

Thoughts on Teaching International Law in Colombo, Sri Lanka: A Poem

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In my hands and up there on the wall,
in the messages shared in our shared spaces,
are words in a different tongue,
from lands across the seas...

In a classroom surrounded by old trees,
hardly a breeze in the hot tropical air...
What is this story I am re-telling,
this history and journey onwards,
is it ours, yours or someone else's?

Even the road, named after an Englishman,
the building designed by a Scandinavian,
Too few of the books or ideas were born here...
Too many of the thoughts are different colours
from the colors of our own experiences.
Did someone else gave us the glasses
through which we peer at the world?

But the ideas are Universal, no?
- by us and for us?
Inescapable - but that is a good thing, right?
A big group hug,
all friends, yes?

But what about yesterday and what about today
and where do we go from here, tomorrow?
What is the story we tell, with half a history?
What is the theory, that ignores parts of reality?
Who tells us still what to think, to teach, to learn.
Who writes the books and spread the ideas.
Do we question enough, what are we doing?
Do we share enough experiences, saying
'Tell me your story, neighbor,
and I will tell you mine...?'

Have we risen to the challenges,
of new methods of teaching,
the new technologies?
The web, wifi, visual, photo, video, audio?
Creative writing, drama, debate and mootings?
Do we sing songs of international law,
Do we paint paintings with words or newer
brushes?
How can we do this, with lesser tools,
with closed doors and coffer?

Note:

Do we keep asking,
'What is it *for* - all of this'?
Do we still dream of a better world,
and does that dream still carry us
forward?
Are we explorers, scribes or builders?
Are most of us just mimics, actors,
dressing up and playing parts scripted?
What should we be, and
how can we be that which we should be?
What is the nature of the candle
which we must kindle,
in those who listen to our stories?...

Remember when we thought to be free,
achieved victories and stood
poised to recreate a world
of truer equality?
All of us Kings and Queens,
All our crowns bright and shiny?

Can we think fresh again,
Can we be brothers and sisters?
Yes, tell me your story, neighbor, and I
will tell you mine,
Has your life been like mine,
Do you also share my dreams?
A little island reaches across oceans,
Across the world to far away places,
To others like us,
With similar experiences.
Help me and I will give you what I can,
Hold my hand, neighbor
and far-away-friend,
Speak to me now,
And let us decide to end our alone-ness.

Let us write new stories together,
Books with our ideas,
nets and webs across the world.
We are each of us, Kings and Queens,
But we are all in this together.

In gathering my thoughts for the “think piece”, I felt that I could express my interest in some of the themes of this conference more successfully through verse than prose.

Moreover, writing my thoughts as a poem is also a way of saying that the teaching of international law should constantly inspire the teacher/learner to search for creative ways of sharing ideas while stepping outside the box of conventional approaches to ones’ field of knowledge.