ON THE PATH OF MY FATHER

Evelin Lindner
2022

Letter to my father is a planned book project about the author's journey that began in a family that was deeply traumatised by war and displacement and which led to a life project dedicated to nurturing more dignity and solidarity in the world. The author was born to a father who had experienced many existential losses — he had lost one arm, his dear father, his beloved brothers, and his beloved homeland Silesia, from where his family was forcibly displaced.
The book describes how the Norwegian heritage of *likeverd* and *dugnad* gave the author a deeper understanding of the values expressed in the ideals of human rights and the motto of the French Revolution, *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité.* The book highlights the Norwegian cultural heritage as being important not only for Norway but for the whole world. It is a unique heritage that encompasses not only freedom and equal dignity but also solidarity, and this not just locally but also globally (see the Nansen Passport). The author attempts to make palpable how these values can give substance to the notion of dignity, both for the individual and for humanity as a whole.

The path of my father

Summarised by Evelin Lindner from 2002 to 2022, in conversation with her father

My father was born in Silesia in February 1926. Silesia is now part of Poland, but until 1945, it was part of the German Reich. My father always regretted that Silesia was not independent when he was born there, because then he and his brothers might have escaped the terrible fate of being forced to become soldiers for the Nazi regime in Germany during World War II.

Silesia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until Frederick II of Prussia (1712–1786), also known as Frederick the Great, conquered large parts of Silesia from the young Austrian empress Maria Theresa. Frederick the Great was driven by an ideal of masculinity that later also shaped Adolf Hitler's vision of German National Socialism. As a child, Frederick had been a 'soft' boy, and as a youth, he was more interested in music and philosophy than in the art of war. This motivated his father to raise him with the cruellest methods of humiliation, hoping to make him 'tough'. This goal was unfortunately achieved — as soon as the father died and Frederick was king, he became a king of war rather than a king of peace.

Later, during the time of National Socialism, the motto of masculinity was brutal, 'Flink wie Windhunde, zäh wie Leder, hart wie Kruppstahl', translated into English, 'Swift as greyhounds, tough as leather, hard as Krupp steel'. Adolf Hitler believed in 'das Recht des Stärkeren', in 'might is right'. He thought that it was not just the *right* of the strongest to dominate, it was even their *duty*, and that the weak deserved to perish. This included the German people themselves. These were his words, 'If my own people were to break under such a test, then I could cry no tears over them, they would not have deserved anything else. That [destruction] would be their own destiny, which they have to attribute to themselves'.[1]

I have always wondered why my father always was immune to this image of masculinity that glorifies competition for dominance and control.

For decades, I knew I had to write a book about my father one day, explaining how my life grew out of his traumas. I conducted many interviews with him, videotaped over a ten-year period, from 2002 to 2011. After 2011, he no longer felt able to talk about his traumatic past. However, a brief window of opportunity opened once again after my mother had passed away in December 2018 — I was able to talk with him almost daily about the book that I plan to write about him. From 2020 onwards, he became weaker and from mid-2021, he was no longer able to have deeper conversations. To my deep sorrow, he died on 3rd May 2022, aged 96.

The book is envisioned to be a non-fiction book about my relationship with my father and the lessons I was able to learn from his experiences, not only for myself but also more generally. His way of building a dignified and meaningful life for himself and his family out of unimaginable experiences of war and expulsion is not only admirable but can inspire others as well. Lessons can even be drawn as to how a dignified future for future generations on this planet can and should be shaped.

There are many reasons for why my father was immune to an ideal of masculinity built on dominance and control. I will never forget his stories about his relationships with the people and animals on the farm in Silesia where he grew up, a farm he would have inherited had the war not intervened. He spoke often of his horses, how he refused to force them to work by beating them. Instead, he relied on dialogue with them, which resulted in the horses trusting him and working faithfully for him, much better than was the case for his neighbour. The neighbour regularly beat his animals and was repeatedly let down by them, with the result that he had to use ever more coercion to achieve anything at all.

Also later in his life, my father treated others respectfully, not only animals, also people. The result was impressive, in all areas. After the war, when my father was a teacher, his colleagues marvelled at his teaching methods and the superior discipline in his class achieved without coercion. Not least my good relationship with my father, and my admiration for him, is built on the loving respect he shows to all creatures. When he still could dig the garden, he talked to the earthworms!

On Christmas Eve of 2018, he explained to me another important reason that made it easier for him to behave differently than most others his age, even as a young child and adolescent. Since agriculture provided food for the people, all those who worked on farms did not have to become members of the Hitler Youth. This meant — as he explained to me — that he was less exposed to brainwashing than his peers.

In 2019, he told me many more details about himself that I did not know before. He told me how he refused to do the Hitler salute at school when he was eleven. A teacher who was a Nazi supporter asked all the pupils to stand up and raise their right arm. My father was one of the few who remained seated (some girls also remained seated). For this, he was systematically ostracised, ignored, and attacked by his comrades. But since he was very good at mathematics, his classmates still wanted to keep copying his results. My father did not have time for any schoolwork because he worked hard after school as a farmer's kid, but still, he always had the right answers in his notebook each morning. So, what he did, was putting his notebook on the table and then go away, so his classmates could come, copy everything, and leave without having to thank him.

That is my father in a nutshell: he continued to offer his support even when he gets nothing in return. Others would have refused to give hostile comrades access to their results. My father simply had a wide and loving heart, full of understanding for human weaknesses and limitations. Looking back on his entire life path, this served him better than short-sighted retaliatory calculations would have done.

When the Second World War began, his two beloved older brothers were the first to be drafted into Hitler's German military service. On 28th October 1943, when he was seventeen years old, also he was conscripted. At that point, he was not only an opponent of Nazi ideology, he also understood the hopelessness of this war. He had the choice, he reported, of becoming a soldier or being shot — at best being arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He regretted very much that he was born in February and not later in the year, because he was sent directly to the front in Normandy. If he had been a few months younger, he would have been drafted only in spring of 1944 and could perhaps have been sent to his beloved brother, who was a soldier under General Rommel in North Africa and later in Italy.

In May 1944, he was devastated by the news that this beloved brother had fallen in Italy. Later also the other brother was lost, reported missing in Russia. One of my father's grandsons recently

turned 18, and my father remembered his own 18th birthday on the Normandy front —- no one knew it was his birthday, he just leaned his head against a horse and cried. He was in charge of the horses, which saved him from having to shoot people. The horses were his friends.

On 6th June 1944, deeply traumatised as he was, he experienced the Allied landing in Normandy, that is, D-Day. To his last day, he would live entirely in the memories of that time, as if it still were 1944 and 1945 — he relived each day of the war, from date to date. He used to say, 'I am not here at all, I'm in Normandy'. He described how he crawled out of his cover hole after the Allied landing, how he saw all the dead bodies around him and threw himself on the ground and cried. I often heard him moaning in his sleep, as I was caring for him also at night — sometimes he heard a voice, he explained to me, the voice of another young adolescent boy who was lying next to him on the ground, begging him, 'Comrade, I don't want to die!' even while his brain was already bulging out of his skull.

After surviving the Allied invasion of Normandy, and courageously avoiding becoming prisoner of war (later he would conclude that it was foolish to do so), he was ordered to Arnhem in the Netherlands as an occupying soldier. He was part of an artillery unit with heavy 15 cm howitzers, where he again did not have to shoot at people because he was in charge of a cariole to bring food to the forward observer posts. (His cariole was a two-wheeled, two-drawbar cart drawn by one horse.) For him, no one was to be treated as enemy, everyone was a fellow human being, and thus he made friends with the locals. They had fled to the countryside from the war and asked him to help them, for example, by fetching items from their homes in the city. He secretly transported the belongings of his friends on his cariole. His friendship with the locals was so good that he once was even invited to a wedding.

Unfortunately, his superior found out about it and ordered him to come to him 'in full regalia', to punish him. He could have ordered my father shot for 'fraternisation', or sent him to a concentration camp, but he merely reprimanded my father and told him that he had 'acted like a *Untergefreiter'*, which is the lowest rank (my father's rank was *Gefreiter*). His superior basically understood my father's actions, he was not a Nazi, my father remembered — my father had a keen sense for this even though, as he recalled, Nazi-ideology was not discussed in his part of the troops. (It was in other contexts that my father had problems, and this because of his nose, as its shape conformed to the anti-Semitic stereotype of a Jewish nose.) His superior also liked my father because of the knowledgeable care he gave to the horses. However, the punishment was therefore very harsh for my father, he was taken away from his beloved horses and had to assist the gunners in the artillery.

Soon, however, the unit was taken from Arnhem to Aachen and on New Year's Eve 1944/45 transported by train to Krakow on the Eastern Front. There my father found himself at the cannons again, this time in a 12.5 cm artillery unit. The position in which he was stationed happened to be near Auschwitz, without him knowing what that meant. From a distance, and without understanding what he was seeing, he witnessed the Auschwitz death march. He could not believe his eyes when he saw exhausted people being shot in the neck and shoved into the ditch. That was the last straw for him — it was the worst moment in his life, he says. Since then, it was impossible for him to call himself a German, in spite of the fact that he had a German passport and spoke a German dialect, the Silesian dialect. This is when he began to say, 'I am a Silesian, I am not German. Germany has destroyed my life, Hitler has raped me'.

General Ferdinand Schörner was his most senior commander during this phase, Schörner was commander-in-chief of Army Group A. Schörner led the troops under his command with extreme brutality, with countless death sentences against his own Wehrmacht soldiers. Even accidentally dispersed soldiers were sentenced to death for trivial reasons. Deserters were hanged from the nearest tree with a sign around their necks that read, 'Ich bin ein Deserteur. Ich habe mich geweigert, deutsche Frauen und Kinder zu beschützen, und bin deshalb aufgehängt worden', in English, 'I am a deserter. I refused to protect German women and children and was hanged because

of it'. Schörner's motto was that the soldier must have 'more fear in the back than in front', in German, 'mehr Angst im Rücken, als von vorne'.

My father's unit was soon surrounded by Russian troops. He reported that the only way to escape from the pocket was on foot, leaving the artillery behind. He succeeded with a brave and almost fatal escape from the encirclement — while his comrades were so exhausted and overtired that they had fallen asleep. He held onto a gun carriage, slept while standing up, and was thus able to recognise when it was possible to escape. At the right moment, he ran out of the *Kessel* over a hill, in the midst of enemy sniper fire. The young man who ran over the hill before him was shot dead — my father calculated that the sniper had to reload his gun and used this short moment to run into safety. Once again, he told us, he threw himself on the ground and wept in utter exhaustion and despair. All those others who had fallen asleep ended up as Russian prisoners of war.

After that ordeal, he was sent to an infantry unit. He was ordered to lie down in a wooded area with a rifle in his hand that he could not operate, surrounded by unknown sounds. He did not know at what point he could escape without being shot from behind as a deserter. Suddenly he got a bullet in his left forearm, he tied his arm off, and from then on, he did not remember how he got to Glatz to the air force hospital. There the arm was amputated in such a hasty and makeshift way that the bare bone stuck out. From Glatz, he was taken in a hospital train to Stollberg, where he was further treated until a few days later, the war was over and Russian soldiers began to occupy the area. Those who were able to walk were released from the hospital and told to 'go home', while everyone else was taken captive by the Russian army.

My father lost his arm just 42 days before the end of the war on 8th May 1945. He was released from the hospital on 26th June 1945 and tried to go home to his native village in Silesia. With his incompletely amputated arm, he walked 200 kilometres from Stollberg to Reichenbach near Görlitz, where he, to his great shock, found his family in a camp, learning that they had been expelled from Silesia, expelled westwards across the Oder-Neisse line. In the camp, he found his parents and five of his siblings — only the two older brothers were missing, they had already died in the war, and the eldest sister was not there, who was believed to be in Belgium.

Russia had lost millions of people to defeat Nazi Germany, and in the Potsdam Agreement of 26th July 1945, Silesia was taken away from Germany and handed over to Poland, as compensation for Russian leader Joseph Stalin getting the eastern part of Poland. Poland was thus 'moved' to the west, so to speak. Millions of Silesians were expelled from their homeland in the following years, as where the inhabitants of other former eastern territories, such as East Prussia and Pomerania. They were ordered to leave their homes behind entirely intact, without destroying anything, so that the Poles who had been expelled from the eastern part of their country could move in.

When asked how my father felt at the time, he always replied that he was grateful to still have his legs and not to be blind like others who had been lying next to him in the military hospital. It was also a great joy for him that his missing arm helped him to support his family, as he got a lot of butter and eggs from the farmers when he went begging. That was my father: he always saw the positive and all he wanted was to give love and support.

My father was glad that he never was in a situation where he was asked to shoot anyone. Yet, this did not prevent him from intensively studying the history books in the decades to come, so he could shoulder the collective guilt of the German people. For decades, he hardly smiled and was silent most of the time. Only through persistent deep prayer could he avoid collapsing under the weight of the unthinkable that had been perpetrated in Germany's name. This was my father: He exhausted every avenue that would allow him not to take part in the war, only to later accept the burden of a guilt, the magnitude of which he had not been able to penetrate as a 17-year-old farm boy. Later, as a teacher, he would help all students who wanted to refuse military service to formulate their arguments.

At first, in 1945, the family, displaced to Görlitz, hoped that the deportation was only a rumour and that they would soon be able to return home. Indeed, in the autumn of 1945, an official call

came from Poland to bring in the crops that would otherwise have rotted in the fields. My father's father and a sister followed this invitation, and the rest of the family snuck secretly aboard an empty freight train to cross the border and then walk home. They found their farm destroyed and the cows burnt to death in the barn. However, the house of a neighbour in the *Oberdorf*, the upper part of the village, was still intact and empty, and there they sought shelter.

In February 1946, my father managed to travel to a hospital in Helmstedt in the British zone, almost five hundred kilometres west of Silesia, to have his amputation completed. He had to do so secretly, 'black', by hiding in the train. He almost died in the hospital because they gave him too much anaesthetic medication. When he returned to his home village in Silesia, again 'black', the new Polish mayor suspected him of being a spy, ready to shoot him. Luckily, however, the mayor spoke enough German to understand the explanation for the reason for this travel and so did not kill him. So, my father was lucky to survive twice in the course of a few weeks.

In July/August 1946, the family was definitively expelled. Everyone was loaded onto an open freight train, not knowing where they would be taken. Some trains went to Siberia, others to what later became communist East Germany. Fortunately, my father and his family's train went directly to Friedland in the British zone, which would later become West Germany.

The Potsdam Accords provided admission quotas for each occupation zone, and after a few weeks in the Friedland camp, my father's family was taken by train to a small agricultural village, where they were 'put on display like on a slave market', as my father remembered. The mayor of a little village near Hameln in Lower Saxony was there with his tractor and trailer and selected my father's family. First, he housed his new arrivals in a cow barn, and then an elderly woman was asked to move out of her house so that my father's family could move in. They were eight people, my father with his parents, his three younger brothers and two younger sisters.

The very next day, my father's father went to the neighbouring farmer to work so that the family could get something to eat. They had nothing, neither food nor money. Later, his brothers and one sister also began to work for farmers in exchange for potatoes, milk, eggs, and flour.

My father was the only one among his siblings who could not work in the fields because he had only one arm. His situation was thus twice as difficult as that of the other expulsees. He once shared how often he went to the nearby forest at night and ran up the mountain just to avoid ending his life.

My father was part of millions of displaced people from the east who were stripped of all their belongings and transported westwards into what was left of Germany, into regions that themselves lay in ruins. These displaced people were not welcome, often greeted with humiliation. They were called *arme Flüchtlingsschweine*, 'pitiable refugee pigs', or, worse, 'dirty Polacks', because many people in the west equated 'east' with Slavic people. Being called 'Polack' represented a particularly grave insult, especially from those and for those among German citizens who still adhered to Nazi racial rankings after the fall of the Nazi regime — after all, the Nazis had categorised people who spoke Slavic languages as racially the lowest of Europe, as sub-human. The following text reflects the situation, a situation that was more or less taboo to speak about until recently:

> Anyone who thinks that xenophobia requires people from foreign countries is wrong. After the lost war, millions of refugees and displaced persons from the German eastern regions crowded into the rest of Germany. Today their reception is considered exemplary — but in truth they were met with hatred and contempt and the openly expressed thought that they should not belong to West Germany but to Auschwitz.[2]

A former local neighbour read this text and wrote to me, 'I believe that the hostile reception of the refugees by the local population was due to the fact that everyone had to admit that they had been deceived by Hitler, whom they had elected and cheered on'. She went on to write, 'It is extremely interesting how you connect your life course with that of your father — in my family

hardly any thoughts were given to such connections. It was always practical work, like taking care of the livestock, that was totally in the foreground'.[3]

My father's parents and siblings had fortunately managed to save the school certificate that he had earned in Lauban in Silesia in 1943. This enabled the administration of Lower Saxony to invite him to Echem in Lower Saxony in 1947 to take part in a course for young war invalids, with the aim to find out what kinds of aptitudes the participants had and how the welfare office could support their education. My father was advised to become a vocational schoolteacher and received 70 Deutsche Mark a month and the tuition fees reimbursed. He had to submit all his certificates to the welfare office of Lower Saxony, from 1948 to 1949. Despite his disability, and despite the humiliations he suffered because of it, his grades were exceptionally good. Due to his excellent results, he was subsequently allowed to attend the *Höhere Landbauschule* (higher agricultural school) and thereafter the *Pädagogische Hochschule* (teacher training college).

The humiliations he was exposed to, also in the following decades, were manifold and had many sources. In the eyes of many people, his visibly missing arm placed him into the category of the very Nazi perpetrators he so much despised. Not only was the sight of an invalid veteran from a lost war unwelcome for those among the older generation who would have liked to win the war, on the other side were young critical left-leaning generations, insufficiently knowledgeable of German history, who scorned him by saying, 'It is your own fault, why did you go to that war?' At school, colleagues would not help him when he could not open a door with his one arm while carrying books.

Thus, for my father, on top of having suffered existential injuries, traumas, and loss during the war, came post-war humiliations — former Nazis saw in him the loss of German honour or viewed him as subhuman, while young critical '1968ers' blamed him for his disability. He could not speak about all this suffering because the topic was met with silence in the German population. Aside from this, my father also deliberately did not want to speak about it, because his suffering seemed unimportant in view of the unspeakable agony that Germans had inflicted on others.

While my father was studying to become a teacher, one of his brothers was working in a nearby village for a farmer whose neighbour also housed displaced persons. There lived a couple with a young woman of marriageable age. She became the wife of my father, and my mother.

Shortly after my parents married in August 1953, my father finished his studies and the next shock came, namely, unemployment. My mother cried and cried, as she later reported. A teaching position he had been promised was given to someone else, and since the numbers of students for the agricultural vocational school were also declining, he could not be employed as an agricultural vocational schoolteacher after all.

After additional training, he finally taught the rest of his professional life until his retirement as teacher at an industrial vocational school, the Eugen Reintjes School in Hameln.

How my path grew out of my father's

I was born in 1954. I was born to a father who was an unwelcome displaced person after having lost his beloved homeland of Silesia, without any hope for return, having lost one beloved brother in the war in Italy and the other brother on the Eastern Front, and having lost his father who died out of grief over his lost farm. My father even lost part of his body, one arm. Having seen the atrocities committed in the name of Germany, he also lost his sense of belonging to any kind of German identity. Until his last day, my father would say, 'I am a Silesian, I am not German. Germany has destroyed my life, Hitler has raped me'.

When I was a child, I remember that he was quiet and introvert, sitting over history books in the early mornings before going to work, trying to fathom the terrible German trajectory and understand what made him resist it as much as was in his power. He wanted to come to terms with

his own fate that he was thrown into at an age when he was not yet able to understand the bigger picture, let alone justify why he resisted. It made a great impression on me that names like Dietrich Bonhoeffer became central for him. In the afternoons, he worked in the garden with his one arm. He had a prosthesis, but he could not wear it because it was just a painful hindrance for him. The prosthetic technology was not yet evolved enough at his time.

There was no television in the house when I grew up, and the Internet was still many decades away. However, as a teacher, my father had access to a film screening machine and to celluloid movies that were used in the school lessons. During school vacations, he made the enormous effort of bringing this heavy machine and some of the films to the village where my family lived, and this despite the handicap of having only one arm and not having a car. These were profoundly thought-provoking films that deeply influenced the rest of my life.[4]

Many decades later, I came back to my father to interview him directly, to learn to see through his eyes how it was possible for the Nazi regime to take power in Germany. My aim was to get a sense of this historical tragedy as if I had experienced it personally.

Despite his physical disability, my father was psychologically the strongest in the family — in a way, he was mother and father in one person. My mother, also she deeply traumatised by war and expulsion, was like his first child, before me and my two younger siblings.

My father read in the Bible daily. All over the world, uprooted people tend to seek refuge from their suffering in religious faith, and my family was not exempt — if dignity is absent on Earth, at least heaven can offer it. Sadly, what was meant to remedy primary war damage led to secondary and tertiary war damage. Four groups emerged in the family that hurt each other, sometimes deeply and existentially. On one pole of the spectrum was a rather dogmatic religious group, in the middle a somewhat less dogmatic religious group, followed by an even less dogmatic group, with a somewhat neutral group at the other pole of the spectrum.

The first group was formed in Bavaria. My father's eldest sister had been an intelligence officer in Belgium during the war, and when the American troops arrived in Belgium at the end of the war, she worked for them, following them into the American zone in Bavaria. After the war, at first her whereabouts were unknown to the rest of the family, but in 1946, with the help of the Red Cross, she located her family in northern Germany. She asked one of her sisters to join her in Bavaria, and later three other siblings and my father's mother followed.

The eldest sister found lodgings for the younger one in the house of Jehovah's Witnesses, a choice she later bitterly regretted, as three siblings and the mother were successfully recruited into this sect. These siblings formed the first group, which ultimately meant the break with the rest of the family. I remember a visit by one of my father's sisters and her family, who came all the way from Bavaria to my parents in the north of Germany with the aim to enrol us into the Jehovah's Witness sect. After this attempt had failed, there was hardly any contact. This meant that the losses my father had endured from war and expulsion were compounded.

My parents formed the second group. Before I was born, my parents had been converted in a so-called *Zeltmission* (tent revival) and saw themselves as born-again Christians, which my mother, however, interpreted more dogmatically than my father.

As a child and adolescent, I formed the third group, alone, which put me into an extremely difficult position. It meant my psycho-social 'expulsion' into extreme isolation, both within my family and outside of it — I was cast out not only from humanity but also from the kingdom of God, such was my sense of self. It was only in the cemetery that I felt at home, at least to some extent, although I knew that even suicide would not offer a way out, since I would remain rejected by God even after death. One could call this ordeal a tertiary war injury. I survived my childhood and adolescence only with extraordinary perseverance. An important factor was that my father did not break off contact but kept a lifeline to me, even though he was part of the 'middle group'.

So, where do I come from? Do I come from Silesia? No. Do I come from Lower Saxony? No. Do I come from Poland? No. Do I come from Germany? No. I come from expulsion, from my

parents' expulsion from their homeland and from my own personal experience of psycho-social religious expulsion. I come from the stories my father told of his lost farm, of his family's lost agricultural lands and forests — until his last day, he yearned 'to go home'. In his imagination, he walked his lands every evening together with his beloved brothers. So, where do I come from? I come from the deep awareness that nothing is certain, that war can destroy what seems to be sure in the blink of an eye. I come from multiple cross-generational experiences of humiliation, from a family who was considered less than human by some when I was young, from the sense that I belonged nowhere, that there was no 'right to return' to anywhere, that I had no right to be part of the human family.

I come from boundless grief over a world where competition for domination is being idealised, where mutual care matters little, a world, in which we, as humanity, squander our energy, enthusiasm, and creativity on fighting each other and fighting nature. I come from a deep desire to belong, to belong to people who look at this planet with awe, wonderment, and loving and tender kindness, to people who refuse to live for money or self-righteousness, to people who live for the joy that comes from seeing, nurturing, and taking delight in our existential connectedness with all life.

After graduating from high school, I continued with the geographical expulsion of my family — that is how one might call it — by moving out into the world. For many years, until I was forty-five years old, I did not feel that I was a 'legitimate' human being, I did not feel that I had a place as a member of humanity. My failure to have children, and a chronic disease compounded this sense. It was not until I had lived globally for more than twenty-five years that my sense of 'belonging nowhere' slowly transmuted into 'belonging everywhere'.

Especially Norway became important for me. I first came to Norway in 1977 and was later married to a Norwegian for a few years. I realised that the Norwegian cultural heritage of *likeverd* (worthiness) and *dugnad* (community responsibility) — both in the form of local and global responsibility (see Nansen Passport) — is my home. I learned to see that this cultural heritage is more valuable than all the oil Norway possesses. *Likeverd* and *dugnad* reflect the motto of the French Revolution — *liberté, égalité, fraternité* — a motto that is also expressed in the ideals of human rights.

When asked, 'Where are you from?' my answer is now, 'I am from planet Earth, like you'. When asked, 'What is your religion?' I avoid creating 'us-them' divisions with my answer, rather. I try to give an answer that can be subscribed to by wise people from all faiths, be they religious, anti-religious, or anything in between. I say, 'My religion is love, humility, and awe for a universe too vast for us to fathom'.

There is a Sufi saying attributed to 13th-century Persian poet Rumi, 'I have learned so much from God that I can no longer call myself a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew. The truth has shed so much of itself in me that I can no longer call myself a man, a woman...'. My personal version would go as follows, 'I have learned so much from the larger universe of meaning around us that I can no longer call myself a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew. The truth has shed so much of itself in me that I can no longer call myself a man, a woman...'

My life has turned out to become a project, a calling, a mission, a mission for equal dignity for all in mutual solidarity. I feel proud of all cultural achievements that humankind has ever attained, and at the same time, I also feel ashamed of all the atrocities humans have ever perpetrated in the world, be it atrocities committed by Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, or any other oppressor. I feel what philosopher Karl Jaspers called the *metaphysical responsibility* to work for 'never again', and this not just in one locality, I feel this responsibility everywhere on our planet, and on behalf of all of humanity — never again mass destruction through systemic and systematic humiliation, be it through war on people and nature.

After almost fifty years of global living, I feel that what I call *big love* is the only way out of the erosion of social cohesion and the destruction of ecosystems — big love meaning communal

responsibility embedded in respect for equal dignity for all, in freedom to engage in mutual solidarity.

So, in the end, my various displacements have given me a home — I am at home in the values of community responsibility and solidarity, embedded in loving respect for the dignity of all living beings on the entire planet. In my writing, I attempt to overcome academia's siloisation by bridging separate academic disciplines. I always begin by trying to understand the core messages of various fields, then I bring these messages together on different levels of abstraction by using the *ideal-type* approach of sociologist Max Weber,[5] and finally, I re-construct everything from the perspective of dignity and humiliation. So far, I have done this with war, genocide, and terrorism (2000, 2017),[6] international conflict (2006 and 2009, translated into Chinese in 2019),[7] gender and security (2010),[8] and economics (2012, translated into Brazilian-Portuguese in 2016).[9] My most recent book is titled *From humiliation to dignity: For a future of global solidarity* (2022).[10] All these works would not have been possible without my father's life path teaching me unwavering dedication to fundamental integrity and loving courage. My father deserves all praise.

While sitting at my father's deathbed a few days before he died, crying, I looked back on the many decades I saw him grieving every day, mourning the many layers of trauma and humiliation in himself and out in the world — while at the same time never giving up being a loving and healing force. That is why I took care of him in his last years until he died with 96. I am infinitely glad that I was able to care for him during his final years, that I could stay by his side day and night, that I could bring as much dignity to the end of his life as possible.

I always reassured my father that his suffering was not in vain, that my work for dignity replaced his missing arm, that my life mission honoured and mourned his family members who were killed and displaced by war. I told him that the Nobel Peace Prize nominations represented his lost homeland and recognised the many war injuries — primary, secondary, and tertiary — that overshadowed not only his life but the lives of so many others, including subsequent generations. I explained to him that with the global Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies network that I had the privilege of initiating in 2001,[11] we wish to sow a seed for a global dignity family, the very family that also he hoped humanity may want to become in the future. No longer 'Disunited Nations' but 'Globally United People for Dignity'. My father agreed that 'Globally United People for Dignity' would be the only authority positioned to overcome *the law of the strongest* with *the strength of the law*.[12]

Then, on 3rd May 2022, my dear and beloved father passed away. I was devastated and I know the pain will always be there. Never was it clearer to me how much more than a father he was to me — during my adolescence, he saved my life, later he was a pillar and anchor in my life, and, most importantly, my entire life mission, my work for dignity, grew out of the extraordinary courage with which he overcame the agonising traumas he had suffered from war and expulsion — he overcame them with loving compassion, always pointing out that others had suffered more.

I often think back to the year 2010, when I began staying at my father's side as he was caring for my mother, when I spent as much time as possible in the house of my parents to be of help. After my mother's passing in December 2018, I synchronised my life with his to the last detail, particularly after the coronavirus pandemic started to unfold in spring 2020. At that point, I halted my global life completely and cared for him day and night. One could say that the timing of two difficult factors — father care and the coronavirus — coalesced for me in a beneficial way. I set up my home office in his living room so I could be close to him while working with our worldwide dignity community using digital platforms, and at the same time finalising my book on solidarity[13] and preparing for the book *Letter to my father*. Combining all these duties and tasks meant that I worked up to seventeen hours per day during these years and I am proud of it.

When the war in Ukraine began, my father could not watch the news anymore. Seeing the footage of suffering in his immediate neighbourhood in Europe, was something he had hoped never to have to experience again in his lifetime. Already during the years when refugees from Syria and

Afghanistan had come to Germany, he was profoundly saddened by the fact that Europe's politicians had not succeeded in creating more comprehensive peace in the world. 'War is the enemy of everybody', this was his conclusion, war on people as much as war on nature. For him, the concept of 'enemies' did not exist, I spoke about this with him often, the last time only two months before his passing.[14]

The coronavirus pandemic imposed many lockdowns all around the world, thus causing an *anthro-pause*.[15] Like me, also my father hoped that this would open a new 'Eleanor Roosevelt moment' just as after World War II in 1948, a new moment for a major re-orientation. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic was not enough. Now there is hope that the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine will not end in a global nuclear war but will open a new opportunity for qualified reorientation. I am glad that my father is spared seeing the tragedy in Ukraine continue.

Just saying 'never again' is not enough, what is needed is 'wehret den Anfängen', 'resist the beginnings', this was my father's continuous warning. It is too late when the 'Hitlers' of this world, the ruthless dominators, have gained power. Their ascendance must be prevented, not just individually but systemically. It is therefore not enough to look back and accuse the German people of having been *Mitläufer* ('followers'), of having failed to stand up against their Nazi leaders. What is needed is to understand that we all are *Mitläufer* in today's world, just by living in it, a world that perpetrates *ecocide* and *sociocide*, that destroys our *ecosphere* and *sociosphere* (in Europe more than in Africa), and that we facilitate this by *cogitocide*, the destruction of our *cogitosphere*, our sphere of thinking.[16] My global life arose from the insight that it is our responsibility to use the lessons of the past to do everything in our power to help the world turn around in the future. My father gave everything in his power, and he did not give up even though he was painfully aware that his efforts were insufficient. I follow him. I sacrifice my entire life and I, too, continue even while being painfully aware that my efforts might be wasted.

What waits to be done it to overcome the need for and the glorification of competition for domination. The inner logic of the *security dilemma* (as political scientists call it) is, 'We have to amass weapons, because we are scared. When we amass weapons, you get scared. You amass weapons, we get more scared'. Its maxim is, 'If you want peace, prepare for war'. The result is that each period of peace is nothing more than a temporary truce, because despite best intentions, war preparations, taken as a whole, tend to produce more war than peace. Likewise, the *growth dilemma* waits to be overcome, it follows the motto, 'If you want material prosperity, invest in exploitation'. Exploitation produces ruin more than prosperity just as war preparation produces destruction more than peace. Superimposing these dilemmas with ever new vicious cycles of humiliation is the height of foolishness, particularly in a world that is so globally interconnected as now. When violence has reached the point where even pacifists feel that there is no alternative to taking up arms, it is too late.

Do we really want only the strongest to win? My father would have signed the following suggestion for a way out:

> We need Globally United People for Dignity to establish *binding global rules for dignity and peace*. This is the only path to peace with each other and with nature. Competition for domination and maximum profit needs to be replaced with the Indigenous seven-generation sustainability rule. True pacifism means leaving behind the tragic security dilemma so that global disarmament can become possible. Globally United People for Dignity can co-create a decent global village and nurture a planet where all living beings can flourish in dignity. This is not naïve utopia, it is necessary *eutopia* — it is the only alternative to collective demise.

Many people in the West entrust their elderly parents to retirement homes and continue with their professional lives. I was often asked why I stayed with my father so faithfully. I always explained that caring for my father was an integral part of my dignity work. As he got his life stolen

by Nazi Germany in the cruellest ways, it was my duty and honour to give him dignity at the end of his life. I always felt that even a Mandela or a Gandhi could have learned from him — he was such an exceptional man. He was never an 'average' citizen who just 'minded his own business'. He went much further than 'minding his own business' — he extended his love to all humanity and all living beings. I know few people who were as securely removed as my father from short-sighted neo-liberal cost-benefit calculations. He thought in terms of the Indigenous seven-generation sustainability rule, and he did so with deep caring compassion, a compassion that was the opposite of patronising but humble and dialogical, inspired by unending all-encompassing love. This is why I wish to write the book *Letter to my father*.

Inspired by my father's wisdom, I have coined the phrase *dignity-ism*, or *dignism*, as a new globally connective narrative for a decent future for our world. Here is how I define it:

> *Dignism* describes a world where every new-born finds space and is nurtured to unfold their highest and best, embedded in a social context of loving appreciation and connection, where the carrying capacity of the planet guides the ways in which everyone's basic needs are met. It is a world where *unity in diversity* reigns, where we unite in respecting everyone's human dignity and celebrating diversity, where we prevent unity from devolving into oppressive uniformity, while keeping diversity from sliding into hostile division. Dignism means ending past cycles of humiliation and preventing new ones from emerging. Dignism means loving care for the common good of all of humanity as co-inhabitants of one single finite habitat. Dignism weaves together all dignifying aspects of all of the world's cultural traditions into one decent global village.

References

Bucher, Rainer (2008/2011). *Hitler's theology: A study in political religion*. Translated by Rebecca Pohl. London: Continuum. German original *Hitlers Theologie*, Würzburg: Echter, 2008.

Coser, Lewis A. (1977). *Masters of sociological thought: Ideas in historical and social context*. 2nd edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (1993). *Quality of life: A German-Egyptian comparative study*. Hamburg, Germany: University of Hamburg, Department of Psychological Medicine, English summary of doctoral dissertation in medicine (in German), *Lebensqualität im ägyptisch-deutschen Vergleich. Eine interkulturelle Untersuchung an drei Berufsgruppen (Ärzte, Journalisten, Künstler)*. www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2000). *The psychology of humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany*. Oslo: University of Oslo, Department of Psychology, doctoral dissertation. www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2006). *Making enemies: Humiliation and international conflict*. Westport, CT, London: Praeger Security International, Greenwood.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2009). *Emotion and conflict: How human rights can dignify emotion and help us wage good conflict*. Westport, CT, London: Praeger, Greenwood.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda, and Desmond Tutu (Foreword) (2010). *Gender, humiliation, and global security: Dignifying relationships from love, sex, and parenthood to world affairs*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, ABC-CLIO.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2012). *A dignity economy: Creating an economy which serves human dignity and preserves our planet*. Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2012/2016). *Por uma Economia digna*. Translated by Fatiha Parahyba. Recife, Brazil: Editora da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. Preface by Francisco Gomes de Matos. English original *A dignity economy: Creating an economy which serves*

human dignity and preserves our planet, Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press, 2012.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2017). *Honor, humiliation, and terror: An explosive mix — And how we can defuse it with dignity*. Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2023). *From humiliation to dignity: For a future of global solidarity*. Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press.

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (作者:林艾雯) (2006/2019). *树敌：侮辱与国际冲突 (Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict)*. Translated by Lanzhi Liu. Beijing: Foreign Languages Publishing Press. Preface to the Chinese translation by Jingyi Dong (2016), available from Dangdang or Jd.com. English original *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006.

Lutz, Dieter S., and Hans J. Gießmann (Eds.) (2003). *Die Stärke des Rechts gegen das Recht des Stärkeren: Politische und rechtliche Einwände gegen eine Rückkehr des Faustrechts in die internationalen Beziehungen*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

Rutz, Christian, Matthias-Claudio Loretto, Amanda E. Bates, Sarah C. Davidson, Carlos M. Duarte, Walter Jetz, Mark Johnson, et al. (2020). "COVID-19 lockdown allows researchers to quantify the effects of human activity on wildlife." In *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, *4* (9), pp. 1156–59. doi: 10.1038/s41559-020-1237-z.

Weber, Max (1904/1949). "Objectivity in social science and social policy." In *The methodology of social sciences*, edited by Edward Shils and Henry Finch, pp. 49–112. Glencoe, IL: Free Press. German original "Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis", in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, Band 19*, pp. 22–87, 1904. http://anthropos-lab.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Weber-objectivity-in-the-social-sciences.pdf.

Endnotes

[1] See Bucher, 2008/2011. Hitler in the Munich Löwenbräukeller on 8th November 1943:

> Auch ich bin religiös, und zwar tief innerlich religiös. Und ich glaube, dass diese Vorsehung die Menschen wägt, und dass derjenige, der vor den Prüfungen und unter den Prüfungen der Vorsehung nicht bestehen kann, der an ihnen zerbricht, dass der von der Vorsehung nicht bestimmt ist zu Größerem, dass das eine in der Natur gegebene Notwendigkeit ist, dass nur aus einer Auslese die Stärkeren übrig bleiben. Und ich möchte es hier ruhig aussprechen: Wenn mein eigenes Volk an einer solchen Prüfung zerbrechen würde, könnte ich darüber dann keine Träne weinen, es hätte nichts anderes verdient. Das würde sein eigenes Schicksal sein, das es sich selbst zuzuschreiben hat. Das glaube ich aber nie und nimmer.

Translated from the German original by Lindner:

> I too am religious, deeply within me. And I believe that Providence measures people, and that the one who cannot stand before and under the trials of Providence, the one who breaks down under them, that he is not destined by Providence to greater deeds, and that it is a necessity given by nature that from a selection only the strongest remain. And I would like dare say here: If my own people were to break under such a test, then I could cry no tears over them, they would not have deserved anything else. That [destruction] would be their own destiny, which they have to attribute to themselves. But I would never believe that [that the German people would break down].

[2] 'Die deutschen Vertriebenen waren damals nicht willkommen', by Daniel Huber, *Watson*, 27th February 2016, www.watson.ch/wissen/history/448145654-fluechtlingsschweine-die-deutschen-vertriebenen-waren-damals-nicht-willkommen. Translated by Lindner from the German original:

> Wer glaubt, für Fremdenfeindlichkeit brauche es Menschen aus fremden Ländern, irrt. Nach dem verlorenen Krieg drängten sich Millionen Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene aus den deutschen Ostgebieten in Rest-Deutschland. Heute gilt ihre Aufnahme als vorbildlich – doch in Wahrheit schlugen ihnen damals

> Hass und Verachtung entgegen und der offen ausgesprochene Gedanke, nicht nach Westdeutschland, sondern nach Auschwitz zu gehören.

See also *'Hooray, I am a Kriegsenkel!' — Transgenerational transmission of World War II experiences in Germany*', a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University in August 2015, by Lina Jakob, https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/104516/2/Jakob%20Thesis%202016.pdf.

[3] A former neighbour in a personal communication on 16t April 2022.

[4] These are the films that would deeply influence my entire life:
• *Der Schlaf der Gerechten* ('The sleep of the just'), a film showing how the persecution of Jews became 'normalised', and how a butcher's wife tried to fight back. See www.imdb.com/title/tt0056453/.
• *Meine Ehre heißt Treue* ('My honor is loyalty'), â film showing the methods of the SS. See https://youtu.be/jsfn0YDa5jw.
• *In jenen Tagen* ('In those days'), the rise and fall of the Nazi regime told by following the owners of a car. See https://youtu.be/1DukQ5tlfGU.
• *Ein Tag* ('One day'), a film about one day in the concentration camp. See https://youtu.be/94_gvbFGdg0.
• *Hunde, wollt Ihr ewig leben* ('Dogs, do you want to live forever?'), a film about the Battle of Stalingrad (23rd August 1942–2nd February 1943). See https://youtu.be/SG98ZvMvuM0.
• *Die Brücke* (' The Bridge'), a film about a school class who was ordered to defend a bridge in the last days of the war. See https://youtu.be/t-z0-dFst4c.
• *Die Wunderkinder* ('The wonderkids'), a film about two schoolmates in the first half of the 20th century. See https://youtu.be/SGBVB3KBPn8.

[5] In my work, I apply the *ideal-type* approach as described by sociologist Max Weber, 1904/1949. See an explanation in Coser, 1977, p. 224:

> Weber's three kinds of ideal types are distinguished by their levels of abstraction. First are the ideal types rooted in historical particularities, such as the 'western city', 'the Protestant Ethic', or 'modern capitalism', which refer to phenomena that appear only in specific historical periods and in particular cultural areas. A second kind involves abstract elements of social reality — such concepts as 'bureaucracy' or 'feudalism' — that may be found in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Finally, there is a third kind of ideal type, which Raymond Aron calls 'rationalising reconstructions of a particular kind of behaviour'. According to Weber, all propositions in economic theory, for example, fall into this category. They all refer to the ways in which men would behave were they actuated by purely economic motives, were they purely economic men.

[6] *The psychology of humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany* was my doctoral dissertation in social psychology at the Department of Psychology of the University of Oslo, Norway. See Lindner, 2000. *Quality of life: A German-Egyptian comparative study* (in German) was my doctoral dissertation in psychological medicine at the University of Hamburg, Germany. See Lindner, 1993. *Honor, humiliation, and terror: An explosive mix — And how we can defuse it with dignity*, was my fifth book, and it came out in 2017 in Dignity Press, in its imprint World Dignity University Press, with a Foreword by Linda Hartling, director of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies. See Lindner, 2017. Please see more chapters and papers in full text on www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php.

[7] *Making enemies: Humiliation and international conflict* was my first book on dignity and humiliation and how we may envision a more dignified world, characterised as a path-breaking book and honoured as 'Outstanding Academic Title' for 2007 in the USA by the journal *Choice*. Please see more details on www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/01.php. See Lindner, 2006, Lindner, 2006/2019. *Emotion and conflict: How human rights can dignify emotion and help us wage good conflict* was my second book. See www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/02.php, and Lindner, 2009.

[8] *Gender, humiliation, and global security* was my third book, published by Praeger in 2010. Archbishop Desmond Tutu kindly offered the Foreword. The book was 'highly recommended' by *Choice* in July 2010. For more details, see www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/03.php. See Lindner and Desmond Tutu (Foreword), 2010.

[9] *A dignity economy: Creating an economy that serves human dignity and preserves our planet* was my fourth book, and it is the first publication of Dignity Press, published in 2012 in its imprint World Dignity University Press. See www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/04.php, Lindner, 2012, and Lindner, 2012/2016.

[10] Lindner, 2023.

[11] Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, www.humiliationstudies.org.

[12] See, among others, Lutz and Gießmann, 2003. I had the privilege of meeting Dieter Lutz on 22nd July 1993 at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, when it was still located in Falkenstein 1–3 in Hamburg-Blankenese. His premature passing was a shock to all of us. See 'Zum Tod von Prof. Dr. Dr. Dieter S. Lutz, Nachrufe', www.ag-friedensforschung.de/science/lutz-nachrufe.html.
Description of his book titled *The strength of the law against the law of the strongest*,Lutz and Gießmann, 2003:

> Die nach dem 11. September 2001 von der Bush-Regierung eingenommene Rechtsauffassung, Angriffskriege gegen mutmaßliche Unterstützerstaaten von Terrorakten zu führen und darüber hinaus gewaltsame Regimewechsel anzustreben, legt die Axt an die Wurzel des geltenden Völkerrechts. Insbesondere das in der Präambel und in Artikel 2 der UNO-Charta niedergelegte Gewaltverbot steht auf dem Prüfstand.

Translated by Lindner from the German original:

> The legal position adopted by the Bush administration after September 11, 2001, to wage wars of aggression against alleged supporters of acts of terrorism and to strive for violent regime change, lays the ax at the root of current international law. In particular, the ban on the use of force laid down in the preamble and in Article 2 of the UN Charter is under scrutiny.

[13] Lindner, 2023.

[14] *My father has no 'enemies'*, 27th February 2022, https://youtu.be/I1GUpcQlB8g.

[15] The term *anthropause* was coined by a team of researchers around biologist Christian Rutz, et al., 2020, who discuss the possible impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on wildlife. We thank former head of the Club of Rome, Prince El Hassan bin Talal, for introducing this notion in his webinar on ecocide convened by Ghazi Hamed on 29th April 2021. See also notes 4420 and 4421 in chapter 12 in Lindner, 2023, for a historical overview by veteran journalist Roberto Savio.

[16] I very much thank the President of the Club of Rome from 1999 to 2007, Prince El Hassan bin Talal, for his personal message from 19th May 2020, where he suggests the term *cogitocide*. He proposed the term *cogitosphere* in his Opening Address to the 2004 Annual Conference of the Club of Rome 'On limits to ignorance: The challenge of informed humanity', 11th–12th October 2004 in Helsinki, Finland. His address was titled *The challenge of informed humanity: From 'infosphere' to 'cogitosphere*'. Read about *ecocide*, *sociocide*, and *cogitocide* in chapter 7 of Lindner, 2023.