Chair for Peace and Conflict Resolution, School of International Service, American University, Washington, D.C. & President, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice.



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- 1 Robert K. Merton, "Discrimination and the American Creed," in *Discrimination and National Welfare*, ed. R.M. MacIver (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 99–126. Merton's typology distinguishes prejudiced from unprejudiced individuals along a separate axis from whether they actually discriminate, showing that prejudiced beliefs and discriminatory behavior, while related, are not identical and can be independently reinforced by social context.
- 2 Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954). Allport proposed that intergroup contact reduces prejudice most reliably when four conditions are present: equal status between groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from institutional authorities.
- 3 Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006): 751–783. Their meta-analysis of over 500 studies found that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice even when Allport's optimal conditions are only partially met, and that the effect generalizes across a wide range of target groups.
- 4 The head-hand-heart formulation draws on the experiential-education tradition associated with John Dewey and is widely used in social-emotional learning and peace-education design, where cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral change are treated as distinct but mutually reinforcing dimensions of transformative learning.
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A PHENOMENOLOGY OF **RACE** THE **EMBODIED** LIFE OF **PREJUDICE**



show the importance of understanding how anti-Black prejudices are not simply doxastic, and how transforming a world of anti-Black prejudices importantly requires transforming how we engage in processes of world-making and radically rethinking how, in this case, white embodiment must itself be radically transformed.



I ntroduction

The phenomenology of race takes seriously the ways in which race, while a social construction, is a *lived*, embodied phenomenon. Phenomenologist Emily Lee understands race as a meaning system that is fundamentally linked to our collective social horizon. From a phenomenological perspective, race is a lived experience that is constituted through meaning-making processes. It is through these processes, which are historically and socially iterative, that race is manifested through sedimented practices that shape our perceptions, desires, fears and embodied comportments.

Since race is by no means a historically or contemporarily benign category, my objective is to demonstrate what a phenomenology of race can uncover through the lens of a first-person perspective within the context of anti-Blackness. I show the importance of understanding how anti-Black *prejudices* are not simply doxastic, and how transforming a world of anti-Black prejudices importantly requires transforming how we engage in processes of world-making and radically rethinking how, in this case, white embodiment must itself be radically transformed. I write within a U.S. context that was founded upon whiteness, the structural source of violent anti-Indigenous and anti-Black prejudices.

An Ordinary Trip to the Store

As a Black man, I walk into a store to purchase goods. It is an ordinary act that most of us do. It is as easy as reaching for my cup of tea, which sits to the left of my computer. Neither requires much conscious thought. It is the sort of transaction within the social world that philosophers describe as mundane or quotidian—the everyday. There is no concentrated effort as my body moves through the space of the store. Phenomenologically, I don't encounter my body as an obstacle that stands in the way of my movement. In fact, I don't encounter my body as an object at all.

As an embodied person, my body functions as the *here*, or what Husserl calls the zero-point of orientation (Gallagher), from which I begin to engage with the items within the store. For example, from this zero-point of orientation, I don't measure my steps or my physical distance from a quart of milk. It is not as if I consciously construct an abstract image of the quart of milk first and then subsequently move toward it and place it in my cart. The quart of milk constitutes a meaningful food object within the larger intelligible world of shopping. As I reach for the milk, as Merleau-Ponty might say, my arms and hands are “potentialities already mobilized by the perception” (p.106) of the carton of milk. Merleau-Ponty also writes, “A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its ‘world’, and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation” (Dreyfus).



But then something goes awry. I now struggle to shop. What had felt like a natural process of reaching for food has been violently interrupted.

The Performative Violence of the White Gaze

I begin to feel my Black body as an object placed under surveillance. I am being watched, marked as a “criminal,” a “thief.” I have been in this situation before. I see the white security guard *looking*, though trying not to be seen. He never speaks; he doesn’t scream “Hey, you there!” No locutionary expression is necessary for me to have my innocence being violated, my integrity being questioned, and my embodied Blackness reduced to a zone of danger. The white gaze is all that is necessary. Like Fanon in his encounter with the young white Parisian boy on the train, my body schema, which is fundamentally pre-reflective, is being challenged. He reduces me to my racialised epidermis.

The white gaze is a sedimented and habitual practice that has the performative force of violence. It is not even necessary for him to have, at that moment, a fully formed proposition—“I believe that Black man is about to steal some food or rob somebody!” The security guard’s

body also moves through space, a space where whiteness is the quasi-transcendental norm—the racially unmarked human as such, against which my Black body stands out as a problem. I notice that white people continue to shop. Their bodies don’t stand out as a problem. As Ahmed writes, “White bodies are habitual insofar as they ‘trail behind’ actions: they do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness ‘goes unnoticed’” (p.157). So, those bodies are left to shop, to move with ease. I am followed.

The white security guard has inherited modes of embodied comportment. He sees a *Black person* and his body is propelled forward to protect all things white. Whiteness is the horizon within which the world unfolds, where the meaning of my body appears as “deviant.” I am not so much pre-judged, which is still linked to beliefs and the action of judging. There is something else that is far more intersubjectively subtle at stake.

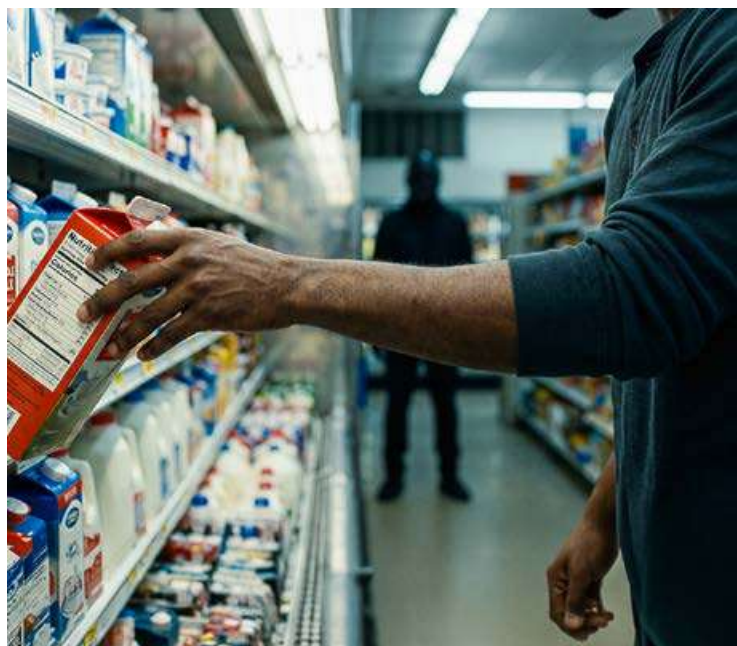
As the quasi-transcendental norm, whiteness plays, as Guenther writes, “a constitutive role in shaping the meaning and manner of [white people’s] experience.” She writes that whiteness permeates and reproduces “the natural attitude in ways that go beyond any particular object of thought. They are not things to be seen, but rather *ways of seeing*, and even ways of *making*

This point exposes the fact that white bodies are not neoliberal subjects, ontologically autonomous. **For white people to claim otherwise is a function of white privilege. Thus, to be white is to be—as a racial collective—part of an ontological binary structure that is heteronomous and calls white people to responsibility.**



the world that go unnoticed” (p.12). So, when the white security guard *looks* at me, as Butler writes, the look is a “schematic foreshadowing of an accusation” (p.18). The white gaze functions as an embodied discursive force that systematically constitutes that which it sees.

I am not seen and then negatively marked by an anti-Black prejudice. Rather, I am always already the dangerous Black body that is encountered—I am an anterior problem. It is not as if the white security guard first read about me in some hypothetical text titled, “How to Profile Black People,” and then, upon seeing me, applied what he had learned. Smith, writing about the lessons that she learned in becoming anti-Black, noted, “And we learned far more from acts than words, more from a raised eyebrow, a joke, a long silence, than from long sentences” (p.90). The white security guard’s performative and habituated white gaze is a necessary ritual that underwrites the moral “innocence” of white bodies, and that “authorizes” him to maintain the “safety” of white spaces. Smith captures the pre-reflective dimensions of anti-Blackness, writing, “These ceremonials [in honour of white supremacy] ... performed from babyhood, slip from the conscious mind down deep into muscles and glands and become difficult to tear out” (p.96).



Un-suturing the White Body and the White World

Think of the white people shopping in the same store along with me. Their bodies trail behind them—a function of white privilege. Jensen writes, “Every time I walk into a store at the same time as a black man and the [white] security guard follows him and leaves me alone to shop, I am benefiting from white privilege” (p.131). They shop without being perceived as problems. They may have problems finding a certain can of soup, but they are not problems—ontologically. The white space within the store functions as a social skin to which white people are sutured and that extends their bodies as they move through a normative white space always already meant for them. Like Ahmed, I argue that to be white within this space is to be a “body-at-home” (p.153).

White bodies *belong* within that shopping space; they are sutured to its hospitality to freely shop without any fear of encountering their own bodies as problem bodies. To shop, to move about lithely as white, is a mode of motility that is sutured to historically sedimented habits, pre-reflective modes of bodily comportment, discursive forces, institutional powers, and anti-Black libidinal economies. This point exposes the fact that white bodies are not neoliberal subjects, ontologically autonomous. For white people to claim otherwise is a function of white privilege. Thus, to be white is to be—as a racial collective—part of an ontological binary structure that is heteronomous and calls white people to responsibility.

But so many white people would rather suture themselves and remain enclosed by a lie that is performed every time they shop. White people may not reflectively know they are lying, but this doesn't in any way position them outside the toxic matrix of white embodied anti-Blackness. What is necessary is the courage to face the fact that whiteness involves embodied "patterns according to which [they] see" (Guenther, p.16).

To face such a reality is to un-suture—a species of embodied vulnerability, a confrontation

with the white self that wounds. White people must tarry with the wound, refuse to suture it, refuse to be at home (phenomenologically a form of *Unheimlichkeit*). Imagine white bodies disoriented, in crisis because they have un-sutured themselves to the truth that their unreflective (and reflective) *normative modes* of being-in-the-world are themselves the problem. To "transform" the world in relation to whiteness misses what is profoundly at stake—the end of processes of white intelligibility that give rise to the world *simpliciter*. The phenomenological implications of an end to white-world making are captured by Baldwin, who argues, "Any real change implies the breakup of the [white] world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one [a white] identity, the end of [white] safety" (p.117).

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HUMANISING THE 'OTHER' CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN SRI LANKA

Dialogue is not simply the exchange of opinions. True dialogue begins when we are willing to listen to life stories that we have never heard before. **When we listen deeply, we begin to see the human being behind the word “other.”**



What happens when we meet, face to face, someone whom we have been taught to fear?

This is not merely a philosophical question. It is an important question connected to Sri Lanka's history, identities, relationships and everyday life. Sri Lanka is a country enriched by ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural and social diversity. Yet, when we begin to see people not through their humanity but through the identities attached to them, this very diversity can become a source of suspicion and division.

Prejudice can be understood as a negative assumption or judgement formed about an individual or community without sufficient knowledge, experience or understanding. Over time, such assumptions can create fear, mistrust, exclusion and inequality. They affect not only personal relationships but also relationships between communities.

In the Sri Lankan context, our past conflicts teach us an important lesson. When people begin to see one another not as individuals but merely as members of a particular ethnic or social group, differences can easily turn into suspicion and hostility. Yet, even during periods of violence, stories of people who protected and helped those from other communities show us another truth: even in the midst of division, human beings can choose solidarity, compassion and humanity.

Through my involvement with young people and communities, my understanding of conflict also changed. Previously, I thought of conflict mainly as violence, fighting or a problem. But as I began to understand it more deeply, I learned that conflict itself is not necessarily violence. Within conflict, there can be a possibility for destruction, but there can also be a possibility for transformation.

I experienced this very clearly during a simple group activity. Participants took part in a game while trying to protect a soft object placed at the centre. As the game became more intense, everyone's attention shifted towards winning. Eventually, the soft object at the centre was damaged.



**But nobody had said that it was a competition.
The competition existed in our minds.**

This small experience revealed a much bigger truth. We often respond to situations not according to what they actually are but according to our assumptions and prejudices. During times of conflict, our relationships, humanity and mutual respect are like the soft object placed at the centre. In our desire to win, we may unintentionally destroy them.

That is why conflict transformation is deeper than simply solving a problem. It involves transforming our thoughts, attitudes, relationships and social structures.

This became even more visible when young people from different regions and backgrounds came together and shared their life experiences. Some spoke about land-related issues and environmental destruction. Others shared experiences of a lack of educational opportunities, caste- and ethnicity-based discrimination, substance abuse and social exclusion. Some spoke about the loneliness, stress and burden of expectations experienced by young people. Young people from areas affected by the war also shared their experiences of language barriers, social inequality, environmental challenges and historical wounds that have not yet fully healed.

At first, these appeared to be different problems belonging to different places.

But then something changed.

One community listened to another.

One person's life experience helped another understand a different reality.

A problem that had once seemed distant became the story of a human being.

This is the power of dialogue.

Dialogue is not simply the exchange of opinions. True dialogue begins when we are willing to listen to life stories that we have never heard before. When we listen deeply, we begin to see the human being behind the word "other." They have fears, just as we do. They have dreams, wounds and hopes.

It is at this point that prejudice slowly begins to transform into understanding.

A safe conversation among women provided an even deeper example of this. Women shared their anger, anxieties, family responsibilities, social expectations and experiences of having their voices silenced. One woman shared how she had distanced herself from members of her own family

From my perspective, peacebuilding does not necessarily have to begin in a large or formal setting. **Sometimes, it can begin in a small circle.**

A circle in which one person feels safe enough to share their true story.

A circle where others listen without judgement.



because they belonged to a different ethnic community. Later, she realised that her own prejudice had contributed to hurting that relationship. This realisation helped her move towards accepting the relationship again with love and respect.

This experience changed my understanding of prejudice.

Prejudice does not always appear as open hatred.

Sometimes it appears in much quieter forms.

Whom do we trust?

Whom do we avoid?

Whose voice do we consider important?

Whose identity do we hesitate to accept?

These questions can reveal the hidden prejudices within us.

Therefore, conflict transformation must take place not only between communities but also within families, schools, communities and our own minds.

We need to ask ourselves some difficult questions:

“Who taught me to fear another community?”

“Where did my prejudices come from?”

“What stories have I never taken the time to hear?”

“Whom have I unknowingly labelled as the ‘other’?”

Such questions invite us into a journey of **learning, unlearning and relearning.**

But reconciliation does not mean forgetting the past. Nor does it mean hiding injustice. It is not simply telling those who have been hurt to “forgive and move on.” Genuine reconciliation means acknowledging pain, listening to the voices of those who have been affected, restoring their dignity and creating an environment in which trust can be rebuilt.

Therefore, conflict transformation must make space for justice and compassion, and for truth and hope.

Sri Lanka does not need to become less diverse in order to live in peace.



Instead, we need to learn how to live together with our diversity.

A small piece of artwork created collectively by people from different backgrounds became a beautiful metaphor for this. Each part of it was different. Yet those differences came together to create a beautiful whole.

This may offer an important lesson for Sri Lanka.

We do not all need to become the same.

We need to learn how to make space for one another and live together while remaining different.

It is not enough to teach young people about peace; they must also be given opportunities to experience and create peace in practice. Women need safe spaces where they can express their voices and dreams. Marginalised communities need more than simply being “given a place”; their lived realities must be genuinely heard and respected.

From my perspective, peacebuilding does not necessarily have to begin in a large or formal setting.

Sometimes, it can begin in a small circle.

A circle in which one person feels safe enough to share their true story.

A circle where others listen without judgement.

Within that circle, the “other” slowly becomes a “neighbour.”

The neighbour becomes visible as a human being.

We begin to realise that this person’s pain, dignity and dreams are as valuable as our own.

At that moment, the power of prejudice begins to weaken.

That is where conflict transformation begins.

Not by erasing our differences but by learning to see one another as human beings within those differences.

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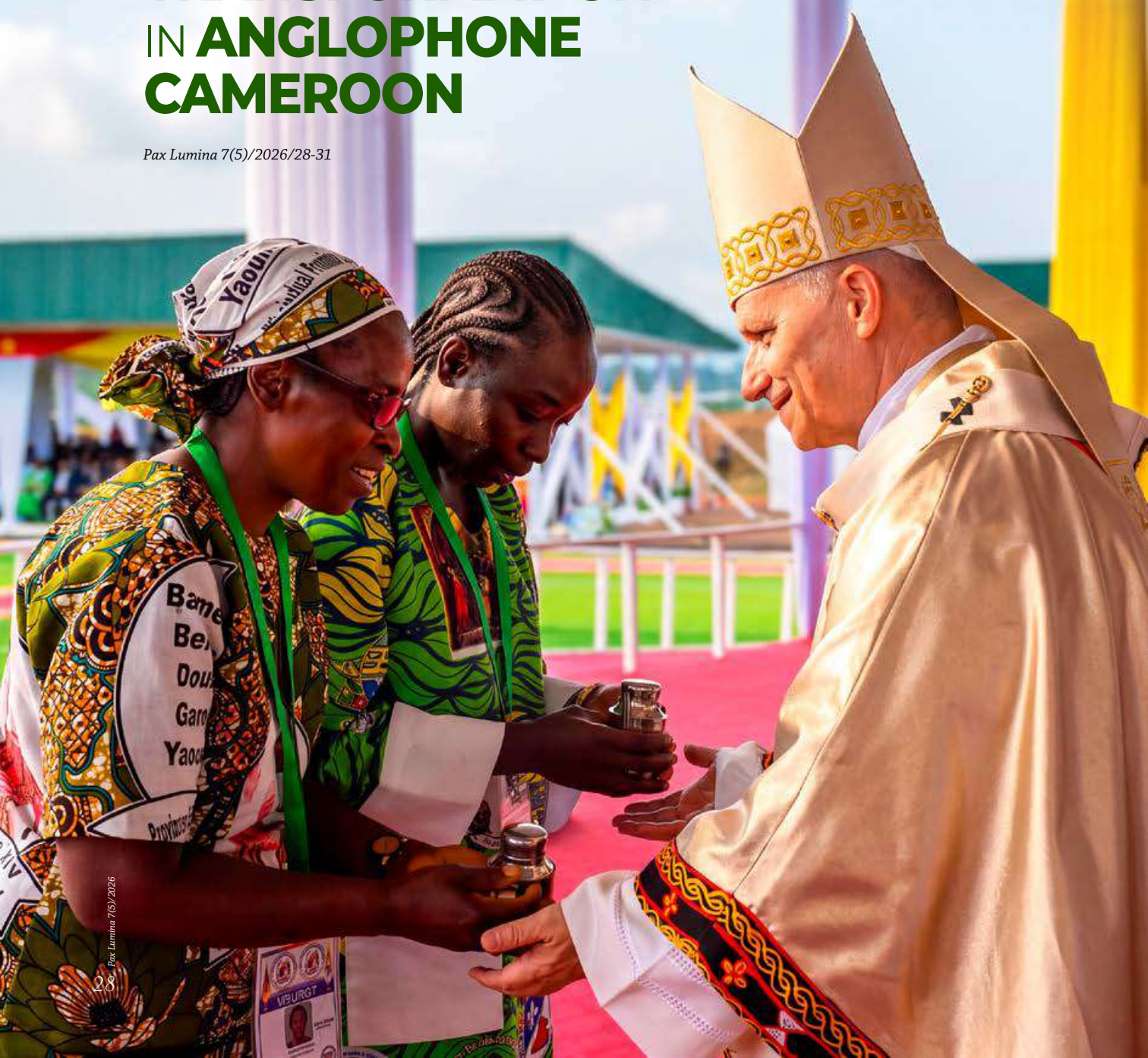
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A LANGUAGE OF EXCLUSION

PREJUDICE AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

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For decades, Anglophones were sent French-speaking judges who could not read our law reports and teachers who could not teach in our language. **We were told, in effect, that our difference was a problem to be administratively solved rather than a heritage to be respected.**



I am a deacon of the Catholic Diocese of Buea, in the South-West Region of Cameroon, one of the two English-speaking regions that have lived, since 2016, through what the world now calls the Anglophone Crisis. I have buried parishioners killed in crossfire. I have sat with mothers whose sons left for the bush and never returned, and with others whose sons returned, but not as the boys who left.

I have travelled roads where a checkpoint could belong to the army or to a separatist fighter, and where the wrong answer to a simple question could cost a life. I write, then, not primarily as an analyst of prejudice but as someone who has watched prejudice do its slow, patient work of turning neighbours into enemies.

It is easy to assume that Cameroon's crisis is only about politics, or about the eleven percent of the population who speak English rather than French. It is not. At its root is a prejudice as old as the country's 1961 reunification: the quiet, then increasingly open, assumption among sections of the Francophone-dominated state that Anglophone institutions, our common-law courts, our English language school system, our very manner of doing things, were inferior, provincial, and dispensable (Awasom, 2020; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003).



For decades, Anglophones were sent French-speaking judges who could not read our law reports and teachers who could not teach in our language. We were told, in effect, that our difference was a problem to be administratively solved rather than a heritage to be respected.

Prejudice, when it is structural and sustained long enough, does not stay quiet. In late 2016, Anglophone lawyers and teachers went on strike over precisely these grievances. The State's response was heavy-handed, and grievance hardened into insurgency. By 2017, armed groups were fighting for an independent "Ambazonia," and Cameroon's military was fighting back.

Nearly a decade later, entire communities have been displaced, and UNICEF estimates that roughly 800,000 children have been forced out of school by the conflict (Nzwili, 2026). More than three thousand people from the Kumbo Diocese catchment area alone have been trafficked across the border into Nigeria, many of them desperate young people with nowhere else to turn (Nzwili, 2026).

What troubles me most, as a cleric who must minister to all sides, is how thoroughly prejudice has become mutual. Government soldiers have treated ordinary villagers as presumed separatist sympathisers merely for living in the wrong village. Separatist fighters have, in turn, treated teachers who reopen schools and civilians who cooperate with the state in any way as traitors to be punished.

Each side has constructed a story in which the other is not merely wrong but less than human, exactly the process of diabolisation that Didier Pollefeyt describes in his study of the Shoah, a process by which recognition of the other's humanity must be destroyed for the violence to be sustainable. Disinformation on social media has deepened this: unverified reports, often lacking any named source, date, or location, circulate faster than facts and entrench each community's worst suspicions of the other (Nounkeu, 2020).

And yet, prejudice is not the whole of this story, and I refuse to let it be the last word.

I have seen the Church, battered as it has been, refuse to let hatred settle in. In August 2025, Bishop Aloysius Fondong Abangalo of Mamfe Diocese told his suffering people that "God's love remains the greatest weapon against evil,

against war, against conflict," offering what he called "the fire of love" as the Church's answer where arms have failed (Catholic World Report, 2025).

The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon has repeatedly refused to take up a single side, instead deploring "all forms of violence" and insisting on dialogue (Vatican News, 2024). And in April 2026, Pope Leo XIV himself came to Bamenda, at the very heart of this crisis, and told a community that had "suffered so greatly" that their endurance of faith amid suffering only deepened "your conviction that God has never abandoned us." He came, in his words, "as a shepherd and as a servant of dialogue, fraternity and peace," choosing embodied presence over the disembodied hostility of the checkpoint and the timeline.

That, I believe, is where conflict transformation genuinely begins: not with the silencing of grievance, which is real and must be heard, but with the patient, humanising work of encounter. In my own small corner of ministry, this looks like continuing to baptise, to bury, and to bless without regard for which side of the road a family lives on; like insisting, in every



Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis began with a prejudice about whose language, law, and learning mattered less. **Genuine peace will require the opposite conviction, patiently rebuilt: that every voice, French or English, Yaoundé or Bamenda, government or governed, belongs equally at the table where our shared future is still, however painfully, being written.**



homily, that a soldier's child or a fighter's child is first and always a child of God before any other identity attaches to them. It looks like teaching young people, many of whom have known nothing but conflict, that the story others tell about "the enemy" is not the only story available to them.

Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis began with a prejudice about whose language, law, and learning mattered less. Genuine peace will require the opposite conviction, patiently rebuilt: that every voice, French or English, Yaoundé or Bamenda, government or governed, belongs equally at the table where our shared future is still, however painfully, being written.

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PREJUDICE AND THE IMPERATIVE OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

**REFLECTIONS ON THE “KILLING” OF
PROFESSOR JASON ARDAY**

The tragic death of Cambridge University professor Jason Arday in August 2026 exposes the lethal consequences of prejudice in contemporary society. This article employs John Paul Lederach's framework of conflict transformation to analyse how prejudice operates across personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions. Drawing on Arday's experience as a Black, autistic, working-class scholar who was subjected to a sustained media campaign, the article argues that genuine peacebuilding requires moving beyond superficial remedies towards deep structural and cultural transformation. The framework of conflict transformation offers a pathway for addressing the root causes of prejudice and building societies capable of protecting vulnerability rather than destroying it.



I ntroduction

On 14 August 2026, Professor Jason Arday—the youngest Black scholar appointed to a professorship at the University of Cambridge, a man who remained non-verbal until the age of eleven and only mastered reading and writing at eighteen—was found dead in his South London home at forty-one years of age. Just nine days prior, Arday had resigned from his chair, noting that the relentless strain of public speculation, hostile commentary, and institutional scrutiny had exacted an unbearable toll on his well-being and his loved ones.

The weeks preceding his death unfolded as a public spectacle. Nathan Cofnas, a controversial figure who had previously lost a research fellowship at Cambridge for publishing claims regarding racial hierarchies in intelligence, publicly accused Arday of academic misconduct. Mainstream British media outlets quickly amplified these assertions, triggering what observers characterized as a systematic campaign of public vilification (Associated Press, 2026). In the wake of his death, Cambridge Chancellor Lord Chris Smith acknowledged that the public handling of the academic had crossed reasonable bounds (BBC News, 2026). Over 90,000 individuals signed

Prejudice is far more than a social or psychological error; it is a profound failure of the imagination and a fundamental rejection of empathy. **It imposes a stunted vision of the Other, reducing a living human being to a mere label, a threat, or a statistic.**



a petition demanding an independent inquiry into media conduct, while mourners gathering in London described the environment as a hostile, relentless campaign against a Black scholar who had overcome profound structural barriers (CNN, 2026).

Although official investigations concluded that the death was not suspicious, community responses pointed toward a broader sociocultural phenomenon: a public ritual of dehumanisation that reduced an individual scholar to a symbolic target.

This is prejudice at its most lethal—not simply a personal attitude, but a public ritual of destruction. Prejudice is far more than a social or psychological error; it is a profound failure of the imagination and a fundamental rejection of empathy. It imposes a stunted vision of the Other, reducing a living human being to a mere label, a threat, or a statistic. When we view someone strictly through the prism of nationality, caste, religion, or ideology, we cease to see the individual, focusing instead on a caricature shaped by our own fears. True conflict transformation, therefore, requires an interior pilgrimage: a deliberate shift away from judgment and toward a place of authentic human encounter.

This dynamic echoes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) conceptual framework regarding the danger of a single story. Adichie observes that prejudice relies on the insistence that a single narrative about a group constitutes its complete and definitive reality. In contested institutional or social spaces, this singular narrative becomes weaponised. It minimises personal complexity, obscures institutional responsibilities, and hinders constructive engagement by fostering insensitivity to individual vulnerability.

Beyond Resolution: The Lederach Framework

Analysing these dynamics requires an analytical approach capable of examining the deeper architectures of social friction. John Paul Lederach's (2005, 2014) framework of conflict transformation provides a structured lens for this inquiry. Lederach distinguishes transformation from both conflict resolution and conflict management. While resolution seeks to eliminate an immediate dispute and management attempts to contain disruptive behaviour, transformation views conflict as an inherent, continuous feature of human relationships (Lederach, 2014).

The analytical focus is not on suppressing friction, but on redirecting its underlying dynamics from destructive patterns toward constructive structural and relational development. Lederach's model conceptualises conflict transformation across four interconnected dimensions: the personal, the relational, the structural, and the cultural (Lederach, 2014). Examining the circumstance of Professor Arday through these four lenses illustrates how prejudice operates at multiple levels within academic and civic spaces.



The Personal Dimension: The Reduction of the Individual

At the personal level, conflict transformation addresses shifts in cognition, perception, emotional experience, and individual identity (Lederach, 2006). Arday's biography presented a narrative of significant resilience: navigating neurodivergence and socioeconomic barriers to reach the higher echelons of British academia. His scholarly output addressed the systemic obstacles encountered by minority ethnic students within higher education (Arday, 2018; Arday, Branchu & Boliver, 2021) and critically examined the historical legacies of elite educational institutions (Gamsu, Ashe & Arday, 2024).

However, within a polarised public discourse, these same characteristics were reinterpreted through hostile frameworks. Rather than being evaluated as a complex academic, Arday was frequently reduced to an institutional symbol—a surrogate for broader debates surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Statements from critics, including Cofnas, explicitly framed the critique of Arday as an attack on broader institutional policies. This abstraction demonstrates the core mechanism of personal prejudice: the erasure of individual humanity in favour of categorical projection. When institutions fail to embed equity as a fundamental structural priority, the burden of representation shifts heavily onto vulnerable individuals, leaving them exposed to targeted ideological opposition.

The Relational Dimension: Institutional and Interpersonal Severance

Lederach's relational dimension focuses on face-to-face interaction, patterns of communication, power dynamics, and relational trust (Lederach, 2014). The developments preceding Arday's death highlight a severe breakdown in relational support networks, both between the scholar and his critics, and between the scholar and his host institution.

While formal mechanisms such as staff counseling were available (BBC News, 2026), these measures addressed individual stress symptoms rather than the external relational pressures acting upon the individual. Observers and colleagues noted that standard administrative protocols proved insufficient against organized external campaigns.

True relational transformation, as defined by Lederach (2014), requires a commitment to human dignity that moves beyond basic administrative compliance. It requires institutional structures capable of identifying when public discourse transitions into targeted harassment and responding with proactive protective measures. The post-hoc initiation of reviews highlighted a fundamental gap in institutional foresight regarding the protection of scholars facing hyper-visible public scrutiny.

The contemporary media ecosystem operates on models that prioritise high-conflict narratives, generating commercial value through sensationalism. **Simultaneously, academic institutions often rely on rigid metrics and procedural vulnerability that can be exploited via public pressure campaigns.**



The Structural Dimension: Systemic Mechanisms of Amplification

The structural dimension examines the underlying social, political, media, and institutional frameworks that generate or exacerbate conflict (Lederach, 2014; see also Galtung, 1969). In this context, structural prejudice manifested through the intersection of commercial media incentives and rigid academic governance.

The contemporary media ecosystem operates on models that prioritise high-conflict narratives, generating commercial value through sensationalism. Simultaneously, academic institutions often rely on rigid metrics and procedural vulnerability that can be exploited via public pressure campaigns.

In Arday's case, despite prior institutional reviews regarding his credentials, secondary investigations were initiated following intense media coverage (BBC News, 2026). This sequence demonstrates how structural incentives within media environments can override internal institutional procedures, creating an environment where individual scholars are subjected to disproportionate external pressure without adequate structural defence.

The Cultural Dimension: Contested Narratives and the Moral Imagination

The cultural dimension encompasses the broader societal narratives, identity frameworks, and shared values that shape how conflict is perceived and conducted (Lederach, 2014). Arday's career and subsequent resignation became central points in competing cultural narratives regarding meritocracy, representation, justice and institutional power in contemporary Britain.

His accuser framed him as the product of a "corrupt system" that elevated the undeserving. His supporters framed him as a victim of a racist campaign to tear down Black excellence. Both sides frequently operated at a level of cultural abstraction that treated the individual primarily as an emblem of a larger socio-political struggle. Both narratives reduced him to a symbol. Neither allowed him simply to be a flawed, extraordinary, struggling human being.

Lederach (2005) argues that cultural transformation depends on the exercise of the "moral imagination"—the capacity to perceive deep human interconnectedness even within deeply divided social contexts. Achieving this requires moving beyond binary cultural battles toward frameworks that recognise individual complexity, value human vulnerability, and reject the instrumentalisation of personal lives for broader ideological debates.



Emerging Dynamics in the Digital Public Sphere

The dynamics observed in this case reflect broader shifts in how prejudice is mediated within digital environments. Online platforms utilise algorithmic systems designed to maximise engagement, frequently favouring emotionally charged or confrontational content. Consequently, allegations or targeted critiques can rapidly achieve widespread circulation without going through traditional editorial verification.

These algorithmic feedback loops interact with historical forms of social prejudice, creating accelerated mechanisms of public pressure. For scholars and public figures from historically marginalised groups, this environment creates a heightened level of exposure. Addressing these digital dynamics requires expanding conflict transformation frameworks to include digital literacy, platform accountability, and institutional strategies designed to mitigate coordinated online hostility.

Imperatives for Structural and Cultural Transformation

Lederach (2014) operates from a deeply pragmatic perspective rather than an impractical idealism. He demonstrates that a truly transformational framework depends on an ability to view conflict through a positive lens—recognising it not as a destructive anomaly, but as a

natural, inevitable force that opens vital avenues for personal, structural, and societal growth. Building on this dynamic premise, he asserts that real progress demands an active, deliberate commitment to engaging with dispute in ways that harness its constructive potential, ultimately translating friction and disagreement into lasting, systemic improvement.

The tragedy of Jason Arday is a summons to this work. The thousands who gathered in Trafalgar Square, the 90,000 who signed the petition, the mourners who spoke of a “witch hunt” and a “modern-day lynching”—they were not merely grieving. They were insisting that something must change.

But change will not come from petitions alone. It will come from the slow, patient work of transformation at every level of human life. It will come when we learn to see each other not as symbols but as persons. It will come when institutions learn to protect rather than sacrifice the vulnerable. It will come when our cultures learn to tell stories that honour complexity.

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Conclusion

The circumstances surrounding the death of Professor Jason Arday serve as a critical case study in the real-world impact of multi-layered prejudice. Transforming these destructive dynamics requires a deliberate shift from reductive categorisation towards authentic engagement with individual human complexity.

Peacebuilding within contemporary institutions cannot be limited to reactive crisis management. It demands a systematic effort to reform structural incentives, foster relational accountability, and cultivate cultural frameworks grounded in empathy and mutual respect. As Lederach's model demonstrates, meaningful conflict transformation is realised only when social and institutional systems are intentionally structured to protect individual dignity rather than compromise it.

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CONFLICTS, STEREOTYPES, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION



At Casa Luisita, relatives of victims can access psychological therapy and spiritual accompaniment while connecting with other searching mothers and families. **These religious practices provide comfort to victims' relatives and foster a communal sense of hope that is often transformed into concrete actions through which they express their claims.**



“The Kuki are not indigenous to Manipur”; “The Reangs are outsiders in Mizoram”; “Muslims in Assam and Bengalis in Tripura are illegal Bangladeshi immigrants”; “North Eastern girls are attacked because they are Christian and don’t dress like Indians.” These are among the stereotypes used to justify conflicts in the Northeast. A peace process has to begin by understanding them and their impact on the communities in conflict. Ways can then be found of sustaining processes aimed at peace with justice.

Creating an Oversimplified Identity

A consequence of such stereotypes is polarisation around a value system or demand, the division of people into those who agree or disagree with it, and the perpetuation of conflicts that obstruct peace. Because of its distinct history, the indigenous identity or “indigenous to the Northeast” as distinct from “indigenous to India” has become such an issue in the Northeast. Indigenous to the Northeast are the communities that inhabited the region prior to the Yandaboo Treaty of 24th February 1826, under which the East India Company forced the Burmese Emperor who ruled the region to cede all his territories to it.



Till then, some parts of the Northeast had felt the religious and cultural influence of continental India, but politically it belonged to the Burmese zone of influence. With the Yandaboo Treaty, the Northeast became part of India's political map for the first time. In fact, for the first time, what was a conglomeration of kingdoms became an entity called the Northeast.



Ever since then, it has been searching for an identity of its own within India, amid pressure to join the ‘mainstream’ understood as the Gangetic Valley. For example, a leaflet circulated in March 2010 by some fundamentalists after attacks on several North Eastern girls in Delhi said that the people of the Northeast are Christians, not Indians, and do not dress according to Indian culture. Their dress provokes men, so they should become Indians if they want to be safe.

Such a stance places the onus for change exclusively on the region’s people, some of whom respond with a victim mentality, creating a vicious circle. They place all the blame on continental India, thereby intensifying the vicious circle of tension and polarisation. With land and resource shortages caused by alienation by migrants or takeover by the State for “national development,” the indigenous identity comes to be linked to land and other resources, and polarisation gets intensified. The “indigenous people” claim sole rights over the resources, to the exclusion of ‘outsiders.’ The “indigenous to the Northeast” issue thus differentiates its people from “outsiders” who entered after 1826.

Polarisation and Oversimplification

Thus, the first step in perpetuating conflicts is to oversimplify their causes and reduce them to a single type. The next step is to blame them on one ethnic or religious group. For example, the Sangh Parivar blames the conflicts in the Northeast on the Churches. Such polarisation is legitimised through one-sided histories of ethnic strife. Amid these dynamics, the reaction of the victims of injustice can be equally one-sided and unjust to the weak.

For example, the Adivasi of Jharkhand origin have been in the Northeast for two centuries, but they are denied a share in privileges like Schedule Tribe status. All the parties to the conflicts rewrite their histories to glorify themselves and proclaim exclusive rights over a given territory. The losers produce counter-histories presenting themselves as victims of aggression, and claiming exclusive rights that the “outsiders” have denied them. This approach sustains conflicts over a long time.



A common feature of such histories is that they isolate facts and present a series of events without providing their context and the social processes. Most of the facts they give are true but taken out of context to suit their needs. Each community chooses a few facts in isolation to present itself as a victim, and the other as an encroacher. The histories interpret their specific indigenous status, and legitimise most conflicts by linking them to land, autonomy, and identity. When such histories are repeated, the masses begin to perceive themselves as victims, and glorify the destruction of the adversary.

Search for Peace with Justice

The situations described above underscore the need to seek solutions for peace. The first step is to understand peace as a journey beyond the mere absence of armed conflict, with justice as a non-negotiable part of it. It requires an understanding of the causes of conflict and an attempt at solutions that address the real causes and the injustice they bring to the fore. They have to be just to all parties and move away from exclusive demands. In its search, one has to be aware of the history that every community rewrites to justify the conflict it is involved in.

Such a search has to be a collaborative effort. Persons belonging to different disciplines and religious and ideological persuasions have to come together for a common cause. Processes that create an atmosphere of hope for the future and mutual trust must go hand in hand with efforts to solve the economic and other problems that lead to conflicts. It is a search for a life with dignity, a requirement of Article 21, the right to life, which the Supreme Court has interpreted as every citizen's right to a life with dignity,

These issues are interlinked. For example, an area that needs the attention of people in education is textbooks. Most of them come from continental India, which pays little attention to the Northeast, thereby undermining its search for an identity. In reaction, many people in the Northeast write histories that can legitimise conflicts. Persons in the educational and social fields and in inter-religious relations can contribute to another history, a different geography, and new economic theories in which marginalised communities play a central role.

Teachers, researchers, and peace activists can join hands with development analysts in this effort to understand the causes of conflicts and to propose solutions that go beyond polarisation. They need to supplement these efforts with steps to bring leaders of communities in conflict together for a long-term process of confidence-building that leads to eventual reconciliation.

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ART
& PEACE

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HUMAN BEINGS

COLLABORATIVE RATHER THAN COMPETITIVE



In this context, my artistic practice seeks to challenge this reality by creating spaces that foreground the possibilities within ourselves, the materials we engage with, and our interconnected communities. **In a world where we are constantly compelled to prove our worth, these spaces offer moments of stillness and equanimity.**



Human beings are fundamentally more collaborative than competitive. Competition emerges primarily when people experience pressure for survival. However, when the instinct for survival transforms into an urge for dominance, it can lead to conflict. The desire for dominance often legitimises the practice of “othering” those who are less powerful.

The aspiration to become a superpower or a coloniser creates a perceived need for a common enemy—one who is economically weaker, socially marginalised, or less privileged, and who can be imagined as a threat to the ambitions of the super-rich and the powerful. In such a system, difference is turned into division, and vulnerability is portrayed as a danger.

Our world today is increasingly marked by anger and aggression directed by the powerful towards the powerless, and by majorities towards minorities. Prejudice, aggression and violence perpetrated by the wealthy and powerful are often legitimised through carefully constructed fake narratives that vilify the very people who are most vulnerable and underprivileged. These narratives shift attention away from structural inequality and injustice, portraying the victims as the source of the problem. Prejudice towards other humans and other non-human beings, including nature and its elements, has caused irreparable damage to and disconnection from our relationship with planet Earth.

Our world is wounded—emotionally, psychologically, physically and ecologically. In our pursuit of dominance, progress, and technological advancement, we have turned against ourselves, one another, and the divine within us, transforming nature into something to be controlled and exploited.

Technology, rather than simply enriching human life, has increasingly invaded our inner and outer worlds, distancing us from our own souls. We need to move beyond this technological invasion and rediscover the paradise within us—the creative spirit nurtured by empathy, non-competition, non-judgement, creativity, and collaboration. By returning to these fundamental human capacities, we can begin to heal our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with the world we inhabit.

In this context, my artistic practice seeks to challenge this reality by creating spaces that foreground the possibilities within ourselves, the materials we engage with, and our interconnected communities. In a world where we are constantly compelled to prove our worth, these spaces offer moments of stillness and equanimity. We stand in a circle where no one is superior, no one is the boss, and no one is the teacher—not even me, the facilitator. Each participant is an equal and integral part of the whole, while retaining their own individuality. The collective does not erase the individual; rather, it creates a space where individual voices, experiences, and creative expressions can coexist and contribute to something shared.

We need non-commercial spaces where people can come together to listen to one another, share knowledge, hold one another, smile, embrace one another freely, and engage in co-creative activities—expressing genuine compassion and empathy without measuring their value or expecting remuneration. Perhaps this is at the core of our human nature. Yet, when did we become so distant from this natural instinct that we began to perceive ourselves and others through competition, prejudice, and fear?



The Action Songs and Cooperative Games that are used in the community-based art programmes that I facilitate invite us into dialogue and deep conversations about egalitarian contexts and alternative potentials. **We begin to understand each other emotionally, spiritually and kinetically.**



Our education systems often cultivate this fear of the “other” from the earliest stages of our formation. In schools, we are burdened with the false imperative to become “number one”, teaching us to measure our worth through comparison rather than through connection, cooperation, and collective well-being. Art and play should become the basis of our educational system.

Art is a multisensory experience. Touch deeply recognises individual and collective presence, while energy is an important activator of oxytocin—the bonding hormone. Humans need understanding and acceptance in many forms to feel a sense of belonging, safety and comfort. The Action Songs and Cooperative Games that are used in the community-based

art programmes that I facilitate invite us into dialogue and deep conversations about egalitarian contexts and alternative potentials. We begin to understand each other emotionally, spiritually and kinetically.

The Body Mapping activity is an invitation to release our individual and collective body images, insecurities, and fears shaped by the manipulation of mass media. After becoming comfortable with their bodies in shared space, participants lie down on a large sheet of paper while the outlines of their bodies are traced, gradually creating a collective body map. Body Mapping becomes a rite and ritual through which each community encounters itself. It crosses borders, boundaries, prejudices, and conflicts, challenging our inhibitions and awakening our innate capacity to collaborate and connect.



As the bodies overlap, individual boundaries dissolve into a shared form. We then return to our perfectly imperfect body-mapped panel and dance upon it—a symbolic, embodied performance that invites participants to experience their interconnectedness.

The ABC (Art Room) Programme of the Kochi Biennale Foundation that I have been conceptualising and curating along with a dedicated team of artist-facilitators and a co-ordinator from 2018 onwards embodies a creative space where knowledge is shared freely by diverse creative educators. Anyone can walk in, explore the space and art materials, engage with storybooks, or participate in workshops. There are no written rules or doors with locks; the space is intentionally non-competitive, non-judgemental, fearless, and collaborative.

Although the programme is called Art By Children (ABC), its emphasis is on the “inner child”—our capacity for play, imagination, curiosity, and joy. In a society with few genuinely non-competitive spaces for adults, the Art Room offers an opportunity to sing, dance, play, draw, paint, build, and collaborate. Fun and joy become powerful means of releasing fear and creating a shared sense of belonging.

Similar principles informed the Village Visual Store House (2011), a community art project developed in a tribal village in Chhattisgarh, where every member of the village came together to build a visual art gallery using locally available natural materials, without monetary rewards. Each person contributed their individual skills and knowledge to create a collective work of art. It was a process of co-creating a work of art by everyone doing hands-on work, singing, dancing, deep listening and engaging in conversations.

Similarly, Rikhiyaasan Rath (2010) is a powerful artwork created by a group of young girls from the Musahar community, one of India’s historically marginalised caste groups. They reimagined and illustrated their community’s mythological stories on a specially designed multi-utility bus. The bus became an iconic expression of the community’s imagination, dignity, and extraordinary creative potential, while countering social prejudices.

Rikhiyaasan Rath is a powerful artwork created by a group of young girls from the Musahar community, one of India's historically marginalised caste groups. **They reimagined and illustrated their community's mythological stories on a specially designed multi-utility bus. The bus became an iconic expression of the community's imagination, dignity, and extraordinary creative potential, while countering social prejudices.**



In these art projects, each participant evolves as a messy, flawed, smudged individual full of creative potential. Eventually, that leads to deep collaborative action and a community that feels no need to deny or dissolve their creative self. In fact, the more deeply the individual is rooted in their own individuality and potential—the better the collaboration.

I, the individual, am not in isolation. 'Because I am, because we are.' That "we" is not just the other human beings or other participants, nor am I merely an individual—I am a community composed of my own context, my own ecosystem, my lived experience, and my ancestry.

Blaise Joseph, Head and Curator of the Art By Children (Art Room) programme, Kochi Biennale Foundation.

It is only when I understand my individual divinity that I can 'stand under the spell' (under-stand) of the other and be a true collaborator. And so it is within this community of collaboration.





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SPATIAL PREJUDICE AGAINST MINORITIES IN INDIA



Muslims and Christians may have lived in India for centuries, but their religions are characterised as 'foreign', while Islamic and Christian affiliation is portrayed as evidence of flawed or deficient nationality.



Prejudice is commonly understood as a hostile attitude towards people. It is not often recognised that hostility towards religious minorities can also take a spatial form. Spatial prejudice goes beyond geographical separation or ethnic neighbourhoods; it concerns the spaces in which people may live, own property, assemble for worship and bury their dead.

When expressed through destructive and disruptive tactics to block these practices by minorities, spatial prejudice reflects the majoritarian supremacist idea that minorities should not leave a durable imprint upon the national landscape. Mosques, churches, graveyards, neighbourhoods and community-owned institutions are treated as evidence of an illegitimate territorial presence. The underlying demand is that minorities may inhabit India only conditionally, without making substantial claims upon its land, history or public culture.

This conflicts with the constitutional conception of minority rights. Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India protect religious practice and the institutional life necessary to sustain it, while Articles 29 and 30 protect cultural difference and minority educational institutions. These provisions presume that religious and cultural freedom requires a material basis. A community cannot maintain its culture without places of worship, schools, cemeteries,

residences, meeting spaces and collectively administered property. Thus, minority rights must also be understood as spatial, because no community can exist meaningfully without the right to occupy, use, remember and reproduce community life upon land.

Hindutva's cultural nationalism advances a conception of landscape that fundamentally challenges this understanding. It imagines India's territory as the civilisational possession of a primordial Hindu people. For its proponents, landscape is not neutral geography but a sacred-national archive populated by temples, pilgrimage routes, mythological sites and memories of conquest and victory.

Mosques and churches are made to appear as interruptions in this supposedly continuous Hindu landscape. Their historical and architectural presence is understood in terms of invasion, conversion and injury. Muslims and Christians may have lived in India for centuries, but their religions are characterised as 'foreign', while Islamic and Christian affiliation is portrayed as evidence of flawed or deficient nationality.

This gives rise to tactics through which minorities are subjected to spatial alienation. A mosque can be described as evidence of conquest, a church as an outpost of conversion, a Muslim neighbourhood as a security threat, and a graveyard as an encroachment. Ordinary religious practices such as *namaz*, devotional meetings in private homes, calls to prayer, religious processions, or the construction and repair of places of worship may be presented as provocations.



The majority's occupation of public space is naturalised as culture, whereas minority visibility is subjected to tests of legality, permission and public order. Minorities are therefore not only alienated from property but also estranged from the historical landscape of the country to which they belong.

The rhetoric of 'land jihad' makes this logic particularly explicit. It presents Muslim acquisition or possession of land as part of a coordinated demographic conspiracy. Property transactions between citizens are described by right-wing actors and sections of the media as evidence of territorial warfare. This prejudice has informed campaigns against Muslim home-buyers, Muslim-majority settlements, mosques, graveyards and waqf properties.

Community property is especially vulnerable because it represents continuity across generations. Waqf land sustains mosques, cemeteries, schools, charities and other institutions relatively independently of the State. Undermining such property weakens the material capacity of Muslims to reproduce collective life.

Christian property is similarly placed under suspicion through allegations of forced conversion. Churches, schools, hospitals, prayer halls and charitable institutions are portrayed as infrastructures for converting Hindus rather than as institutions belonging to Indian citizens. Even when no coercion has been established, allegations of conversion can permit surveillance,

disruption and demands for dispossession. This is particularly visible where Adivasi Christians are told that adopting Christianity has forfeited their membership of the village community.

Burial conflicts reveal the violence of spatial prejudice in its starkest form. Burial is simultaneously a religious practice and a familial obligation, but, importantly, it is also a profound way of belonging in which the dead are returned to the soil of the community. Opposition to Muslim and Christian graveyards therefore conveys a brutal message that they do not belong to the national landscape, even after death.

In *Ramesh Baghel v. State of Chhattisgarh*, the Supreme Court confronted the refusal to permit an Adivasi Christian man's burial in his native village, where the burial ground was claimed as a 'Hindu-tribal' site. The State instead proposed a designated Christian cemetery outside the village. The judges differed over whether burial in the ancestral village should be protected, exposing the unresolved question of whether conversion can spatially expel an Adivasi from the community of his ancestors.

Demolition governance converts these prejudices into executive action. Houses, shops and places of worship associated with Muslims have been demolished following communal clashes, protests or allegations of criminality, often through a selective invocation of municipal regulations. The language of encroachment gives collective punishment an administrative appearance. The removal of a structure by a bulldozer destroys savings, livelihoods, documents, neighbourhood networks and the security produced through long residence.

In 2024, the Supreme Court held that the executive could not demolish someone's property merely because the person was accused or convicted of an offence, affirmed shelter as part of Article 21, and prescribed procedural safeguards against arbitrary demolition. The judgment recognised that punishing families through their homes violates both due process and the rule of law. However, the Apex Court is also aware of the wilful ignorance displayed by street-level bureaucracy in implementing its directives.

Spatial prejudice cannot, however, be understood through religion alone. Land in India is already distributed through caste and class power. **Dalits have historically been confined to segregated settlements, excluded from village commons and burial grounds, and deprived of agricultural land. Adivasi land has been alienated through indebtedness, fraudulent transfers, mining, dams, conservation regimes and development projects.**



Spatial prejudice cannot, however, be understood through religion alone. Land in India is already distributed through caste and class power. Dalits have historically been confined to segregated settlements, excluded from village commons and burial grounds, and deprived of agricultural land. Adivasi land has been alienated through indebtedness, fraudulent transfers, mining, dams, conservation regimes and development projects. Poor households are disproportionately likely to live without secure titles and are consequently more vulnerable to eviction and demolition. What appears as a neutral campaign against ‘encroachment’ or ‘illegal construction’ therefore operates upon a landscape already structured by unequal access to law, documentation and political influence.

These processes become more complex when caste, tribe and religious identity intersect. Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians experience caste-based disadvantage while being denied Scheduled Caste recognition under the existing constitutional order. Adivasis may face corporate or state acquisition of their land in the name of development, while Christian Adivasis may simultaneously be accused of betraying tribal culture through conversion. Hindutva can thus assimilate Adivasis symbolically into a Hindu nation even as their material control over forests and land is weakened. Cultural incorporation can therefore act as a cover for economic dispossession.

Spatial prejudice is ultimately a struggle over people’s right to inscribe the palimpsest of the Indian national landscape with their culture. A democratic landscape cannot be the exclusive cultural property of its majority. It must bear the institutions, memories, dwellings and graves of all its people. Protecting minority cultural rights therefore requires more than liberal toleration of private belief. It requires safeguarding the material worlds through which communities endure.

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PREJUDICE, DELEGITIMISATION, AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION





The challenge of changing the psychological intergroup repertoire has been a central concern of social psychology. Research on changing negative stereotypes and prejudice began soon after these phenomena became established areas of study. Researchers recognised that negative stereotypes and prejudice can contribute to harmful intergroup behaviour, particularly delegitimation and discrimination, and can intensify and perpetuate violent conflicts.

Consequently, this research has increasingly been understood as an effort to transform intergroup relations, based on the assumption that changing negative stereotypes, prejudice and delegitimation can contribute to broader changes in relationships between groups.

Much of the early research was conducted in the United States and focused primarily on racial relations and ethnocentrism. European research, which expanded during the 1960s, focused more heavily on relations between majority populations and ethnic and national minorities. Post-war migration from former European colonies to countries such as Britain, France and the Netherlands significantly altered their demographic composition.

These changes, together with migration from diverse national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, were accompanied by racism, prejudice and discrimination, compelling Western European societies to address relations between majority and minority groups.

Another important focus of research has been the transformation of intergroup relations in intractable conflicts. Such conflicts present a particularly demanding context because negative stereotypes, prejudice, delegitimation and hostility are often deeply embedded in collective narratives, historical memories, social identities and institutional practices.

Transforming intergroup relations in these contexts therefore requires not only changes in individual attitudes but also attention to the broader sociopsychological processes through which hostile perceptions are maintained and reproduced.

Transforming a negative psychological intergroup repertoire is crucial after years of stereotyping, delegitimation, prejudice, fear and hatred. At the cognitive-affective level, I propose that such transformation requires the legitimisation, equalisation, differentiation and personalisation

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of members of the rival group, together with the moderation of negative emotions and the development of hope and acceptance. It is equally important to transform perceptions of the past and construct a new narrative of collective memories that can support more constructive relations in the present and future.

Legitimation

Legitimation involves viewing the opponent as belonging to an acceptable category of groups with which it is possible—and desirable—to terminate the conflict and establish positive relations. It entails recognising the legitimate existence of the other group and accepting its differences in goals, values, ideology, religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, culture or other domains.

Legitimation also means acknowledging that the other group has the same right to exist and live in peace as one's own group, as well as the right to articulate its interests, grievances and demands. Such differences are then understood as issues to be addressed through negotiation and other non-violent means rather than coercion or violence.

Legitimation provides an important psychological foundation for trust, which is essential for initiating and sustaining conflict-resolution processes. When the rival is perceived as a legitimate partner rather than an illegitimate or threatening entity, members of the group can develop expectations that future interactions may be constructive. This can facilitate engagement with peace processes and increase willingness to negotiate. Legitimation therefore makes negotiation with a former adversary psychologically possible and provides an important foundation for peaceful and cooperative relations.



Equalisation

Equalisation makes the rival an equal partner with whom new relations can be established. This requires recognition of status equality between the groups, first in negotiations and subsequently at all levels of intergroup interaction. Equalisation implies that leaders and ordinary people perceive members of the other group as equals, without notions of superiority, and treat them accordingly.

This represents a profound psychological transformation after prolonged conflict, during which the rival may have been characterised through delegitimising labels as inferior, dangerous or fundamentally different. Equalisation therefore challenges the hierarchical perceptions that often accompany prolonged conflict. Without some degree of perceived equality,

it is difficult to establish peaceful relations or conduct meaningful negotiations. It creates the psychological conditions for reciprocal recognition, dialogue and constructive interaction between former rivals.

Personalisation

Personalisation involves viewing the rival group not as a depersonalised collective entity but as consisting of individuals with ordinary human characteristics, concerns, needs and goals. It represents a process of individuation following a prolonged period of de-individuation.

Personalisation involves recognising variation and complexity at three interrelated levels: within individuals, among individuals and across social roles. Differentiation within individuals means moving beyond a single, generalised image towards recognition of multiple characteristics, experiences, motivations and identities. Differentiation among individuals involves acknowledging that members of the rival group differ in their appearance, personalities, opinions, concerns, needs, experiences and goals.

The group is, therefore, understood not as homogeneous, but as a collection of distinct individuals. Differentiation across social roles involves recognising that members occupy multiple personal and social roles—for example, as parents, children, students, teachers, physicians, farmers, professionals and community members.

These forms of individuation weaken generalised representations of the rival and make it possible to recognise both differences and similarities among its members. Personalisation can reveal shared human characteristics, experiences, emotions and aspirations and, in some cases, common values. It facilitates empathy with the hardships and experiences of rival-group members and may foster identification with some of their needs and concerns. Personalisation therefore humanises the rival without denying group differences and creates psychological space for more empathetic and constructive intergroup relations.



Differentiation

Differentiation involves the heterogenisation of the rival group. It enables a new perception of a group that was previously viewed as homogeneous and uniformly hostile. The group is understood as comprising diverse subgroups that differ in their views, values, ideologies, interests and orientations towards the conflict.

This represents an important psychological transformation because prolonged conflicts almost always contain social and political forces that oppose peaceful resolution and may even resort to violence to prevent it. Differentiation makes it possible to distinguish, at least broadly, between those who support peaceful resolution and those who oppose it. It allows for more nuanced perceptions of different segments of the rival group and creates possibilities for identifying potential partners and constituencies for peace.

Differentiation does more than identify political divisions within the rival group. It provides a more complex and realistic representation of the other and does greater justice to its internal diversity. It can make visible subgroups whose values, beliefs and interests overlap with those

Personalisation can reveal shared human characteristics, experiences, emotions and aspirations and, in some cases, common values. **It facilitates empathy with the hardships and experiences of rival-group members and may foster identification with some of their needs and concerns.**



of one's own group, particularly in relation to the pursuit of peace. By weakening the perception of the rival as a monolithic entity, differentiation creates psychological space for recognising potential partners and allies for peaceful relations.

The difficulties involved should not discourage societies from seeking peaceful relations or transforming their perceptions of former or current rivals. Historical experience demonstrates that societies involved in prolonged and seemingly intractable conflicts can embark on processes of conflict transformation and reconciliation. South Africa and Northern Ireland, for example, illustrate how societies marked by profound grievances, violence and hostile perceptions can initiate processes leading towards more peaceful political and intergroup relations.

Similarly, France and Germany, after centuries of recurrent and often violent conflict, embarked on a sustained process of reconciliation following the Second World War. This involved not only political and institutional cooperation but also a gradual transformation of negative psychological representations, collective memories and attitudes towards the former adversary.

These experiences demonstrate that deeply entrenched intergroup repertoires are not immutable. Although their transformation is difficult, prolonged and often reversible, societies can gradually replace patterns of hostility, prejudice and delegitimation with legitimisation, recognition, cooperation and more differentiated representations of the other. Transforming prejudice, delegitimation and other hostile psychological orientations therefore remains an urgent challenge in many parts of the world.

Contemporary conflicts—including those involving Russia and Ukraine, Israelis and Palestinians, India and Pakistan over Kashmir, Sudan and Myanmar, and tensions between Iran and the United States—illustrate the continuing need for such transformation.

Sustainable conflict resolution requires not only political agreements and institutional arrangements but also changes in the psychological intergroup repertoire that has developed and become entrenched over years or generations of conflict. Without such changes, formal agreements may remain fragile, while the perceptions, emotions and narratives that sustain hostility may continue to reproduce conflict.

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WHEN AI REPRODUCES PREJUDICE

ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT DATA
[CLASSIFIED - HIGH RISK]

EMPATHY AND DIGNITY FOR LEARNER

Assessment does not begin when an algorithm processes data. **It begins when an institution decides which forms of knowledge it values, which modes of participation it considers legitimate, which evidence it accepts as a demonstration of learning, and which indicators it interprets as success, difficulty, or risk.**



Assessment as an Ethical Decision

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education often comes with a compelling promise: assessment can become faster, more consistent, and more objective. In classrooms with large cohorts and growing demands for feedback, that promise is understandable. Yet, it raises a profoundly pedagogical question: what happens when a tool designed to make assessment more efficient turns existing prejudices into seemingly neutral decisions?

Assessment does not begin when an algorithm processes data. It begins when an institution decides which forms of knowledge it values, which modes of participation it considers legitimate, which evidence it accepts as a demonstration of learning, and which indicators it interprets as success, difficulty, or risk. AI may streamline some procedures, but it does not remove those decisions; in some cases, it makes them less visible.

The False Neutrality of AI-Mediated Assessment

AI is often said to reduce human subjectivity. These tools can organise information, identify patterns, and provide initial feedback at a speed that would be difficult to achieve through manual work alone. But consistency should not be confused with justice. A system may apply the same criterion to every person and still produce inequitable outcomes if it overlooks the diverse circumstances in which students learn, participate, and demonstrate what they know.



Data are not neutral simply because they are data. They reflect prior decisions: what was recorded, what was left out, how performance was classified, and which patterns were treated as the norm. Categories such as ‘at-risk student,’ ‘low participation,’ or ‘potentially irregular behaviour’ may guide appropriate support, but they can also label students prematurely, lower expectations, and reinforce trajectories of exclusion. Research on algorithmic bias in education shows that systems can reproduce inequities when they rely on historical data, unsuitable proxy measures, or design choices that do not adequately account for students’ contexts (Baker & Hawn, 2022).

If a platform detects infrequent logins as a lack of commitment, it may overlook limited internet access, caring responsibilities, or long working hours. The indicator may appear objective; the conclusion is not necessarily so. The speed with which a platform generates an alert does not replace the responsibility to understand a student’s situation.

The concern becomes more serious when AI is used in high-stakes decisions: grading written work, predicting performance, identifying academic risk, or supervising examinations. International guidance on AI in education emphasises the need to identify bias, protect diversity, strengthen transparency, and maintain meaningful human oversight, precisely because systems may reproduce discriminatory patterns embedded in their data, settings, or contexts of use (UNESCO, 2023).

Prejudice, Surveillance, and Pedagogical Conflict

The issue is not limited to technical error. AI-mediated assessment can alter the pedagogical relationship when it turns a student into a score, a profile, or a source of suspicion. This is particularly evident in remote proctoring and academic-integrity tools. Although they are intended to protect academic integrity, they can create an experience of constant surveillance and generate false positives linked to technical difficulties, anxiety, or disability. Ethical discussions of online proctoring caution that its legitimacy cannot be assessed only in terms of fraud detection; privacy, proportionality, equity, validity, and consequences for students' rights must also be considered (Coghlan et al., 2021; Ramsden & Wingrove, 2023).

In these situations, prejudice can operate quietly. It does not always take the form of an openly discriminatory statement; it may emerge as an automated alert, an unexplained grade, or an algorithmic recommendation that is given more authority than the student's own voice. The risk is that legitimate pedagogical conflicts (questions about assessment criteria, disagreement with a grade, or the need to explain a particular circumstance) are treated as resistance, non-compliance, or misconduct. Viewing such disagreements as opportunities for dialogue, explanation, and review can transform assessment-related conflict into a practice of recognition and institutional learning, rather than turning it into a sanction or a lasting mark on the student.

Trust is central to assessment. Students need to understand what is expected of them, how their work will be assessed, and what they can do to improve. When tools are opaque or decisions cannot be challenged, an institution may end up privileging administrative efficiency over recognition of the person.

An Ethical-Pedagogical Framework and Responsible AI Governance

In response to these risks, the answer should not be to reject every use of AI. Its potential to support feedback, organise evidence of learning, and identify barriers can be valuable. The challenge is to ensure that technology does not displace the formative purpose of assessment.

I propose four pillars for guiding AI-mediated assessment in higher education:

Recognition of the Person:

No student should be reduced to a grade, a prediction, or a risk profile. Data can offer useful signals, but they do not exhaust the meaning of a learning trajectory. Assessment must recognise each person's agency to explain, learn, correct, and demonstrate progress.

Transparency and the Right to Question:

Students should know when AI is involved, what information it uses, and how it may affect an assessment decision. They should also have clear procedures to request explanations,



Artificial intelligence can be an ally in university assessment, but it is not a neutral arbiter. Its outputs depend on the human decisions that design, train, regulate, and interpret it. **If those decisions remain hidden, AI can reproduce prejudice under an appearance of impartiality and turn mistrust into an everyday feature of academic life.**



Formative Purpose and Restorative Justice:

provide context, challenge a conclusion, and seek review. Transparency is a condition for trust and responsible participation.

Human Judgement and Contextualisation:

No significant academic decision should depend exclusively on an automated tool. Teachers and institutional leaders must be able to interpret results, depart from an automated recommendation, and consider other evidence. Professional judgement cannot be replaced by a score when complex learning processes are being assessed.

AI should strengthen feedback and opportunities for improvement, rather than expand classification, punishment, or surveillance. If a tool produces an unfair or discriminatory decision, the institution must respond through accessible mechanisms for review, correction, and redress.

From my experience in university dental education, this discussion has a particular resonance. At UniCIEO, the institutional expression, 'What is worth doing is worth doing well'" invites us to see that quality is not exhausted by technical efficiency. Applied to AI-mediated assessment, it poses a deeper requirement: that a decision should also be



fair, explainable, and respectful of the dignity of the learner. No alert, score, or prediction can replace the pedagogical responsibility to listen, contextualise, and support (Fundación Universitaria CIEO – UniCIEO, n.d.).

Responsible governance: Ethical principles have practical effect only when they become institutional responsibilities. Universities should establish who authorises the use of AI tools, which criteria guide their selection, how data are protected, how effects are reviewed, and what pathways are available to challenge or remedy unfair decisions. Governance is not an administrative formality; it ensures that innovation remains accountable to dialogue, public responsibility, and care for learners (UNESCO, 2023).

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Assessing Well: Rigour, Justice, and Humanity

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The ethical challenge is not to make technology grade more quickly. It is to prevent it from automating suspicion and silencing difference. Fair assessment requires preserving the possibility to listen, explain, review, and repair. There lies AI’s transformative potential: not in replacing the pedagogical relationship, but in helping make it more attentive, more transparent, and more humane.

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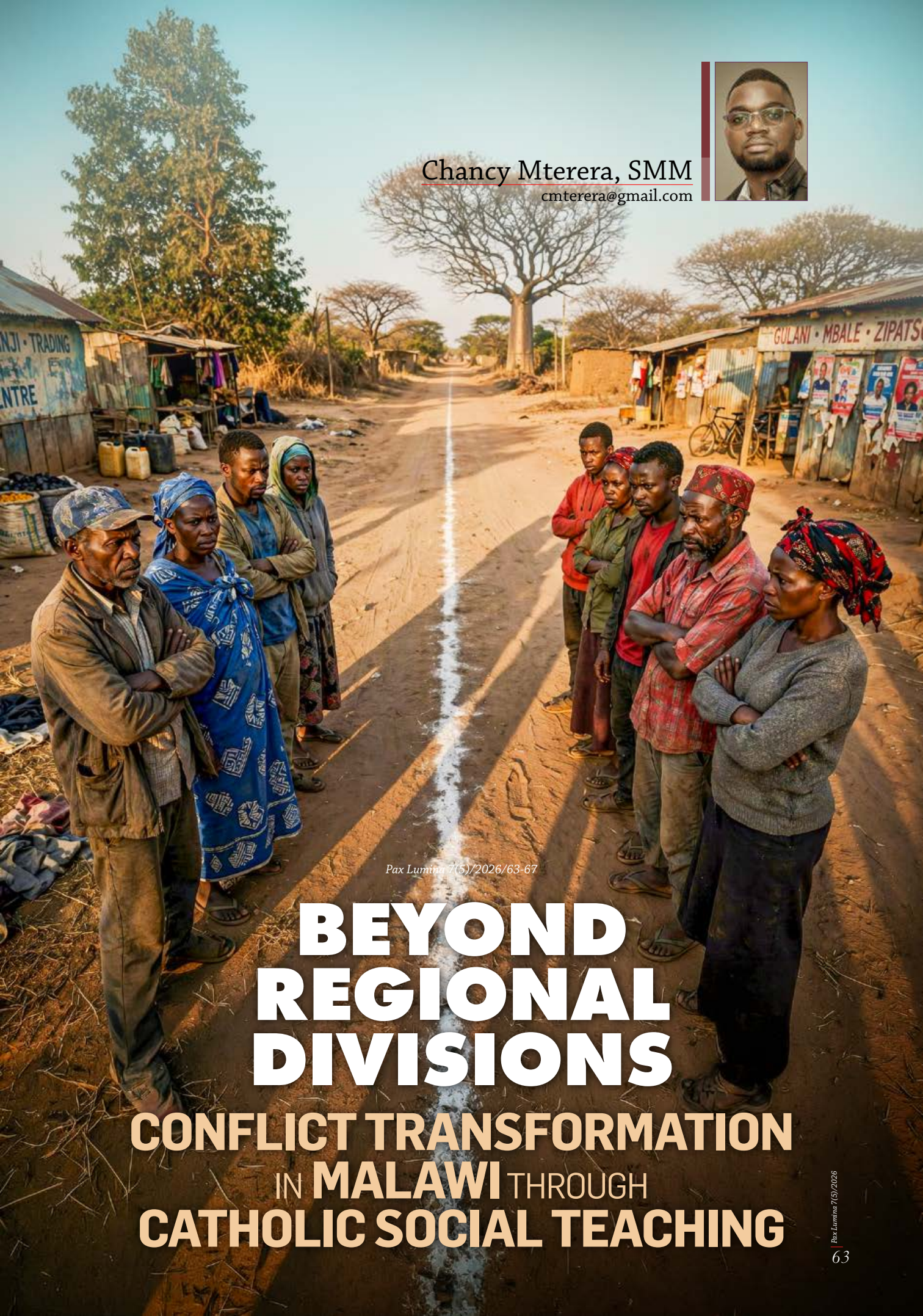
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BEYOND REGIONAL DIVISIONS

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN MALAWI THROUGH CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

I ntroduction

Malawi is widely regarded as a relatively peaceful country, having avoided prolonged civil wars and large-scale political violence. Yet, peace involves more than the absence of violence; it also requires political inclusion, equality, mutual recognition and a sense of shared citizenship. Since the transition to multiparty democracy in 1993–1994, political competition has increasingly acquired regional patterns, shaping perceptions of political power, national resources and belonging.

This paper argues that regional diversity itself does not threaten peace. Rather, conflict risks emerge when regional identity becomes politicised and generates prejudices about other regions and political communities. Such prejudices can turn electoral competition into perceptions of exclusion, unequal citizenship and competition among regions for control of the State. From a Catholic perspective, Catholic Social Teaching (CST), particularly its principles of human dignity and the common good, offers a framework for transforming these prejudices and fostering a more inclusive national belonging.

Regional Identity and the Formation of Political Prejudice

Regional patterns have become an important feature of Malawi's electoral politics. Although the 1994 election was primarily a national struggle for political change, clearer geographical patterns of political support emerged in subsequent elections, becoming particularly pronounced in 2014 and 2019. Yet regional voting does not determine electoral outcomes.

The 2020 Fresh Presidential Election demonstrated that political alliances could combine different regional bases into a broader national coalition, while the 2025 election again showed both the persistence and limitations of regional voting patterns. Malawi's politics are therefore regionally patterned without being completely determined by region.

The peacebuilding concern arises when these patterns are interpreted through prejudice. Political identities can encourage assumptions that people from particular regions naturally support certain parties, possess unfair political advantages, or seek to dominate national institutions. Such assumptions reduce individuals to regional identities and create an “us-and-them” mentality.



This paper argues that regional diversity itself does not threaten peace. Rather, conflict risks emerge when regional identity becomes politicised and generates prejudices about other regions and political communities. **Such prejudices can turn electoral competition into perceptions of exclusion, unequal citizenship and competition among regions for control of the State.**



This becomes particularly dangerous when political power is perceived to determine access to development, public appointments and national resources. Lloyd Chipembere Lwanda (2019, pp. 51–61) observes that successive Malawian presidents have been associated with development initiatives and political appointments perceived to favour their regions and ethnic constituencies. Whether or not every such perception reflects deliberate favouritism, its persistence can reinforce the belief that political power determines which regions benefit from the state.

Consequently, electoral victory may be understood not simply as the formation of a government but as the victory of one region over another, while electoral defeat may be experienced as

regional exclusion. Such perceptions can deepen resentment, prejudice and political intolerance. The problem, therefore, is not regional difference but the prejudicial interpretation of regional difference. When citizenship is viewed through a zero-sum regional lens, one group's political gain becomes another's loss, turning legitimate democratic competition into relational tension.

Catholic Social Teaching and the Transformation of Prejudice

Conflict transformation requires more than preventing political violence. It requires changing the perceptions, relationships and conditions that allow prejudice to persist. CST offers two particularly relevant principles: human dignity and the common good.



Human Dignity and Equal Citizenship

CST begins with the inherent dignity of every human person. Drawing from Genesis 1:26–28, the Christian tradition affirms that because every person is created in the image and likeness of God, each possesses an intrinsic and indelible value. Human dignity is therefore prior to social, political and regional identities. A person's worth cannot be increased or diminished by the region from which they come or the political community with which they identify.

This has a direct bearing on regional prejudice in Malawi. If every person possesses equal dignity, then no region can claim greater entitlement to political power, national resources or public opportunities. Likewise, citizens should not be judged according to regional identity or treated as less deserving of trust, participation or respect because of where they come from. Human dignity thus provides the moral foundation for equal citizenship.

Regional prejudice becomes a violation of this principle when the political “other” is reduced to a regional identity. A political opponent is no longer encountered simply as a fellow citizen with different political preferences,

but as part of a region perceived to threaten one's own interests. Such perceptions foster suspicion and resentment because they deny the individuality and equal worth of those who are categorised as the “other”.

From the perspective of human dignity, conflict transformation, therefore, requires a change in how the other is perceived: not the elimination of regional identities, but recognition that these identities cannot determine a person's worth, belonging or political legitimacy.

This recognition must also be reflected in public life. If citizens possess equal dignity, access to development, public services, employment opportunities and participation in national life cannot legitimately depend on regional or political affiliation. Equitable institutions are therefore not merely matters of administrative fairness; they are expressions of respect for human dignity.

Conversely, persistent perceptions of regional favouritism can reinforce the belief that some citizens matter more than others and thereby reproduce prejudice. Human dignity consequently provides both a diagnosis of regional prejudice—as a failure to recognise the equal worth of the other—and a basis for transforming relationships through recognition, respect and equal citizenship.

The Common Good and Shared National Belonging

Human dignity is complemented by the principle of the common good. The common good requires social and political arrangements that enable all members of society to flourish rather than allowing the interests of one group to dominate others.

For Malawi, this requires moving beyond an implicit “our region first” approach to political leadership. Regions have legitimate interests in development, representation and public services, but these interests must be pursued within a political order in which no region's well-being depends upon the exclusion or disadvantage of another. Political leadership should therefore be understood not as an opportunity to advance sectional interests but as a responsibility to promote the well-being of the whole national community.

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The common good challenges the zero-sum logic of regional politics. Development, public appointments and national resources should be evaluated according to their contribution to the flourishing of the whole country rather than their usefulness to particular political or regional constituencies. In this way, the common good complements human dignity: while dignity changes how citizens understand the worth of the other, the common good provides a basis for ordering political and social life so that all can flourish together.

Conclusion

The challenge of regionalism in Malawi cannot be addressed through political and institutional reforms alone. Because regional identities and the prejudices attached to them are deeply rooted, their transformation requires a conversion of the human heart. The insight that “the heart of human problems is the problem of the human heart” (Phiri, 2023, p. 206) offers an important starting point: structural change must be preceded and accompanied by an inner transformation that changes how people perceive and relate to one another.



From a Catholic perspective, such conversion means moving from prejudice to recognition, from suspicion to trust, and from sectional interests to the common good. As this transformation takes root in individuals, it can gradually shape relationships, collective consciousness and, ultimately, social structures. Lasting peace therefore requires not the abandonment of regional identities, but a conversion that enables Malawians to see beyond them and recognise one another as persons of equal dignity and members of one national community.

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MOVIE
REVIEW

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THE GIFT AT THE GATE

**CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S THE ODYSSEY (2026)
TURNS THE OLDEST ADVENTURE INTO A
MIRROR — AND WHAT IT REFLECTS IS US**

Beneath the spectacle, this is a study of the hollow narrative: **the Trojan Horse offered as a treacherous gift, holy on the outside and murderous within, wheeled through the city's gates by its own reverent hands. What follows, once the walls are open, is a city in embers.**



Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* (2026), his first film since the Oscar-sweeping *Oppenheimer*, arrives as the kind of event cinema now rarely attempts: a \$250-million myth shot entirely on IMAX film across Morocco, Greece, Iceland and the Western Sahara. Matt Damon, in his third Nolan collaboration, plays Odysseus; Anne Hathaway is a watchful Penelope, Tom Holland an imperilled Telemachus, with Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong'o, Zendaya and Charlize Theron rounding out a murderers'-row ensemble. It is monumental, formally daring, and – a warning to anyone expecting a swords-and-sandals romp – emotionally merciless.

Nolan's source beyond Homer is Emily Wilson's spare, muscular 2017 translation, the first into English by a woman, which strips the poem of its varnish and restores its inherent savagery, cruelty and strangeness. He works in the practical-effects tradition of Ray Harryhausen — real monsters, a genuinely frightening Cyclops, no digital gloss — and a Ludwig Göransson score that shuns anachronism, conjuring this Bronze Age world from reconstructed auloi, bronze gongs and struck scrap metal – coupled with the ghost vocals of James Blake. You never once feel you have heard this story before.

And yet the film's true significance may lie beyond the frame. Months before a single frame had been seen, Elon Musk pronounced the project a betrayal, sneering over a casting rumour that Nolan had 'lost his integrity' – a rich man swatting at a film he had not seen. When *The Odyssey* arrived, the critic Ezra Klein turned that verdict inside out: Musk



Christopher Nolan

had not understood *the Odyssey* at all – yet the film understood *him* exactly, and Trump, and something about who all of Us have become. Beneath the spectacle, this is a study of the hollow narrative: the Trojan Horse offered as a treacherous gift, holy on the outside and murderous within, wheeled through the city's gates by its own reverent hands. What follows, once the walls are open, is a city in embers.

Nolan builds his film around that shadow. His Odysseus is the archetypal trickster, the *polytropos* who wins not by force but by the lie, the disguise, and the well-laid ambush; the wooden horse is his masterpiece, a container of faith with an army inside. But Nolan's sly move is to cast against type – Damon, a byword for steadiness, plays not the gloating schemer,

but a guilt-worn, tormented soul trying to get home and to deserve it. The film refuses Homer's forward march and, like *Memento* and *Dunkirk*, shatters the chronology: Odysseus does not so much journey as *remember*, recovering the Cyclops, Circe and the Sirens in disordered fragments, so the great set-pieces arrive as the intrusive flashbacks of a badly damaged man. What looks like an epic of heroism is, structurally, the memory of a traumatised soldier who cannot stop reliving his war.

Other critics have fixed on the same darkness from a different door. The most persuasive readings treat it as a war picture wearing a myth – and recall François Truffaut's provocation that no film about war is ever truly anti-war. Nolan takes that as a dare. His homecoming is not a reunion but a massacre: Odysseus reaches Ithaca disguised as a beggar and turns on Penelope's suitors with the very tools he sharpened at Troy – deception, ambush and overwhelming violence. The wily survivor and the efficient killer are the same man; his celebrated cunning is indistinguishable from the thing that has hollowed him out.

And here Nolan, the maestro, touches the rawest nerve. In the poem's most famous trick, Odysseus tells the blinded Cyclops that his name is 'Nobody,' so that when the monster screams that *Nobody* is hurting him, the neighbours turn away, and no one comes. It is a perfect emblem of the information age – the fabrication that moves nations yet, when the reckoning arrives, has no author, no accountability, no fingerprints, placed by nobody and answerable by no one. A war can be lit by a single sentence, and by the time the fact-checkers arrive, the sentence has no owner. We witnessed the phantom weapons of mass destruction that once justified the dismantling of Iraq; of the war now in its sixth month against Iran, grinding on, stoked by fabricated 'admissions'; of the Strait of Hormuz, the planet's oil artery, at a standstill while the world burns through its reserves – a fifth of global crude held hostage to a story about a nuclear bomb, believed hard enough.

There is a second rhyme, and it, too, turns on the stranger at the gate. Homer's world ran on *xenia* – the stranger sacred, the guest inviolable – and every monster earns the name by breaking that law. Our own moment breaks it as policy:

the stranger is now the migrant, remade by inherited narrative – assumption, stereotype, fear – into the 'other,' the barbarian at the wall. Across the first world – from Australia to the United States, from Britain to a hardening European Union – the poem's oldest duty has curdled into open hostility. Nolan's Cyclops devoured his guests and was a monster for it; the film asks, without raising its voice, which side of that law we now stand on.

The closing image seals the diagnosis. After the suitors are dead and Odysseus and Penelope embrace, Nolan ends not on their faces but on a brass astrolabe on the bedside table, its inner rings spinning uncontrollably, exactly as they did in the time-distorting waters off Calypso's island. The instrument that should fix a position in space and time has come loose. There is no true homecoming; Ithaca is only another room the war has entered, and the man who has 'arrived' is still adrift in distorted time – the returning warrior who carries the battlefield home because he no longer knows how to be anything but a weapon.

None of this makes *The Odyssey* easy; it is cerebral to the point of cruelty, and it will not hold your hand for a second of its running time. But the coldness is the argument. This is a story about a man who thinks his way into damnation, and a director who has handed the oldest poem in the West back to us as a mirror. See it enormous, see it loud – and then sit in the dark a little longer than you need to, because the astrolabe is still spinning, and it is spinning for Us.

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Reviews

Rotten Tomatoes – Popcornmeter (audience): 97%
'Verified Hot,' average 4.80/5.

IMDb: 8.4/10, despite 10% of its reviews being
rated a 1/10

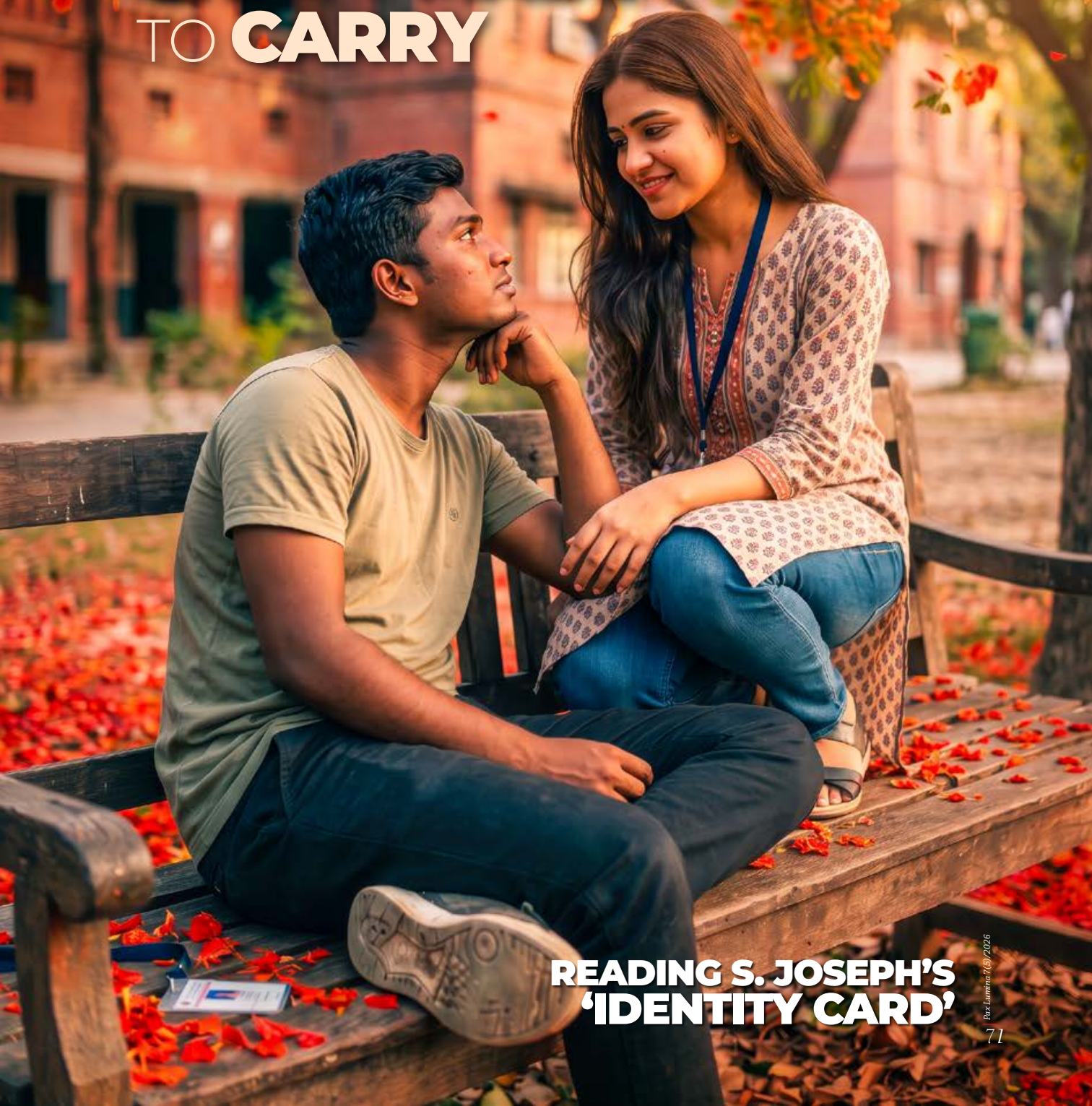


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POETRY
& PEACE

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THE **IDENTITY** **WE** ARE **MADE** TO **CARRY**



READING S. JOSEPH'S
'IDENTITY CARD'

Prejudice rarely announces itself. It seldom arrives as an insult or an act of violence. More often, it works quietly, seeping into our habits and friendships, into the way we understand ourselves and the way we look at the world around us. We learn, almost without noticing, to classify people before we meet them as persons—caste before character, community before individuality. Prejudice is at its most powerful precisely when it stops looking like prejudice and starts looking like common sense.

S. Joseph's poem 'Identity Card', translated from Malayalam by K. Satchidanandan, lays bare this quiet operation of caste. It is about a student relationship between a young man and a girl, one that seems, for a while, to have moved past religious difference altogether. Then a small detail on an identity card surfaces a caste identity, and everything shifts. What makes it more tragic is not that someone says something cruel, but beneath an apparent equality and a mutually inclusive relationship, a strange and old hierarchy has remained hidden all along, waiting.

The narrator begins by recalling an environment where boundaries seem to have dissolved. The speaker remembers his student days, and a girl who comes "laughing". Their hands touch while sharing and mixing food, and, on a stone bench, "we became / a Hindu-Christian family". It's an intimate, unremarkable image, and in it, identity feels fluid. The poet reminisces about a relationship devoid of any sense of hierarchy. At least, neither of them was concerned with it.

The mention of Pablo Neruda deepens this — poetry stands in for another kind of world, one of imagination and fellowship. The speaker isn't thinking of himself first as a Dalit. He is a student, a reader, a lover. He has even lost his identity card. The document meant to establish who he is has, for a while, become beside the point.

Then there is a twist. The girl hands the card back and mentions, almost in passing, that "the account of your stipend / is entered there in red". Nothing dramatic is said. Nobody announces that caste has intervened. It arrives instead through a bureaucratic detail, a red entry in an office ledger, and that mark becomes the visible trace of an otherwise invisible order. This is what makes the poem worth dwelling on. The identity card stops being a personal document and becomes, in that instant, a social instrument. Something designed to identify a person ends up reducing him to a category. Every single trait of what he actually is—student, poet, friend, lover—is slowly vanishing into the thin air by an identity assigned to him from outside.

Delving deeper, one is forced to confront a bitter irony. The very system built to support historically disadvantaged communities is the same system that exposes the stigma attached to that



S. Joseph

Identity Card

In my student days
a girl came laughing.

Our hands met kneading
her rice and fish curry.

On a bench we became
a Hindu-Christian family.

I whiled away my time
reading Neruda's poetry;
and meanwhile, I misplaced
my identity card.

I noticed, she said
returning my card:
the account of your stipend
is entered there in red.

These days I never look at
a boy and a girl lost in themselves.
They will depart after a while.
I won't be surprised even if they unite.
Their identity cards
won't have scribbles in red.

© Translation: 2010, K. Satchidanandan

support. A stipend meant to open doors ends up, being in social imagination, proof of inferiority. The trouble is never affirmative action itself; it is a social attitude that reads it as evidence that its beneficiaries are somehow lesser.

Going further down through the lines, it becomes clearer the Dalit identity is not limited to the personal experience of a single individual, but goes beyond it to encompass the collective burden of an entire community. The speaker is not only carrying his own memory; he is carrying a history that precedes him. That red mark stands in for generations of classification and exclusion, inscribed onto one body, one afternoon. The title "Identity Card" becomes all the more a powerful and an

The identity card stops being a personal document and becomes, in that instant, a social instrument. Something designed to identify a person ends up reducing him to a category. **Every single trait of what he actually is—student, poet, friend, lover—is slowly vanishing into the thin air by an identity assigned to him from outside.**



evocative metaphor in this context. An identity card is supposed to tell us who someone is. The poem asks something more unsettling: who decides what our identity even consists of? He can see himself through love and friendship, but society insists on seeing him through caste instead.

The final movement of the poem shifts dramatically and drastically towards a more unsettling phase than the mere rejection itself. The speaker admits that these days, when he sees a couple absorbed in each other, he no longer really looks. They will probably drift apart, he thinks — and even if they do not, it would not surprise him, because their identity cards, presumably, carry no "markings in red". The prejudice he once suffered has moved inside his own head. He has learned to expect discrimination before it appears — one of the cruellest effects of prejudice, that a person ends up carrying not just what was done to him, but the constant expectation that it will happen again.

That burden becomes collective because this is never only about one failed relationship. The speaker recognises a pattern, and his disappointment reshapes how he reads the world. Every young couple becomes a reminder of what can go wrong. A private wound turns, slowly, into something closer to a shared consciousness — the more difficult territory of internalised prejudice, where people learn to anticipate boundaries before anyone has actually drawn them.

Caste does not survive because people go around proclaiming one caste better than another. It survives because the social imagination has been trained, over a long period, to attach certain communities to purity, status, privilege or deprivation — associations that become habit rather than something that anyone examines. Prejudice stops being merely a private opinion; it becomes a social grammar, a set of rules by which people learn to read one another.

The poem also unsettles the comfortable idea that modernity does away with prejudice by itself. The setting is a college; the young people are educated, reading Neruda and sharing food across religious lines. By every outward sign, this is a modern, secular space — and yet caste survives underneath it, largely untouched. Old hierarchies are perfectly capable of moving into new buildings.

Joseph never lectures anyone about caste; he lets one small incident carry the weight of an enormous social structure. Yet, it does not leave us without a way forward. If the burden of caste is something society produces, it is also something society can undo, beginning with separating identity from hierarchy. There is nothing wrong, in itself, with having a caste identity—the trouble starts the moment identity becomes a measure of worth. What we need is a way of understanding identity that lets someone say, ‘this is who I am’ without society answering, ‘and this, therefore, is what you are worth.’

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The red marking on the card becomes a powerful metaphor for prejudice itself: a mark made by society, but carried by the individual. The poem leaves behind a question that is hard to shake off — how many of the identities we think we see in others are, in truth, identities we have been simply taught to see? Only by unlearning those inherited hierarchies can an identity card return to doing what it is always meant to do: identify a person, rather than determine their place in the human community.

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MORAL DEVELOPMENT AS A MECHANISM FOR UNDERSTANDING AND TRANSFORMING INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT



I. INTRODUCTION

When is it too late to prevent a conflict? "Intergenerational conflict often emerges when people who share a family, educational, or social environment interpret the same situation according to different expectations regarding responsibility, relationships, fairness, and appropriate action. These differences can easily become personal judgments: one person may perceive the other as insensitive, authoritarian, or irresponsible, while the other may interpret the same behavior as caring, protective, or justified. However, various approaches in developmental psychology, particularly those proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg ^[1] and Jean Piaget ^[2], suggest that the foundations of moral judgment begin to develop during childhood through family, social,

If moral structures begin to develop through early relational and social experiences, understanding these structures may also provide a way to explain how people from different generations interpret conflict. **Analyzing moral development can function as a bridge between generations by helping individuals identify the moral structure underlying another person's decision.**

and cultural interactions. Understanding the moral reasoning behind these interpretations offers an alternative starting point for conflict transformation. If moral structures begin to develop through early relational and social experiences, understanding these structures





may also provide a way to explain how people from different generations interpret conflict. Analyzing moral development can function as a bridge between generations by helping individuals identify the moral structure underlying another person's decision. Rather than beginning with the question of who is right, the process begins with a more fundamental question: "From what moral reasoning is the other person making this decision?" This shift does not require agreement. It creates the possibility of understanding before judgment and dialogue before confrontation.

II. From Judgment to Understanding

The recognition of different moral structures changes the starting point of a difficult conversation. Instead of asking, 'Do you consider this the right thing to do?' as a way of judging whether the action is correct, participants can ask, 'What makes this decision right for you?' to understand the other person's intentions. The objective is not to eliminate differences, but to make the reasoning behind those differences visible.

The study suggests that moral reasoning is shaped by family, social, and educational experiences. The family is identified as an initial space for learning limits, empathy, authority, justice, cooperation, and responsibility, while broader social and educational experiences

continue to influence how individuals interpret these concepts. Consequently, moral reasoning should be understood within the context of the experiences through which individuals develop their understanding of relationships and responsibility. When an intergenerational conflict occurs, understanding these foundations can help transform the interpretation of the other person. The other is no longer viewed simply as someone who is making a wrong decision, but as someone whose decision may be coherent within a particular moral structure.

II. Moral Structures and the Interpretation of Decisions

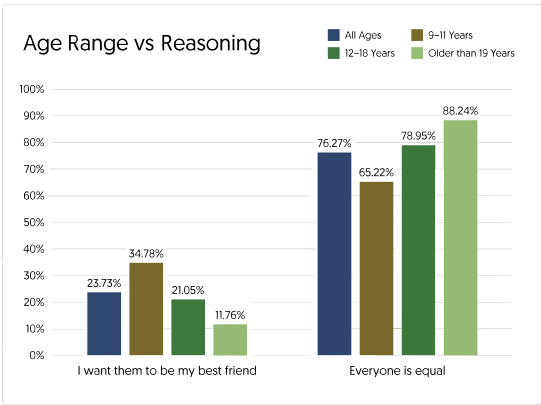
An exploratory study involving 61 participants in Colombia examined the moral reasoning underlying a simple dilemma involving cooperation and empathy. Participants were classified into three age groups:

Table 1.
Participants age distribution

Category	Participants
5 to 11 years	23
12 to 18 years	19
Older than 19 years	17

Participants were asked whether they would share their sandwich with a friend who had dropped theirs. Rather than focusing on the yes-or-no response, the study analyzed the justification underlying the decision. Three forms of moral reasoning were identified: reasoning based on external consequences, reasoning based on interpersonal relationships and social approval, and reasoning based on equality, fairness, and helping someone in need.

Table 2.
Distribution of Moral Reasoning Structures by Age Group



The results indicate a relationship between age group and the moral reasoning used to justify the decision. The proportion of responses based on interpersonal relationships was higher among the younger participants, while reasoning based on equality and justice was more frequent among older participants. For the purposes of this article, these findings are not interpreted as evidence of a linear moral evolution. Rather, they suggest that different generations may exhibit different distributions of moral reasoning structures. This distinction provides a useful starting point for understanding intergenerational conflict. When two individuals disagree, the conflict may arise not only from different interests or expected outcomes, but also from the different forms of moral reasoning they use to evaluate the situation.

Moral development can therefore become a mechanism for conflict

transformation when it is used not to rank individuals, but to understand the reasoning behind their decisions.

Conflict transformation can begin not with agreement, but with the recognition of how different moral structures shape perceptions of justice, responsibility, and relationships.



III. Experience as a Mechanism for Building the Bridge

Understanding moral reasoning alone does not necessarily transform conflict. The methodological proposal of the Fundación Logos Heritage Model provides safe environments in which participants can interact, make mistakes, reflect, and develop trust without humiliation [3]. Within this framework, experience provides an opportunity to observe how individuals make decisions, interact with others, respond to tension, and reflect on their actions. The methodology connects context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation, creating a structured process through which moral reasoning can become visible through interaction and reflection. Dialogue, therefore, is not limited to reaching verbal agreement; it becomes an opportunity to recognize one's own responses, understand the reasoning of others, and reconsider possible ways of acting.



Based on this approach, intergenerational conflict transformation can be conceptualized as a process:

Recognize 'Interpret' Dialogue 'Reframe' Act

Individuals first recognize that different moral structures may influence how a situation is understood; they then interpret the other person's decision by identifying the moral reasoning that gives meaning to it. This creates the basis for dialogue without immediate judgment, allowing participants to reframe the conflict and identify possibilities that may not have been visible from their initial position. Finally, this new understanding can be transferred to relationships and shared practices. The bridge between generations is therefore not necessarily agreement, but rather the capacity to understand how another person constructs the moral meaning of a situation through a particular moral structure. Experiential learning and reflective environments provide opportunities to make these differences visible and open to discussion.

Moral development can therefore become a mechanism for conflict transformation when it is used not to rank individuals, but to understand the reasoning behind their decisions. Conflict transformation can begin not with agreement, but with the recognition of how different moral structures shape perceptions of justice, responsibility, and relationships.

IV. Conclusion

Intergenerational conflict can be approached as a problem of moral interpretation as much as a disagreement over outcomes. Classifying moral structures provides a way to understand why individuals may respond differently to the same situation, while experiential learning and reflective environments provide opportunities to make these differences visible and open to discussion.

Jorge Andrés Macías Quintero, Facultad de Ingeniería, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Bogotá, Colombia and Dragana Jevremovic, Fundación Logos Heritage Model Bogotá, Colombia.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 7(5)/2026/80-81



Dear Editor,

Summer greetings! Congratulations on another excellent issue. I was so pleased to see Samantha Hart's contribution in this edition as well. Thank you for your support of student voices.

Joshua Snyder

Boston College, USA

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for sharing the July 2026 issue of PAX LUMINA. It is an honour to contribute to this volume on such an important theme. I am especially grateful for your encouragement and support throughout the writing process. I truly appreciate the opportunity.

Brenda Okum

Nairobi

Dear Editor,

Thank you for Pax Lumina. This is just to express my appreciation for this publication. All the best in the work you are doing.

Mayamiko Kachipapa

Campion Hall, Oxford

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the thought-provoking issue of Pax Lumina on "Reimagining Gender." Gender and peace need to be addressed from the school level onwards. We need to nurture a culture in which young people learn to understand gender differences, respect one another, and work together towards a more peaceful and inclusive society.

Promoting community initiatives and bringing people together for shared tasks can greatly enhance peace both on campus and beyond. What we need to focus on is meaningful and inclusive participation, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

Let us engage more closely with the realities of gender differences and create regular spaces for dialogue, reflection, and mutual understanding. Such spaces can help us move towards genuine equality and equal opportunities for all.

Adv. Jose Aedaiodi

Kochi

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for the July issue of Pax Lumina. It is a pleasure and an honor to see my article published alongside such thoughtful contributions from scholars around the world. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this special issue, Reimagining Gender for Peace. Congratulations to you and the editorial team for bringing together such a timely and meaningful collection of essays. Thank you once again for your trust and encouragement.

Juan Javier Aguiar Román

Ecuador



Dear Editor,
 Thanks for Pax Lumina on Gender and Peace.
 My appreciation for being the voice of refugees.

Mamy Cishamba
 Kenya

Dear Editor,
 Thank you for Pax Lumina. The issue on Gender
 and Peace has come out so well. I appreciate your
 efforts.

Regards,

Dr Adfer Rashid Shah
 Kashmir.

Dear Editor,
 As usual, congratulations on an excellent
 production. You have a great editorial team.
 Just browsing through the graphics alone is so
 informative, educative and inspirational.

Roy da Silva
 USA

Dear Editor,
 Thanks again for the excellent and daring Pax
 Lumina on Gender and Peace. I appreciate the article
 by Prof. Masko Tanaka in this issue which is very
 revealing of the hard facts.

Roy Sebastian
 Delhi.

Dear Editor,
 Thank you for the July 2026 issue of Pax
 Lumina on the timely and thought-provoking theme
 of "Reimagining Gender and Peace." It is encouraging
 to see gender and peace brought together in a way
 that goes beyond conventional discussions and
 invites us to examine the deeper structures, attitudes
 and prejudices that shape our societies.

The richness and diversity of the articles make
 this issue particularly meaningful. The reflections
 from different cultural, social and geographical
 contexts show how questions of gender, identity,
 discrimination and peace are deeply interconnected.
 The issue also challenges us to move from merely
 recognising differences to creating spaces for
 dialogue, participation and equal opportunities.

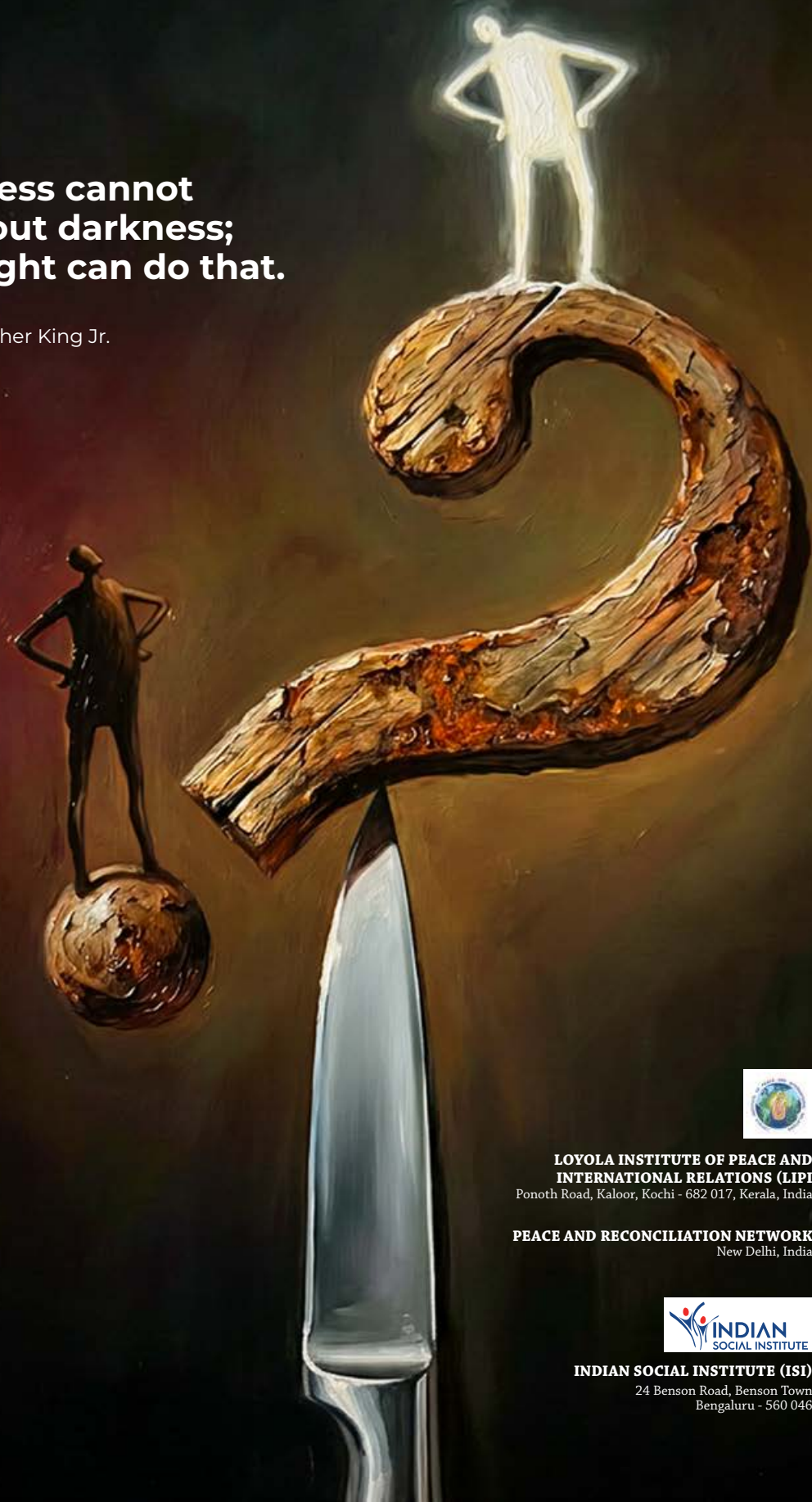
Catherine M.
 Germany

Dear Editor,
 Pax Lumina, July issue on "Reimagining Gender
 for Peace" spreads before the reader a spectrum of
 'reimagination' on a number of related problems.
 The article "Transgender Genetics: Fact or Fantasy"
 has thrown light on some important questions. The
 author states that biological underpinning is neither
 binary nor ineluctable; rather, it is one component
 in a complex interplay of genetic and environmental
 influences. This position appears to have theological
 consequences.

Dr Joseph Mathew
 Bharananganam

**Darkness cannot
drive out darkness;
only light can do that.**

- Martin Luther King Jr.



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