



August 2021

## Orienting toward a Shared Future

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Can Human Solidarity Globalize?](#)

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Despite its seeming decline, especially in the US, COVID-19 continues to dominate the public horizon, and as it does, it reveals the historic infirmities of the “old normal” not just in the areas of economy, health, governance, environment, and culture, but also in politics and public discourse. The pandemic-like “old normal” has unevenly plagued our world for at least the past five hundred years wherein peoples of our planet continue to be (1) dispersed, displaced, and dislocated; (2) their identities racialized and ethnicized; (3) as well as gendered and sexualized; (4) their lives commodified and pathologized; (5) their contexts militarized, securitized, and weaponized; and (6) their bodies incarcerated, disabled, erased, or forgotten.

Any discussion of the prospects of global solidarity, it seems to me, must start with the consequences wrought by these multiple pandemics. We need to keep asking: What do these multiple pandemics, and the normative and aspirational responses to them, look like? What analytics are required? What learning, teaching, and research are needed? What engagements are demanded? What behavioral and institutional changes are necessary? Or to put it in the language of UNESCO, what does the “Next Normal” look like, especially one that is oriented towards global solidarity in the service of peace, justice, and sustainability—with a sense of a shared future(s)?

### Orienting Practices

There are at least four orienting practices that might help us along the way to global solidarity.

*First, the practice of deliberation.* Deliberation cannot be reduced to mere speech. It encompasses the whole range of participative practices that recognize and affirm not only the diversity of

institutions, celebrating difference as constitutive of community, but also of meaningful and direct participation in the construction of global solidarity. Here, “community” has less to do with the aggregation of groups based exclusively on racial/ethnic, gender, class, sexual orientation, or disciplinary identities or solidarities, and more with the sites of engagement where human beings recognize and affirm their mutual obligations and relationships while simultaneously accepting norms of tolerance and principled inclusion.

*Second, the practice of creating, nurturing, and defending “the common,” that is, the res publica—the “public thing.”* The “common” is the space for difference carved out by deliberating communities as they seek meaningful consensus while recognizing their shared contexts, their profoundly pluralistic existence, and their ecologically mediated identities.

*Third, the practice of utopian thinking.* This is about radical imaginaries which are not descriptions of the future but orientations in the present, points of entry, beginnings and departures, exits, but not final destinations. This is critical consciousness and creative imaginations that are iterative, formative, informative, and transformative.

*Fourth, the practice of truthfulness.* More than demonstrated factual/counterfactual correspondence or coherence to some a priori “logos,” truth is about disclosure—of bringing into presence or understanding the world in which human beings dwell. It is a process of differentiation and formation that “maintains a crucial reference to the world’s horizon as a space of human relations...of meaning held in common...of signification or possible signification.”<sup>1</sup>

## Educational Tasks

Global solidarity requires educational tasks that are hospitable to peace, justice, and sustainability with the sense of a shared future(s).

*First, the task of embracing and experiencing a continually changing world.* This is simply a reiteration of the necessity of solidarity being thoroughly embedded and oriented to historical, political, cultural contexts and locations.

*Second, the task of cultivating critical and engaged pedagogies that are embodied as an ecological biosphere.* Solidarity is about the discovery, creation, and nurture of creative and critical

consciousness, that includes thinking, feeling, acting in the midst of struggles and transgressions to create just, participatory, and sustainable societies aspiring to the global.<sup>2</sup>

*Third, the task of redefining institutions as a (local, regional, and global) ecological system.* Not unlike communities in which they are embedded, institutions are more than administrative apparatuses. They are also a confluence of (re)resources of food, water, livelihood, energy, friends, ideas, recreation, sacred inspiration—as well as economic, political, cultural interests and passionate dispositions. In short, global solidarity is a biosphere that aspires to sustainability, creativity, and critical/corporeal being.<sup>3</sup>

### **Global Solidarity as Effective Partnerships**

Finally, global solidarity, particularly for peace, justice, and sustainability, is fundamentally about “effective partnerships”: those practices that are animated by and enhance at the broadest levels, mutuality and collegiality, shared responsibility, accountability, transparency, and decision-making among partners at whatever level or kind, and that have clearly agreed upon purposes that empower and transform those in the partnerships, and which are contextualized, sustainable, useful, and attainable.

Effective partnerships include those practices that emphasize the desirability of multilateral, multilayered, and multi-perspectival strategies, and voices that (1) seriously attend to the intersectionalities of the issues related to global solidarity; (2) broaden and deepen collaborations, particularly in terms of inclusion, plurality, and difference; and (3) are intentionally sensitive to the nuances and specificities of asymmetrical space, time, and place. Effective partnerships are those practices that are marked by interdependence and relative autonomy in global North-South relationships, that empower those involved in the partnership, that flatten power differentials that arise out of the unevenness of human, financial, and physical resources, and of history and location.

Global solidarity in the service of peace, justice, and sustainability with a sense of a shared future(s) is the creation of the fundamentally new that is also fundamentally better.

## Endnotes

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or Globalization* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2007), 333–35.
2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1994).
3. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

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## About the Author



Lester Edwin J. Ruiz is director of accreditation and global engagement with the Association of Theological Schools in the US and Canada. Prior to ATS he was professor of theology and culture and academic dean at New York Theological Seminary and associate professor of political science at International Christian University in Tokyo, teaching peace and world order studies, international relations, and politics and culture. Ruiz is coeditor of a number of published works, including *Re-Framing the International: Law, Culture, Politics*, with Richard Falk and R.B.J. Walker, and has contributed to numerous journals and books. He is on the editorial committees of *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, the *Journal of World Christianity*, and *Silliman Journal* and is involved with transnational organizations including Churches Witnessing with Migrants, and the Global Forum of Theological Educators.

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Cite as Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, "Orienting toward a Shared Future," contribution to GTI Forum "Can Human Solidarity Globalize?," *Great Transition Initiative* (August 2021), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/global-solidarity-ruiz>.

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