

PANGERNUNGBA

# Unmasking the Violence of Peace

*We live in a world where order and stability 'rests on' or is 'born of' violence. Peace has become an animated 'political word'; it is used as the most effective weapon of power and domination. Violence can flourish only under the 'name' and 'shadow' of peace.*

*A careful reading of the heart of history reveals how the worst violence, the most bloody and unjustifiable violence continue to be unleashed in the name of peace. Irrespective of how, where, when and in what name they are done; its sole purpose is to rip the earth, cultivate vicious cycle of violence and perpetuate unending poverty, marginalisation and impoverishment of the world's majority population. Beyond this politics of peace, we witness a large section of humanity whose experience of peace is synonymous to violence, death and destruction. Commitment to the task of unmasking the 'painted face of peace' has become imperative.*

*This brief reflection will attempt to ask how contemporary capitalism's 'ideology of peace' is advanced as a countervailing equalizer to harmonise the violence caused by its instruments of domination (globalisation); how peace has been co-opted by the worst tyrants to carry out violence under the label and garb of peace; how the ideology of peace is actually embedded in the pure political interest and strategic gains of a few dominant countries and institutions that control contemporary capitalism; how should one confront and deconstruct the 'ideology of peace' and how a movement of justpeace (justice & peace going together) in Asia and in the ecumenical movement could be reconstructed to go beyond the malicious discourse of 'peace'.*

## Waging Peace – the Violence of Peace

The 'Inferior Race' needed to be civilised. The west (now all the dominant countries irrespective of West, East, North & South) made it their mandatory mission to subjugate, colonise, exterminate and exploit the "colonised objects". History witnesses to this crime and the victims continue to thank the colonisers for:



*“Discovering” us, Stealing our land,  
Raping the women, Killing us ‘In the name of God’,  
Sharing with us your diseases, Writing OUR history,  
Taking us from our traditions, Teaching us to be like you,  
Giving me my name, Poisoning our Mother Earth,  
And, most importantly, celebrating this day!<sup>1</sup>*

Series after series of political programmes continue to be relentlessly forced upon the weaker peoples in order to keep them under perpetual control. Taking insight from Anisur RAMAN, Jeremy SEABROOK states how

<sup>1</sup> PELTIER Leonard, *Aboriginal Sin*. In Neva WELTON & Linda WOLF (eds.), *Global Uprising: Confronting the Tyrannies of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Canada, 2001. 142.

»‘development’ was originally a western promise to the South, designed to counter the danger of socialism. It was the threat of Bolshevik revolution inspiring social revolutions in the Third World that was countered by a promise of “development” and “development assistance” to help underdeveloped societies to catch up with the “developed.”«<sup>2</sup> Poverty had to be invented as a global reality in order to legitimise the need for development (domination).

Similar is the present day ‘politics of human right and peace’ advocated under the shadow of the United Nations, G8, Non-Governmental Organisations, etc. The politics about UN peacekeeping forces or any other mechanisms advanced in the name of security, peace and human rights are farce at its core. This fact is aptly explained in the political comment of Samir AMIN: “Never have the armies of the North brought peace, prosperity, or democracy to the peoples of Asia, Africa, or Latin America. In the future, as in the past five centuries, they can only bring to these peoples further servitude, the exploitation of their labour, the expropriation of their riches, and the denial of their rights.”

Genuine movements of resistance and liberation that emerge as a response to injustices are sealed off and contained in the name of terrorism and peace. Luis LOPEZLLERA sums this up, “for the most powerful nation in the world, terrorism becomes the main challenge today, without distinguishing violence as a structural cause and violence as an unpredictable effect. A global war is declared against effects of the same system.”<sup>3</sup> This politics is successfully backed by NGOs ideologically fed and funded by the disciples of contemporary capitalism. NGO’s have become co-opted channels that execute the ‘practical field work’ orderly assigned to them by their masters. ‘Pieces of peace’ are exported and imposed upon at any time, irrespective of whether it is felt necessary or opposed by the people.

Much of the conflict resolution and human right programmes are used as political commodities required for creating an artificial (forced) state of peace. Subversive methods of peace diplomacy, negotiation, resolution, ceasefire, etc. are packaged and handled through their armed ‘peace mediators’. It is an anathema for such politics of peace to work toward correcting structural errors based on the truth of history. The fact of confronting the truth scares those who perpetuate ‘false peace’ as it is too costly for them.

Victims who suffer historical subjugation affirm that justice must be established first in order to have genuine peace. But the oppressors claim that (false) peace is possible even without confronting the ‘roots of injustice’. This is the reason why century long conflicts in many parts of the world remain sustained and unresolved. Old conflicts achieved through forced negotiation keep recurring as their deep wounds are not healed permanently and new unwanted conflicts keep emerging.

NGO work does not bring about permanent change in the lives of people as their works are directed only at addressing the symptoms of violence and not the

<sup>2</sup> SEABROOK Jeremy, *Victims of Development: Resistance and Alternatives*. London, 1993. 8.

<sup>3</sup> LOPEZLLERA M. LUIS, *Multicellular Organic Society Vs. Virtual Illusions*. Alliance of Hope 2002/8. 52.

causes of violence. It is very crucial for us to ask whose peace we are talking about. Whose slogan are we shouting? Whose prayers are said every Sunday and whose path of peace are we following? Is the genuine road to peace a distant reality?

### **Liberating Peace from Ideological Captivity**

Peace, co-opted as a concept of global monopoly has become corrupt of its soul to heal violence. Instead of asking what peace is, we must rather ask whose peace, which peace, peace for whom and at what cost? We have given different names to peace. Our world has many interests and many types of peace. The peace produced by the dominant is imposed against the genuine demands of people's justice.

We are repeatedly told that there is only one peace - the peace of the dominant: 'dominant peace'. Legitimate voices of peace are drowned and left unheard. Naïve expressions about peace abound - 'peace is simply peace', 'peace of rest', 'peace is peace', 'absence of war' or 'nothing more than peace', 'peace as avoiding conflict', etc. We humans talk about peace but love war and conflict. Human actions promote injustice and perpetuate unwanted conflicts. Talks about peace contradict and betray the holder.

Peace has become a global commodity for the proponents of contemporary capitalism. It is advanced and legitimised to mask the cover of violence, which their instruments of domination perpetuate. Peace is now a saleable commodity in the market; supplied plentifully in every nook and cranny by the agents of contemporary capitalism: nation-states, politicians, ruling elites, middle class, media, peace NGOs, etc. It is the religion that can be consumed, worn and spoken as the 'social justice' slogan of contemporary capitalism's 'ideology of peace'.

Consuming this brand of peace becomes a way of attaining salvation and satisfaction amidst the insecurities generated by modern society. This illusion of peace has created "peace euphoria". If I am allowed to misquote this 'peace mania' in the expressions of Karl MARX, peace has become the 'opiate of the masses'. Recent strategies have been heavily banking on the fears and insecurity of people (e.g. war against terrorism after destruction of World Trade Center and Pentagon).

The politics of peace has created a 'false consciousness' in the people. This peace is 'produced', 'enforced', 'managed' and 'made to function' in society to blind and obstruct people from raising true issues of peace. It is not only subverting the masses from indulging in the right quest for peace but robbing and fast-killing people's sensitivity to engage and ask the right question that can direct a process of lasting peace in the world.

It is important for us to deconstruct this 'ideology of peace' promoted by a few powerful to perpetuate miseries on the rest of the communities of the world. We need to wash away all the myth and farce that it advances. By doing this, we will not only reconstruct peace in its real essence but also liberate peace from its present violent ideology. We will have to be reborn with positive ideas and thoughts

that do not suppress but give value and space for genuine resistance and struggles of the people. Such peace is not manipulative, but redeeming. It is not destructive but upholds the values of life capable of creating a peaceful world.

### **The Church and Ecumenical Movement: Beyond the God of Peace!**

Modernity's promise of peace has not only failed but also led humanity to a dead end 'crisis of value'. We are now confronted with a crisis of 'meaning' caused by unprecedented fragmentation of ultimate values that held the matrix of life. Means have become an end and ends have been written off conveniently. This has been caused by the instrumentalisation and commodisation of the base of life and values that hold society organically.

Christianity that applauded and pleased to sail together in the boat of modernity has now become incapable of providing a moral direction in the present crises. For Christians, the present crisis signifies a deep 'crisis of faith'. It is about coming to terms with the 'god of peace and shalom' and re-evaluating the effectiveness of Christian utopia and eschatology that we seek to be part with God. Can we work together with the god of peace to create a world of justice, peace and truth? Is the world evolving into violence?

We are tempted to resign and say how scarce peace can be today. Our reality speaks so, that, "peace can be nothing more than a short and precarious interruption of ever present and inescapable war. Violence had the first word in history; it will have the last word - and most of the words in-between too."<sup>4</sup> It has become necessary for the church to go beyond the 'god of peace' - beyond a 'theology of peace'. Should violence become the destiny of humanity? Should this require of us a renewed faith to resurrect the 'god of peace' who is the beginning and end of human history?

We must transcend the institutionalised 'god of peace'. Our peace-building ministry must first start with a critique of the religious legitimacy of violence that is manifested through the institutionalised church vested in power. Power has become an important element in the life of the structures of the church. The glorification and veneration of our institutions have resulted in the inability of the church to speak up for 'genuine peace'.

No wonder, church programmes are now full of activities related to peace. Peace is the heart of all church services. The text of Christian worship and liturgy is full of references about peace and peace is a 'prayer' uttered from the lips of every Christian. It may not be too far for us to listen to Prophet Jeremiah's warning, that, "they have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying "peace, peace," when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:13-14).

These and other numerous changing trends have direct political influence on the movements of the younger generation capable of causing potential misdirection, co-option or positive movement direction. There is at least one recognised perspective, that, 'the globalisation process can succeed only with the uncritical

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<sup>4</sup> VOLFF Miroslav, *Exclusion and Embrace*. Nashville, 1996. 304.

participation of the younger generation'. For example, we need to seriously take stock of the global market of human rights and peace, which is luring and converting a large number of young people as mediators and transporters of their 'ideology of peace'. While we should not undermine people who are genuinely committed to work within it without sacrificing their basic values; there are many who see it as a redemption and safe haven of activism from the disillusionment and insecurity impacted by the process of globalisation.

The 'powers that be' promoting unequal global balance continue to fund and promote the legitimacy of comfortable NGO cultures of social justice. The younger generation must go beyond this doctrine of comfortable activism that leaves our contradiction and orientation unquestioned and ultimately serves to fortify the pillars of injustice. We must also caution ourselves not to be swept away without clear purpose in the present 'activism mania' generated by computer linked social movements.

The church is still caught up in the traditional paradigm that regards leadership as the unquestionable prerogative of the elders. Analysis of our situation clearly indicates that the younger generations have become the '*nucleuses*' of present global (global & local) movements. This is partly because the younger generation is more adept at discerning the dynamics of present social disorientation by transcending the 'given' traditional ideological lenses of social movements. The church must 'deeply embrace' this '*nucleus*' (youth) in order to revitalise her historical effectiveness in present times.

A recent initiative of the World Council of Churches, which declared 2001-2010 as "Decade to Overcome Violence", is a hopeful sign and positive direction. Might the church, originally a counter-culture movement, repent to regain her vision in order to become a community that provides an alternative for the present situation? How might faith communities become *avenues of reconciliation* to direct the church toward a more imaginative and proactive social involvement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Are we required urgently to re-assert the vocation of Christians to peace, justice, liberation and wholeness and God's reconciling work in Christ as the context of understanding Christian identity and ministry? Can we meaningfully engage in "beating the swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks" (Micah 4:3)?

### **Strengthening the Movement of Justpeace in Asia**

Ecumenical action for peace needs to find its launching points within the context of the emerging global movements confronting the hegemony of peace. The recent shape of global movements against the onslaught of neo-liberalism have not only transcended the traditional paradigms of social movements but also universally recognised one common enemy: *contemporary capitalism*, or whatever one may like to term it. With the historical project of socialism becoming untenable, not one but several alternative projects or models of the models are encouraged within the loose umbrella of global justice movements.

We are now in a momentous and propitious epoch where “the glocal citizen’s movement has made a momentous discovery and revealed a dangerous truth: the corporate *coup d’etat*, the triumph of the rich over the poor, market over society, rapacity over nature is not inevitable.”<sup>5</sup> Margaret THATCHER’s TINA (There Is No Alternative) is replaced by TAMA (There Are Many Alternatives) and AWIS (Another World Is Possible). The movement is more “a kind of ‘trans-generational, trans-class, trans-gender and trans-national generation.’” The inherent contradiction of contemporary capitalism has become stark, accumulating comparable cracks of its downfall as a political project.

Asia is still a place wrought in suffering and violence emanating from the deep scars and legacies of colonialism. The roots of human misery in Asia are located in the structures of violence that are manifested in new forms such as ‘structural adjustment programmes’ and many others. Transforming these inhuman structures must continue to be our main agenda for action.

A peace-building ministry, which seeks to demystify the politics of peace, must identify and work within basic ‘rallying principles’ on peace. The first principle should be Justpeace (justice & peace going together). Justpeace is the ‘cultural act’ of peoples (victims) transforming concrete situations of human injustice from its ‘roots’ so that justice is established in a new form of inclusive human relationship. The primary task of this bottom-up approach is to confront the root causes, forces and structures of the violence. These processes would create genuine peace, tranquility and self-determination of people in society.

The second principle must be our act of deliberately re-asserting the dynamics of ‘history’. Our struggle for justice and peace should be seen and defined within specific historical contexts, relationships of power and domination of North over South. This is the only true way that can help build genuine peace based on the establishment of truth in history. Different agendas are advanced in order to divert the oppressed in history from addressing these issues. Individualism, consumerism and hegemony of the US war on terrorism are but some recent examples. It is very true what Thabo MBEKI, the president of the South African Republic said, “until the victims started to write the histories of their own, the histories are the histories of the hunters.”

The third principle is ‘*people and culture*’. Agendas of the dominant must be decentred in order to re-centre the participatory power, wisdom, humanising values and politics of the marginalised. Self-determination must be upheld as the core principle. Self-determination is the ‘cultural act’ of peoples ‘transforming’ concrete situations of human ‘injustice’ so that ‘justice’ is established ‘equitably’ in a new form of human relationship. We must insulate our work for peace from the ‘ideology of peace’ that works to strengthen the pillars and systems of historical domination and leave large sections of humanity dispossessed. Finally, our approach to peace-building must carry and inculcate transforming values that

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<sup>5</sup> GEORGE Susan, *Global Citizens Movement*. New Internationalist 2002/343. 7.

respect the culture and worldviews of people. This approach challenges us to denounce the exclusive and dominating values that we often claim to be good and liberating.

### **Conclusion**

Could the 'culture of justpeace' become our daily resistance and vision of a just society for all? A Justpeace movement in Asia will need to confront the unjust forces of contemporary capitalism, subvert the violence of peace, promote counter-cultures of life and make alternatives irresistible. The future of humanity is bound together. I conclude with the 'Aboriginal Activist Sister' who reminds us "if you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together."

### **PANGERNUNGBA: Desenmascarando la violencia de la paz**

El artículo de Pangernungba es un análisis sobre las políticas de paz. En él critica el concepto capitalista actual sobre esta, y sugiere que eso no es verdadera paz. Él afirma que para una inmensa parte de la humanidad, esta paz moderna es realmente un sinónimo de violencia, muerte y destrucción. La intención del artículo es desenmascarar "el rostro pintado de paz", y al mismo tiempo propone una paz alternativa para el movimiento ecuménico, la cual es una paz en relación con la justicia: justipaz.

### **PANGERNUNGBA: Révéler la violence de la paix**

L'article de Pangernungba étudie la politique de la paix. L'auteur met en question le concept capitaliste dominant de paix et suggère qu'il ne renvoie pas à une paix véritable. Il affirme que, pour une grande partie de l'Humanité, le concept dominant de paix est synonyme de violence, de mort et de destruction. L'intention de cet article est d']ter «le masque peint de la paix». L'auteur propose une paix alternative pour le mouvement œcuménique, une paix engagée dans la justice: la «justepaix».