Foreword

Jannie Malan

Before, as usual, saying something about the contents of this issue, I feel obliged to share a few thoughts about the unusual situation in which we happen to find ourselves.

During a recent virtual ACCORD meeting, our Founder and Executive Director said, 'Covid has accelerated the future which would have happened at a slower pace. Remote working would have come in a decade'. We have indeed been fast-forwarded into a *fait accompli* future. And so we are compelled to adapt our organisations and ourselves to having virtual meetings and doing virtual work – which are less costly, but which also lead to less profit in businesses and to less donor funding for non-profit organisations.

What we have to realise, however, is that when we use 'virtual', as in the previous paragraph, it functions in a novel semantic field. The new meaning of 'computer-generated' or 'computer-facilitated' was coined when information technology became a revolution. It did not oust the established meaning, however. We still need the old 'virtual' in the semantic field of 'to all intents and purposes', as, for instance, in the case of a virtual manager or leader. Interestingly enough, however, these two fields of meaning seem to overlap at the at the semantic field of 'almost'. An audio-visual computer meeting is *almost* a physical meeting around a table. And a person managing an organisation although not formally designated, is *almost* a fully-fledged manager.

This 'almost' may need our serious attention. In the social sciences, and particularly in the field of dealing with conflict, it may be worthwhile to

follow the example of Newton's and Leibnitz's calculus in mathematics, and investigate the importance of very small differences. There may be cases where a very small miss is as good (or actually as bad) as a mile. If, for instance, one carries on working from home with whatever advanced computer technology, but without sharing notes with colleagues during tea breaks, your virtual work may suffer a loss in quality without being noticed. There may also be cases, however, where smaller or larger differences will be the result of outdatedness. As counterpart of the rushed entry into the future, the pandemic has indeed caused a sudden exit out of the past. That, however, may have important advantages. The past that was taken for granted, was one with conventionalities and luxuries which mainly benefitted the affluent minority of the planet's population. It was a dispensation of discrimination and inequality. To the advantaged, it was fascinating; but to the disadvantaged, frustrating. And so, in moving into a new future, several established privileges of the 'good old days' will have to be dispensed with, or recycled into shareable formats.

Leaving behind a dispensation that has been well-established for centuries, is of course quite an experience – in two ways. Firstly, one has to accept that the years of your own life thus far have now suddenly become part of a bygone history, an era that will be preserved in museum displays. For what it may be worth, let me share my own astonishing experience in this regard. Participating in a conference at Oxford seven years ago, forty-four years after spending a term there during my doctoral research, was already a memory-lane reminder. But then, I visited the History of Science and saw exhibits of three items, which I had used as student, more than sixty years earlier. There they were, exact specimens of my treasured 'engine divided' ruler, map-drawing instruments, and slide-rule – as *museum* items! It made me feel awkwardly at home in the museum. But it also confronted me with the reality that the past is indeed a *departed past.*

Secondly, one has to admit that for the vast majority of fellow-humans their previous years of lived experience have been severely marred by inflicted injustice. And, if one happens to belong to a group in the happy-go-lucky minority you will have to acknowledge culpability and join the goodbye party for the unequal past. As in all leave-taking occasions, one will have to work one's way through feelings and emotions. But then, having buried such a past, we may enthusiastically welcome a new future – a future which will not be a mere virtuality, but an actual reality.

In this new reality, however, the virtual methods and proceedings will most probably be essential components. If so, we will have no other option than devoting ourselves to becoming as competent and proficient as possible in all our virtual proceedings. By so doing, we might then also succeed in making the almost gap as small-most as feasible.

After this excursion into virtuality and reality, I should, as usual, say something about the articles in this issue. Although most of them have been submitted during the pandemic, some of the research and writing apparently took place before the pandemic. The fieldwork referred to took place when real interviews and real discussion groups were still possible. Nonetheless, what these authors share as findings and conclusions, suggestions and recommendations, are surely also valid during the pandemic situation (and thereafter, if and when a thereafter does arrive).

The first three of the articles are about ethno-centric enmity between specific ethnic or wider racial groupings of human beings. And such own-groupishness seems to be an ever-present tempting feature embedded in what we tend to call 'human nature'. In Yonas Adeto's article we read about people encultured into ethnic thinking and incited to violent ethnic extremism, about the factors that can jointly create such a mind-set, and about ways of countering such a threat. Velohamanina Razakamaharavo explores socio-economic and cultural reasons driving ethnic groups towards conflict-readiness. She discusses various conflict-provoking factors – images of self and others, polarising actions, but also elitist liberal peace, and top-down accommodation and reconciliation efforts. And Adeoye Akinola frankly addresses the deplorably unresolved and inevitably racialised problem of land in South Africa. He quotes the colonial act which allocated a bare 7% of the land to the black majority. But he also quotes the shocking fact that soon after the government of the new South Africa began rectifying the huge disproportionality, 'most of the black Ministers or their families owned between two and five big farms each'. He finds the labelling of farm murders as 'white genocide' to be an exaggeration, but at the same time a compelling motivator towards resolving the land issue soon. And his recommendations include the enlisting of 'a Panel of the Wise'.

The last two articles are about supporting fellow human beings, which is of crucial importance during the pandemic, but will surely remain so

thereafter. Joseph Adebayo and Blessing Makwambeni examine the potential of cash transfers to unemployed youth who gang together to gain money and exhibit their masculinity. They refer to comparable studies which fix hope on violence reduction, but they also refer to the apparently very effective 'Cure Violence' programme, in which violence is approached as a curable disease. In the last article, Pindai Sithole focuses on the way in which a traditional institution of intra-community socio-economic assistance can contribute to preventing and resolving conflict and to community-based development. The traditional way of working together for household food security, inadvertently brings about a climate of reciprocal mutual trust and respect, and of resulting peace and solidarity.

Best wishes – for innovative reading, working and living.