

# The Politics of Compassion in a World of Ruthless Power

**Kevin Clements**

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Kevin Clements is the Foundation Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies and Director of the New Zealand National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

I would like to explain why I'm focusing on the politics of compassion in 2016 even though it sounds somewhat oxymoronic at this particular juncture in history. I am writing a book about the politics of compassion because the world is far too small to accommodate the application of dominatory, hegemonic, authoritarian, and bullying politics. This sort of adversarial, zero-sum politics is not solving and cannot solve the problems that the global order is currently confronting. John Burton, one of the founders of our field, felt that one of the promises of conflict transformation was to think about how to do politics differently.<sup>1</sup> He thought that adversarial politics should and would eventually be replaced by a more collaborative, problem-solving politics. This normative desire to change the nature of politics needs to be given shape and focus if we are to address a wide range of global challenges effectively. We are living in a dystopian present. George Orwell said in *1984*, "Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? It is ... a world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but MORE merciless as it refines itself."<sup>2</sup>

I think that Orwell's fictional prophecy is coming to pass. We are living in a world of fear and treachery and torment where politicians and political systems trample upon others, and we are living in a world that seems to be growing merciless as it refines itself even though there's a lot of good evidence to suggest that many of the intractable conflicts of the world are beginning to diminish.

What makes modern politics challenging, though, is that we are confronting a perfect storm of tectonic shifts within the global, political, economic, and social system.

In the first place there is climate change, which is already wreaking havoc in different parts of the world. I'm in the UK on sabbatical at the moment, and in the last six years, there have been three floods classified as hundred-year floods. In New Zealand, where I live normally, and in the southern part of the United States, there have been more flooding and unusual weather events. The hottest February in history was recorded in 2016. The world as a whole in 2015 was 0.23 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than average

recordings in 2014, and 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than a century ago.<sup>3</sup> These are not North-South problems anymore; they are truly global problems impacting all of us.

Second, in addition to climate change, economic vulnerability remains a persistent problem. The global financial crisis of 2008 could easily repeat itself. The Bank of International Settlements in Basel has just gone to negative interest rates and people are saying, “Well, what does this mean if there’s another banking crisis? Will the reserve banks have the capacity to handle it?” The answer to that question is not at all clear. If there is another financial crisis, it’s highly probable that the global financial system will not be able to bounce back as it did the last time.

Third, I think there are numerous examples of state dysfunction and pathology. This is not just a question of a democratic deficit, (i.e., a situation of deficiency in relation to political accountability and legitimacy.) On the contrary, there are some fundamental pathologies that challenge the whole democratic project. Coming from the UK or New Zealand to the United States, for example, it is easy to see quite high levels of political pathology. There is no way to describe the current presidential primary campaign in the U.S. other than politically bizarre.<sup>4</sup> Apart from Bernie Sanders, policy discussions are almost nonexistent, and candidates are engaged in constant ad hominem attacks. The fact that aspiring political leaders can get away with transgressive political discourse and such little attention to political vision or policy prescription highlights something of the American people’s alienation from political systems and political processes. This is not just an American phenomenon. Political leaders in both the U.S. and Europe are articulating fear, frustration, and high levels of anger and aggression. These are playing themselves out in political systems that probably are going to prove inadequate to the task of controlling them. The result is the generation of high levels of political extremism in many of the world’s ostensibly stable democracies. In Europe right now, for example, there are multiple right-wing, reactionary, fascist parties in Germany, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Hungary. The United Kingdom is not immune. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) is the British National Party rebranded, and the Brexit movement for British withdrawal from Europe builds on xenophobic nationalism, prejudice, and fear. These extremist groups are tugging political processes in all these countries further and further to the right. The center is no longer able to hold moderate positions. On the contrary, many centrist parties are demonstrating intolerant tendencies and, worse, beginning to challenge many of the taken-for-granted, normative achievements of the twenty-first century. The Civil Rights Movement, for example, achieved legal equality for blacks and whites in America, but it is being challenged by states wishing to change electoral and gender equality laws in the South. The Convention against Torture, which was a singular achievement of the twentieth century, is also being observed in the breach all over the world right now.

I have just coordinated a workshop in Japan on warrior and pacifist traditions in the Abrahamic religions and in Buddhism. When we were talking about Donald Trump saying that “waterboarding was

for sissies,” one of my Jewish colleagues at the meeting said without blinking an eyelid, “In Israel, we normally find that sleep deprivation gives us all the information we need before we use any other tool in our torture toolbox.” He didn’t even hesitate when saying this. Does this mean that Israel and America and many other democratic countries are willing to breach the convention they’ve signed to abolish torture? Where is it going to end?

Amnesty International has just announced that 2015 was one of the worst years for capital punishment. Even though most of this was accounted for by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, it sends an ominous signal to countries that have abolished this punishment as cruel, inhuman, ineffective, and frequently unjust. Does this growth in numbers of state-sponsored executions mean that pressure will build for capital punishment to be reasserted as an acceptable punishment for states that are already showing signs of moving in less democratic directions?

Are we on the cusp of an era when all kinds of human rights laws and conventions will be undermined and subverted? My personal feeling is that we’re living in extremely dangerous times, and unless we are very wary, some of the normative achievements of the twentieth century will be reversed in the twenty-first.

The challenges that are confronting the world are not old North-South problems; they are global problems that impact all of us. When I talk about the politics of compassion, I am talking about a politics that, hopefully, will begin to challenge all of us to think afresh about what we want our political systems to do for us. In particular, what do we want our politics to look like in an era of growing individual atomization and alienation in the West? While the internet has, in different ways, brought us all together in real time, it might be making us more politically paralyzed in particular places and contexts.

I have identified six political pathologies that worry me and which I want to tag. Then I’ll give you some of my more optimistic ideas about how we might address these challenges.

## THE POLITICS OF DOMINATION

The first pathology is the politics of domination. Twenty-first century politics in both democratic and non-democratic systems are becoming progressively more callous, domineering, and oriented towards the protection of power, privilege, and sectional interest. Politics have always been like this, but this process seems to have intensified since 2001. The attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 generated first an American and then a wider Western overreaction that has resulted in the evolution of national security states everywhere, by which I mean states that give inordinate amounts of power to their intelligence and surveillance apparatuses, police, and military. There have been increasing political surveillance and political control at all levels. In the 1970s and ’80s, I was chairman of the Canterbury Council for Civil Liberties in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the City Council decided to install some

surveillance cameras on the four major avenues around Christchurch to monitor traffic flows. We were able to mobilize a whole campaign against the installation of those closed-circuit television cameras on the grounds that it was a major infringement of privacy because people would know which car was passing at what time of the night, and that information could be used against us if we were engaged in nefarious activity. Nowadays, nobody cares—everybody wants a surveillance camera at the end of the street and everywhere they go, and these surveillance cameras are generating information that is available to the State for whatever purpose it seeks to use it. Sometimes these purposes can be very helpful as when police and others use closed-circuit television images to track criminals through time and space. On other occasions, however, and in different places, these can be used to track and assassinate political opponents. However they are used, these cameras and the information that they are gathering is being used to generate ever tighter controls over individual citizens and non-citizens alike.

The Russian poet Klebnikov said, “What a great thing is a police station. The place where I have my rendezvous with the State!”<sup>5</sup> I would want to amend this now and argue, “What a great place is the Immigration and Customs departments, for this is where citizens and non-citizens have their rendezvous with the State.” I can speak from some personal experience of this. I have been on sabbatical in the United Kingdom for the last eight months. Even though I’m a British subject by lineage and lived in the UK for five years as such, this year I had to get an academic visa in order to stay in the UK for longer than six months. To get this I had to provide five years’ worth of bank account details and five years’ worth of passport details, showing every country I’ve visited outside of Britain in the last five years. I had to go to Auckland from Dunedin, New Zealand, to get my biometric (iris and fingerprint) data gathered. Then all of this information was sent off to the United Kingdom’s new border control post, which is in Manila, in the Philippines. This processing organization processes every British visa for the whole of the Asia-Pacific region, from China through to Central Asia. It takes twelve weeks to get a British visa now. It used to take two days and could be done quickly at a local British embassy. The British immigration border is now offshore, remote, and relatively inaccessible—unless you are living in Manila.

As part of this same process, I had to activate a British bank account in New Zealand using my Nat West Visa card. A week later, I got a note from the New Zealand Inland Revenue Department saying, “It has been brought to our attention that you have used an overseas bank account to withdraw some New Zealand dollars, which suggests to us that you’re in possession of multiple overseas bank accounts. In order to avoid a tax audit,” which is horrendous, “would you provide us with details of all of those bank accounts?” I was subsequently informed that all of the “Five Eyes” countries (joined under the UKUSA Intelligence agreement), that is the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, are now sharing every single piece of banking information across all five countries. Now, when you add this intelligence to the cyber-intelligence that is being gathered based on every email or text

message we send or receive, not to mention human intelligence (focusing on each one of us, wherever we happen to be), we are subject to multiple layers of state-sponsored surveillance.

This means that we are indeed living in a crazy, draconian world where the State seems to mistrust citizens and non-citizens alike and where nothing we do is secret or private anymore. In fact, one of the marks of the politics of domination is a blurring of divisions between the private and public spheres. There is increasingly no private sphere that is beyond the reach of the State's control and interest. This is an awesome prospect if you start thinking about what might happen if somebody like Donald Trump or even Ted Cruz becomes president of the United States and placed in charge of all surveillance technology and state intelligence material.

The reality is that there are few people and even fewer social movements resisting these multiple levels of surveillance and, by extension, heightened state control of citizens. The stock argument is that if you have nothing to hide then there is nothing to fear. That's what liberals and the left assumed in Germany before Nazi oppression! I want to argue, however, that all that is needed for dominatory and authoritarian politicians to take advantage of surveillance technology for their own purposes is a lack of resistance and effective opposition to concentrated power and rule.

The current U.S. primary campaign is a worrying example of this. While I hope that there will be checks and balances on the Trump and Cruz campaigns, both are examples of what I call the pathology of dominatory politics.

In Donald Trump, for example, you have a potential president of the United States pointing his finger at absolutely everybody in a naming and blaming game, inciting violence and bombast while activating xenophobia, nationalism, and a mishmash of contradictory social and economic policies. He is not driven by a "realistic" or even an "idealistic" change agenda. He is driven solely by narcissistic self-interest. He's the archetypal dominator, and he makes no bones about it. I think that he's an extraordinarily frightening character. If you look at some of the recent discussions that have been occurring around authoritarian personality types, which are at the heart of the politics of domination, what is being discovered is that there are active and passive authoritarian personality types. Donald Trump is a good example of an active authoritarian—his success rests on an activation of latent authoritarian tendencies. For Trump, the silent majority are what social psychologists call latent authoritarians who respond to his dominatory personality because it resonates with their own desire for order and control. Trump activates this constituency with violent, blaming rhetoric that generates the illusion of an authoritative response to physical and psychological threats and social change. He prioritizes social order and hierarchy to bring a sense of control to a chaotic world. He does this by being critical of diversity and suggesting that outsiders (Moslems, Mexicans, and a wide range of "negative others") are upsetting an ordered past that never really existed. This is a variant of classic authoritarianism was mapped out by

Adorno<sup>6</sup> and others. My Ph.D. supervisor was Jim Robb, who wrote his Ph.D. thesis in 1947 on working-class authoritarianism and anti-Semitism.<sup>7</sup> His research focused on Mosleyites and Blackshirts in East London, but he described exactly the same phenomena we're seeing again in the United States. In this instance though, it is Moslems—not Jews—who are being held responsible for all the insecurities, fears, and anxieties that Americans currently feel.

The politics of domination are not confined to the United States. There is a strong desire across Western Europe and in other parts of the world for “authoritarian” dominyatory leaders who can provide reassurance in the face of existential uncertainty. The Trump and Cruz campaigns, however, are essentially a replay in 2016 of the authoritarian, dominyatory, and populist politics of the 1930s.

### THE POLITICS OF INEQUALITY AND GREED

The second pathology is what I call the politics of inequality and greed. Not only are we beset by politicians and states that are intent on monopolizing and utilizing power for their own purposes, but one of the central purposes of dominyatory politics is also to provide a rationale and legitimation for what I call the politics of inequality and greed. On the part of many political leaders, there is passive and active acceptance of growing inequality and injustice at national, regional, and global levels. Many people continue to think that this is the divinely ordered state; some people are born to be on top, and some are born to be on the bottom. This inequality is becoming entrenched and normalized as states and citizens follow neoliberal growth models and pursue the politics of greed. That's certainly what's happening in this current U.S. election campaign. Apart from Bernie Sanders and to a lesser extent Hilary Clinton, most other candidates are pandering to the politics of greed. “We will make America great again; we will make it rich again; we will make your middle class robust again; we will ensure that your kids have the education that you were unable to have.”

Instead of focusing on sustainable consumption, the politics of greed assumes that individuals and institutions can produce and consume without restraint. There is no sense of sustainable realism or any priority placed on social, community, or public goods. Politicians and government officials don't often, or publicly, emphasize notions of public service. On the contrary, it is assumed that once elected, politicians can pursue sectional rather than public interests and present them as in the public good when they are manifestly not. Where the gaps are egregious, there are some signs of progressive resistance to injustice and inequality, but these have not, as yet (apart from the short lived “Occupy Movement”) manifested themselves in mass political movements for equality, justice, and social harmony. If you want to see a good film on the politics and economics of greed, see *The Big Short*. It's a very good example of what drove the 2008 global financial crisis. Similarly, if you want to understand the politics of greed and pork barrel politics in the United States, look at the cost of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. It has currently cost

\$1.3 trillion and is still not in service. I think that U.S. citizens and the rest of the world have a right to ask, what is the point of this plane? What will it add to the sum total of U.S. or global security? There may be some strategic purpose to it, but from the outside it looks as though the primary purpose of this project is to distribute “pork” across the polity. Even here, however, there is no equal distribution. It is distributed in very unequal ways in response to those who wield bureaucratic and political power in Congress.

The Oxfam report released just before the Davos World Economic Forum this year came up with a very interesting analysis of global wealth. It was called “Wealth: Having It All and Wanting More.”<sup>8</sup> The report showed that the richest one percent of the world’s population has seen their share of global wealth increase from forty-four percent in 2009 to forty-eight percent in 2014. At this rate, it will be more than fifty percent in 2016. One percent of the world’s population controls fifty percent of the wealth. This makes pre-revolutionary France look like some sort of egalitarian utopia. Members of the global elite had an average wealth of \$2.7 million per adult in 2014. In relation to the remaining fifty-two percent of global wealth, almost all of it (forty-six percent) is owned by the rest of the richest fifth of the world’s population. The other eighty percent of the world’s population share just five and one-half percent, and had an average wealth of \$3,851 per adult—that is one-seven hundredth of the average wealth of the one percent. These are scandalous and unsustainable statistics. We are living in a world where this kind of inequality and greed is getting worse. If you listen to the U.S. presidential primary election campaign, Bernie Sanders is the only one who is really articulating the necessity to challenge inequality in order to achieve a harmonious polity. You can’t have good politics in a world of such grave inequality.

## THE POLITICS OF FEAR

The third pathology is what I call the politics of fear. Extremist political movements everywhere have become adept at generating widespread existential anxiety and fear with relatively small acts of political violence. The shooting of 230 people in Paris, for example, was an outrageous and completely unjustifiable event, but it was used to legitimate an extraordinary crackdown on Muslims in France, Belgium, and in other parts of Europe. It is also being used to justify a rapid expansion of intelligence gathering and security services in France and other European countries. On the political front, it adds fuel to right-wing xenophobic parties such as the National Front in France and similar parties in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Poland.

These violent actions in France have been used by government and political leaders of all persuasions to legitimate a dramatic centralization and consolidation of state power and security capacity. This capacity is far out of proportion to the scale of threat that Europe and the U.S. face in response to international terrorism. In the Global Terrorism Index, for example, we counted 32,000 cases of terrorist

violence last year.<sup>9</sup> Ninety-five percent of these occurred within five countries: India, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria. Terrorist violence is not something that we in the West need to be afraid of, and yet it is there to justify all of the security arrangements we put in place at airports and elsewhere, and it's being used to justify the wall along the Mexican border and all the other walls that Donald Trump and his supporters would like to develop. The politics of fear have resulted in an erosion of democratic politics, a weakening of opposition parties, a curtailment of civil and political liberties, constraints on media freedom, and the development of national security agencies that concentrate a huge amount of power and secrecy in the hands of the executive.

In Japan, for example, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe is moving the whole of Japan in a very right-wing direction. People who publicly challenge him are subject to strict surveillance and control. Japanese academics, for example, are much less free than they used to be, and if they are critical of government policies, the government has sought to sanction them through their university administrations. These constraints flow from a wider political desire to control the content and delivery of the Japanese curriculum at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. This means that even though Japan and the Republic of Korea are both western-style democracies, they share some important authoritarian tendencies along with China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In the UK right now, the "Prevent Program" is aimed at countering extremism. What this means is that in every single class at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, teachers have to take a roll of all students attending class. This is aimed at ensuring that all enrolled foreign students are accounted for. These attendance records have to be reported to the Home Office at the end of every month. Even I fell under this surveillance regime. The office manager of the Department of Politics at the University of Kent, for example, came and told me that she had to apply the "prevent" rule to me as well because professors were also subject to Home Office surveillance. She had to file a report that would persuade the Home Office that I had been doing what I had told them I was going to do in terms of my research, that I had not been absent from my job for longer than one week at a time (and I have been), and that as far as she knew I had not been engaging in any extremist incitement of any students on campus. She was also asked to comment on whether I was a good departmental citizen and colleague. What on Earth is happening here? The British academy didn't resist these demands and it is now subordinate to the Home Office demands that they do all these things for visitors, aliens, and the "negative others" that are assumed to exist all around us.

These initiatives have resulted in an infantilization of citizens in a wide variety of diverse polities. Instead of our politicians realizing that each individual citizen is sovereign in a democracy, they assume, quite unjustifiably, that they are the sovereign. The reality, however, is that active citizens are the capacitating and legitimating actors in democratic political processes. Far too often, politicians pander to



sovereign citizen needs during election campaigns and then forget their obligations and accountabilities upon election. If the consumer is sovereign in the market, then the individual elector is sovereign in the polity. If politicians choose to play on the politics of fear, infantilize, and politically castrate us, they neutralize our political efficacy and ultimately their legitimacy.

## THE POLITICS OF WAR

The fourth pathology is what I call the politics of war. All of these earlier pathologies lead to a reliance on police, military, and security forces that predispose political leaders to think in terms of coercive rather than preventive diplomacy, and the application of power when persuasion would be more effective. As state systems have become more centralized, paranoid, and unable to control events at all levels of political action, there is a willingness to utilize coercive, military, and security responses to complex economic and political problems before exhausting negotiated solutions.

Listen to Donald Trump. “America will be great again,” “the military will be great again,” “the vets will get their rights,” and we will do whatever is needed to knock any challenger to the United States out of the political equation. Being a classic example of an authoritarian political leader with domineering, bullying tendencies, Donald Trump sees most problems in zero-sum, winners-and-losers terms. These are very blunt politics in the twenty-first century. Can you imagine Donald Trump’s hand on the nuclear trigger? Would he nuke North Korea if that country didn’t comply with his unilateral demands? Who would or could restrain him? From the outside, he seems like a man without nuance, subtlety, or appreciation of more positive strategies that may have a better chance of changing or modifying the behavior of others.

Trump’s bellicosity and that of others who share his orientation to national and global politics have resulted in a growth in military and security budgets in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. It has also resulted in the securitization of aid and development, closer levels of political surveillance and control, and a willingness to apply military solutions before exhausting all nonviolent options. The politics of violence and war are closely linked with the next pathology, which is the politics of intervention.

## THE POLITICS OF INTERVENTION

If the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer, and all your problems look like nails, then you’re going to want to intervene in other people’s and other countries’ political affairs. That’s exactly what the West has been doing over the past twenty years. When British, French, German, Hungarian, and Polish politicians say, in relation to the current refugee crisis, “Why is the world knocking on our doorstep right now?” they have to turn that question back on themselves. The answer to their question lies in answers to

why the West has engaged in the politics of armed intervention. “Why did we intervene in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria?” (Not to mention all the other military interventions in Africa, the Gulf, and Central Asia in the past fifteen years.) The consequences of those have been apocalyptic. They have resulted in the willful destruction of critical infrastructure and many direct and indirect casualties and deaths from war. They have also resulted in an extraordinary subversion of functioning state, economic, social, and cultural institutions. Saddam Hussein, for example, was an odious and ruthless dictator but he did run a government that worked, within which women had equality and where Sunni and Shia lived in an uneasy co-existence. Not only that, there was a relatively equal distribution of goods across the Iraqi state. This flawed but functional system was completely sabotaged and undermined by the U.S.-led invasion. What was the stated and actual purpose of that absolutely foolhardy decision to invade, and what have been the outcomes? As a result of that decision, millions of people are now unable to satisfy their basic human needs for security, welfare, and inclusion. A fragile equilibrium has now been replaced by high levels of violence and profound social, economic, and political dislocation.

The result of this original intervention is that the total numbers of internally and externally displaced peoples have reached globally record proportions. It also created ripe conditions for the Syrian war, the major result of which is that three hundred thousand men, women, and children have been killed over the last six years. Thousands have been imprisoned and tortured under the Assad regime. The internal repression and war have generated 4.9 million refugees and 6.6 million internally displaced persons<sup>10</sup>, and more than a million Syrians are now direct recipients of humanitarian aid and would die without it. Those are the consequence of intervention, of supporting opposition movements militarily.

The same story is repeated in Iraq. Violence against Iraqi civilians is “staggering,” said the United Nations in January 2016, with some 19,000 killed and 3.2 million displaced over a recent 21-month period—and this is after the war has ended.<sup>11</sup> The number of forcibly displaced persons in the world last year stood at 65.3 million. Ten years ago it was about thirty-eight, and that was considered catastrophic.<sup>12</sup>

When we ask who is responsible, and when Donald Trump points two fingers at others, he doesn’t realize that he is pointing three fingers back at himself and the West. Those of us who live in the West, especially those of us who have joined these military follies in coalitions of the willing, are responsible for the chaos that has been generated and for the millions of civilian casualties of these interventions. Because the coalition of the willing is responsible, it is up to us to clean up the mess, both in terms of humanitarian assistance and by enabling indigenous actors throughout the Middle East to resolve their own problems. Listening to U.S. presidential candidates talking about the Middle East, I hear projection, displacement, and blame. It is assumed that these problems are of Middle Eastern origin or a

consequence of political extremism, or al-Qaeda, or the so-called ISIS. These are not the problem; they are the consequences of a disastrous politics of intervention.

## THE POLITICS OF DEFICIENT LEADERSHIP

The sixth pathology is the pathology of deficient leadership. There are very few political leaders in the twenty-first century who are driven by a clear sense of moral value. When people are driven by a clear sense of moral value, guess what happens. They win support. Bernie Sanders is probably your best conviction politician. He's unswerving in his commitment to equality, unswerving in his commitment to changing the banking system, and unswerving in his commitment to ensuring a public health system and free tertiary education. In the United Kingdom, Jeremy Corbyn is unswerving in his commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, unswerving in making sure the Labour Party becomes the party of labor. Conviction politicians are coming back into their own again because many electors don't want focus-group driven political candidates or parties; they want to know something about the character and moral compass of each person.

Most of those who espouse a neoliberal economic and political agenda are caught in a technocratic model where it is assumed that politics can be eliminated in favor of technocratic solutions to complex political and social problems. Those who control the technocrats claim to know more than the rest of us, which results in a politics of exclusion. This generates a lot of the political alienation that is manifesting itself on both sides of the Atlantic. Most political leaders don't see their role as servant-leaders, but they ought to be our servant-leaders. Citizens don't elect politicians to dominate us; we elect them to serve us. It's about time we started reconstituting this notion of what public service and democratic politics is all about. Because responsible, accountable, and inclusive leadership is at a premium, most politicians are incapable of capturing the positive visions and imaginations of their electors because they have no positive visions and imaginations of their own.

When I saw all of the Republican candidates discussing what they would do if elected president I realized that most of their policies were negative: get rid of Obamacare, get rid of the IRS, get rid of big government, make sure no Democrat gets appointed to the Supreme Court, make the military even more powerful—even though the military of the United States accounts for forty-seven percent of the world's military expenditure, nine times more than the next ten largest military spenders together. What do they mean when they say that the U.S. has to develop a bigger military? The United States is the most bloated and expensive military in the entire world.

There are many technocratic leaders who think that politics is simply a matter of gathering evidence and applying smart solutions to complex problems. There are many populists who pursue and gain power by pandering to individual fear, greed, and anxiety. (Think Trump.) But there are few leaders

with moral and political courage capable of catalyzing, capturing, and promoting progressive personal and social imaginaries that will address and solve the problems of the twenty-first century.

In Britain, Nick Hardwick, ex-Inspector of Prisons, said “There are two major failings with policy makers: lack of imagination and failure of empathy.” In relation to prisons and prison reform he said, “Too many policymakers do not ask themselves the crucial question: ‘How would I react if I were in that situation, and why are people in prison in the first place?’”<sup>13</sup> How many of our politicians are saying, “What would I do if I were in their shoes, and why are these people experiencing public problems or troubles, and what can I do to help them resolve their problems?” Instead, they are more likely to say, “What can I do to make sure that my agenda prevails over everybody else’s agenda in a winner-takes-all contest?” This is why I think we need to be thinking much more actively about a different kind of politics.

Frank Furedi, in his book, *The Politics of Fear*, says, “Right-Left divisions no longer seem capable of providing individuals or groups with a strong and coherent sense of identity or direction. The Right have forgotten the past that they wish to preserve and the Left have forgotten the future that they wish to create. This means that we are caught in a paralysing present.”<sup>14</sup> It is into this context that modern political leaders impose their own notions of how to be presently political or politically present. These impositions have unfortunately mainly focused on ways of preserving the status quo and have emptied politics of much of its passion or meaning. What do we need to do about it?

## FROM DOMINATORY TO COLLABORATIVE POWER: POWER “OVER” TO POWER “WITH” OTHERS

This is the optimistic part of my talk. The question is how do we move from dominatory to collaborative power? That’s the challenge. If we are to generate a genuine paradigm shift from a political paradigm based on “power over” to one based on “power with,” or in Kenneth Boulding’s terms, from coercive to integrative power, then it is critical that we have a value and normative system capable of sustaining an egalitarian, relatively non-coercive, non-dominatory social system and a politics to go with it. <sup>15</sup> The interesting thing is that it exists already, but it has been systematically isolated and marginalized from the realm of the political. I started off as a sociologist and a political scientist, so I am coming back to my sociology. The reality is that when you take all the static out of the current electoral process and set political institutions to one side, the social system persists. Why does the social system exist? It exists and persists through time because good people such as yourselves know how to organize in the company of others. Societies exist even when state systems collapse. If you look at most post-conflict environments, for example, women and men keep the system going; they keep social relationships and the individuals within them alive.

What I want to argue is that we need to get back to the Golden Rule of doing unto others what you would have them do to you. This is the norm that holds most communities and societies together, and it provides the sociological basis for continuity through time. Without it, political systems would have to depend almost completely on force and coercion. The whole point of good politics in Western democracies is to make sure that the iron fist (which lies at the heart of the Western Weberian state) is covered in a velvet glove. That velvet glove is welfarism—education, health, transportation, communication—all of the things that enable us to live relatively spontaneous lives in society and in community.

When you hear politicians saying, “The welfare state is for losers” or “the welfare state is socialism,” challenge the statement. The reality is that without state-sponsored health, welfare, education, roads, infrastructure, etc. there would be no effective or legitimate government. These are the things that generate the support of working people and those who are old and retired or young and vulnerable. All of these groups need support. Who is going to give it to them? The market won’t give it to them because it’s cruel and callous, and if kinship groups can’t give it to them, then the state has to. I’m arguing for a politics that really is aimed at supporting and bringing back the social, i.e. the conditions within which interpersonal relationships and communities can grow and flourish.

To bring back the social, I went back to 1960 (I know some of you think that this sounds like the Middle Ages) and re-read Alvin Gouldner’s “Norm of Reciprocity.”<sup>16</sup> All communities rest on the reciprocity norm, and only a few members are exempt from it. The norm regulates the exchanges of goods and services between people in ongoing group or individual relationships. It dictates that people should help and not injure those who have helped them, and that legitimate penalties may be imposed on those who fail to reciprocate. It is the Golden Rule: we help our friends, and our friends help us. We make commitments to each other, and when we betray our friends’ trust, there are social, political, and legal sanctions. Reciprocity calls for positive reactions to favorable treatment and for negative reactions to unfavorable treatment. The things exchanged may be heteromorphic; that is, the goods or services may be concretely different but equal in value, as perceived as such by the exchange partners. Or the things may be homomorphic; that is, the goods or services may be roughly equivalent or identical. It doesn’t matter as long as the exchanges take place. What I want to argue is that we need to reaffirm the social to challenge the political.

For us to become capacitated, sovereign, individual, political actors, we need to build on our strengths. Our strengths lie in the way in which we are connected and related to community, sociality, and sociation. The reciprocity norm is critical to social and political functioning and social and political stability through time. It’s much more important than “imposed” political order; it’s the glue that governs the millions of social exchanges that take place every day, most of which have nothing to do with the

realm of politics. The norm of reciprocity generates altruism among kin and non-kin groups. That's what's missing in dominatory politics. There's no altruism in it. There's no empathetic concern.

In particular, there's no willingness to acknowledge that the political system exists to support the poorest so that all might have a reasonable chance of survival through time. A politics of compassion that stands in juxtaposition to dominatory, zero-sum politics limits selfishness and creates the sociological and social-psychological basis for integration and harmony.

## WHAT IS THE POLITICS OF COMPASSION?

If we don't begin to create the conditions within which politicians and political leaders work to encourage communitarian and socially driven policies, the world will indeed become more merciless as it perfects itself. The politics of compassion places the welfare of the community first and the state second. It is the opposite of dominatory, pathological, fear-driven, xenophobic politics based on a monopoly of force and coercion. If we depend on that for our order, we have already lost the plot. The difficult answer to this question is that the politics of compassion is a new political paradigm for an interdependent world. The reality is that there is no way in which you can build a wall against anything in the twenty-first century. The whole notion of a wall is just stupid in an age of electronic communications.

The politics of compassion, therefore, focuses on an assertion of the dominance of social criteria in political decision making. When making political decisions, therefore, politicians have to ask themselves, "To what extent is this decision going to serve the community? To what extent is it going to capacitate the elector? To what extent is it going to generate richer and deeper levels of relationship and empathetic consciousness?" These are questions that most politicians don't bother to ask because they are so wedded to stimulating the conditions for economic growth and development and to ensuring that the interests of the state are accorded primacy over the interests of the community. If you did ask these questions of them, I think a lot of current economic, political, social, and foreign policies would seem to be very self-serving and/or institutionally or bureaucratically driven.

The politics of compassion, on the other hand, is aimed at solving problems nonviolently, collaboratively, empathetically, and altruistically. This means that we have to begin thinking about a collaborative problem-solving orientation to the problems that confront us. I think that problem-oriented learning, problem-oriented politics, and a problem-oriented approach to grappling the big issues that are confronting the world is really critical. To begin with, such an orientation has to be inclusive rather than exclusive, egalitarian rather than hierarchical, and rest on sociation instead of domination. To borrow from Lenin, What's to be done, and where to begin?<sup>17</sup>

We have to pay much more attention to analyzing and negating dominatory politics and the politics of fear everywhere. In the first place this means encouraging a politics of resistance to taken for

granted everyday politics because these are producing quite dysfunctional political pathologies for a very complex world. It means acknowledging the ways in which the personal, interpersonal, social, and political combine to generate functioning and vibrant community or not.

The politics of resistance and a more socially driven compassionate politics will force us to analyze the diverse ways in which personal relationships between men and women, between diverse cultures and people, are generating hierarchical dominatory politics or something much more emancipatory. Wherever we see domination occurring, we have to challenge and expose it, and in that process we will discover a politics that flows out of the grassroots, from the bottom up, as we start transforming relationships in a much more egalitarian and equal direction.

It sounds a little oxymoronic or paradoxical, but the development of a politics of compassion means we have to develop some positive anti-politics based on sociation processes and a radical critique of divisions between the private and public spheres.

The reality is that the personal was very political for us in the 1960s, and it has to become political again. We have to begin thinking about the ways in which what we do at interpersonal levels, in our group activities, and in our organizations, is serving others and creating spaces for individual and collective flourishing and the development of narratives that don't ignore but rather celebrate difference. We have to delegitimize negative, pathological politics.

Looking at the United States right now, how might Americans stop all of the negative forces that have been unleashed in this campaign? Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, for example, have gotten away with transgressive politics that in other times would have been totally unacceptable. It's going to take generations to bring mainstream politics back to some degree of civility. It's really astonishing, coming into this political environment from outside and realizing how relatively uncivil it is. It's not good politics. It's brutal, violent, extremist, xenophobic, misogynist, sexist, and racist politics, and people ought to be calling it like that. In other parts of the world people can't understand how Trump managed to get this far in the primary cycle. In the process of getting this far, I think he's really damaged the social fabric and created an environment in which minorities and aliens and foreigners don't have a place. He's creating a world that is bitter and embittered. He needs to be resisted and rejected by tolerant and inclusive Americans.

Another part of the politics of compassion is placing equality at the heart of our analyses and prescriptions. This means a radical critique of the ways in which our own governmental and nongovernmental processes produce and reproduce patterns of hierarchy, power, and privilege. I'm becoming more and more convinced, the older I get, that these patterns of power and privilege quietly assert themselves because we're not conscious of them. We need to become really conscious of the ways in which we ourselves are benefitting from these hierarchies, and we have to work out ways in which we

can subvert and challenge them while creating relationships that are equal, accountable, and responsible, and where the norm of reciprocity can really take hold.

In this, it's imperative that we give priority to the weakest and poorest; welfare, education, and health have to be at the heart of responsible state activity. These policy areas shouldn't be challenged as though they are somehow or other an aberration. Getting these policies right is at the heart of what it means to be a good state. I am the chair of the Advisory Board of the Global Peace Index, and every year we come up with a list of the top twenty most peaceful nations in the world. All of them have high taxation regimes, all of them are strong welfare states, and all of them have a commitment to the well-being of their individual citizens. It's no surprise that Iceland, Denmark, Austria, Portugal, and New Zealand are listed among the top five most peaceful states in the world. They are the most peaceful because they understand the centrality of equality and inclusion. They are being challenged by the neoliberal model to become more unequal, and there are many malignant, neo-fascist, rightist groups that are emerging to problematize the welfare contract in many of these welfare states. But the legitimacy and success of these peaceful states emerge from placing a priority on serving and listening to their citizens and satisfying their basic needs. To paraphrase Gandhi, if you are wondering about whether your life has been worthwhile, at the end of each day recall the faces of the poorest, the weakest, and the most vulnerable, and ask whether what you've done has helped that person over the course of the day.<sup>18</sup> It's a very useful little injunction for trying to figure out if what you're doing is going to have any social or political impact.

Then we need to identify and reinforce individuals and groups who sustain the social fabric in the face of economic and political subversion. Who are the connectors in the United States? Who is trying to challenge divisive politics and the politics of fear? Who's working at building up community and solidarity, and who is making sure that relationships are robust and resilient? These are the people who need reinforcement and support. They're the ones that should be being nominated and appearing in primary elections. They are the ones we need to be put on political party tickets.

To move from dominy politics to compassionate politics, we need deep contextual analysis in order to identify individuals, groups, and organizations capable of knitting communities together instead of dividing and separating them. To do positive contextual analysis, we must go with what I have called "the grain of locality."<sup>19</sup> Far too much of our analysis and prescription remains global, abstracted, and detached. How can anybody in this current electoral campaign, for example, say anything coherent about the United States of America? The United States consists of 320 million different individuals, from multiple different groups, with multiple interests. In order to understand the United States, we need to do justice to that plurality, the cosmopolitanism, and the diversity that makes you who you are. When your political leaders talk about the United States, what are they referring to? The United States of Donald



Trump? The United States of Bernie Sanders? The United States of somebody in the ghetto? Or the United States of somebody sitting in the streets? Which United States are we talking about? To advance a politics of compassion means being nuanced about what United States and which Americans you are talking about, and then what sort of social system will enable all of these diverse United States to live in harmony with each other. This is your challenge.

To move towards a politics of compassion, we need also to have a theory of power. This means figuring out who is subjugated, who unites, who divides, who supports the status quo, who is challenging, who is analyzing, who is being analyzed. Where do you—where do we—stand and sit? This is crucial. Where you stand and sit determines what you see, the narratives you employ, and the kind of politics you're going to engage in. How do we mobilize across intersectional lines and build empathetic spaces between and across boundaries of difference? This is a new kind of politics. What does it mean for white Americans to sit down with African Americans and say, "We screwed up in the twentieth century, let's not screw up in the twenty-first century; let's figure out a new way in which we can live together." And the same thing with the Native Americans. How do you sit down with them and say, "There's a history of exploitation, colonialism, oppression, marginalization, and subjugation here; how do we make amends in the twenty-first century?" This is the politics of compassion.

We then have to focus on inclusive and participatory processes that really do justice to the concrete experiences of those who are victims of domination, violence, marginalization, and humiliation. I don't think we can do this without transforming ourselves in less domineering, nonviolent, inclusive ways. This is really challenging if you're a white, middle-class, professional man earning twenty-seven percent more than a white, middle-class, professional woman. How do we do all of this while dependent on governments perpetuating negative politics (the politics of power, greed, and domination)? We have to acknowledge the need to do this at multiple levels, both the micro and the macro. We have to widen the focus from "formal politics" to public and private politics. We have to rediscover the values of empathetic, altruistic, collaborative processes in a world seemingly dedicated to their opposites and focus on inclusive, elicitive, iterative, cumulative dynamics that build peace one step at a time.

This sounds easy; it trips off the tongue—but these are challenging. How do we do this? How do we develop an inclusive politics? How do you elicit from all people what their needs and interests are? How do you create political programs that are iterative, that can be reviewed and challenged and changed? How do you embrace change instead of fearing it? How do you create positive, virtuous circles instead of negative, vicious ones? Donald Trump is going around, getting thousands of people to come to Trump rallies, not to hear his politics but to see what blood ends up on the floor. We have to get out of that negative cycle to promote something more positive.

John Paul Lederach, the author of *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, has a mantra that I want to finish with.<sup>20</sup> He says we have to reach out to those we fear. This is really crucial. We have to start seeing ourselves in this interdependent planet as completely linked to each other. If we fear others, we still have to acknowledge that they, too, are part of the wider web of humanity, and we can't cut ourselves off from them. We can't build walls against the rest of humanity. If you are afraid of others, the best way to deal with that fear is to figure out ways to attach and connect yourself to those you fear, to open up dialogues and difficult conversations with them so that you might be able to say, "Let's figure out if we have a future together." I know that's very challenging when you're confronted by groups like ISIS (or Daesh, if you prefer), but somebody has to do it, somebody has to open up a conversation with them to acknowledge the differences, build on the commonalities, and discern whether there is anything that might help them transform their own behavior.

The second thing Lederach talks about is overcoming simplistic dualisms. We have to move beyond simplistic, dualistic reasoning and seeing the world in black and white. On the contrary, we have to figure out how we can touch and embrace the heart of complexity. As academics and individual human beings, how do we appreciate and celebrate complexity? The reality is that each one of us human beings is a complete, complex set of functioning organs and we survive through time with high levels of extraordinary personal complexity. When you're combining 320 million people, not to mention the other 7.1 billion human beings on the planet, just think of the complexity of that. How do we embrace all of that in ways that will enable us to really celebrate diversity?

The third dimension of all of this is our vision for the future, imagining beyond what is seen. If it's thinkable, it's doable. Why don't we think imaginatively, then, even in a utopian fashion, about a different kind of politics, a different place from here? Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet believed it possible that there may be a place on the "far side of revenge."<sup>21</sup>

Finally, how do we risk vulnerability one step at a time? I'm not suggesting with any of this that we should be naive about our politics. Compassionate politics is going to require as much sophistication and organization as the politics of domination, and if we're going to resist the national security state and all its surveillance mechanisms, we need to figure out ways of doing that. But then we also have to be willing to be courageous and to risk vulnerability one step at a time.

When my father was about to die, he collapsed one day while my daughter was holding his hand, and she thought it was the right time to ask him the secret to a good life. He woke up and said he couldn't possibly die while holding the hand of such a beautiful young woman. Then he said, "All you need is love, courage, and hope." That's exactly right, it seems to me. The heart of all of this is that when people die, at the end of their lives, they don't normally say in their obituaries, "Well, Joe or Josephine published 15 books and 575 journal articles and taught 750 different classes simultaneously." They say, "He was a

good father or she was a good mother and a good family person.” They talk about the person’s character. That character rests on whether or not we have a capacity for love and a capacity to make ourselves vulnerable, one step at a time. That requires hopefulness; it requires imagination; and it requires considerable courage.

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