

# **THE DEATH OF THE WEST AND HOW TO AVOID IT**

**Book Proposal**

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## BOOK PROPOSAL

Title: The Death of the West and How to Avoid It

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Target Audience: A large readership among followers of current affairs. Also of great interest to professionals and academics in a wide range of related fields including human rights issues, sociology, psychology, history, politics, international relations, Europe, American studies, Asian studies, conflict resolution.

Length: 90,000 words

### Brief Synopsis:

The Age of the West is coming to an end. This is a dangerous time. The West dominated the world for the past five hundred years. It has left a huge legacy of bitterness. The power of the West was humiliating for the rest of the world. Now the rest of world is catching up with the West. They want the West's technology but not its arrogance. The West is becoming a target for the hatred of humiliated people throughout the rest of the world. Terrorist attacks are a symptom of this. The great danger is a cycle of escalating violence

The world faces the choice between violent self-destruction and a constructive search for lasting peace. So far, we have learned too slowly. In Europe the cycle of humiliation and revenge led to Nazism, the Holocaust and the Second World War. Later, the outcome was ethnic cleansing and war in Bosnia and Kosovo. Far better to follow the example of South Africa and begin a process of truth and reconciliation.

If we don't learn to heal the wounds of humiliation then the story of Europe in the twentieth century is likely to be repeated on a global scale in the twenty-first. The West is holding a tiger by the tail. When it is forced to let go, how will it avoid the tiger's teeth?

In The Death of the West and How to Avoid It Evelin Lindner and Dennis Smith explore the powerful but widely misunderstood part played by humiliation in human affairs. They survey evidence from Asia, Africa, America and Europe to investigate the causes and consequences of humiliation. They argue that the nature of humiliation has changed through history, and suggest ways in which humiliation has shaped the modern world and may yet destroy it. Drawing upon this analysis, Lindner and Smith propose a strategy for avoiding the cycle of violent conflict that threatens to dehumanise global society.

Synopsis for book jacket

The Age of the West is coming to an end. This is a dangerous time. Western domination lasted five hundred years and left a huge legacy of bitterness. The power of the West was humiliating for the rest of the world. The greatest threat is a vicious cycle of violent revenge and retaliation. The West is holding a tiger by the tail. When it is forced to let go, how will it avoid the tiger's teeth? Healing the wounds of humiliation is an urgent matter. The authors of this book show how this can be done.

In The Death of the West and How to Avoid It Evelin Lindner and Dennis Smith explore the powerful but widely misunderstood part played by humiliation in human affairs. They survey evidence from Asia, Africa, America and Europe to investigate the causes and consequences of humiliation. They argue that the nature of humiliation has changed through history, and suggest ways in which humiliation has shaped the modern world and may yet destroy it. Drawing upon this analysis, Lindner and Smith propose a strategy for avoiding the cycle of bloody revenge and violent conflict that threatens to dehumanise global society.

# **THE DEATH OF THE WEST AND HOW TO AVOID IT**

Evelin Lindner and Dennis Smith  
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The West has dominated the world for the past five hundred years. It likes to think it has 'civilised' the world but it has also left a huge legacy of bitterness. It is the bitterness of the humiliated on every continent. It is the resentment of those who have been forced to bend their knees and bow their heads to European and American masters. The pain of the humiliated is real, largely unacknowledged and highly dangerous.

There is only one way to avoid a cycle of violence. That is for the West to make peace with its victims and heal the wounds of humiliation. This requires honesty and understanding on all sides.

However, the West has played a double game. Since 1945 it has claimed to stand for human rights for all while actually keeping most of the world's resources for itself. This looks like blindness or, worse, duplicity. The West has tried to deny or avoid the anger of those it has humiliated. It has not faced up to its global responsibilities. This is very short-sighted.

The West is losing its position as world top dog. More and more, global power is being shared between different continents and cultures. No one knows how long this change to a multipolar and multicultural global society will take. No one knows what the outcome will be. However, one thing is sure: the period of transition is deeply perilous, especially for the West.

The West is holding a tiger by the tail. When it is forced to let go, how will it avoid the tiger's teeth?

The West must learn to look the facts in the face. Terrorist attacks on Western embassies, the slaughter of Western tourists and repeated kidnappings are all symptoms of a desire to hit back on the part of the humiliated.

This is not a 'clash of civilizations,' as Samuel Huntington would argue. It is the violent protest of non-Western victims who have learned to understand their own humiliation in terms the West has taught them: the ideal of universal human rights. This ideal has made the forced abasement of one person, group or nation by another nothing less than a crime against fundamental human dignity. This is originally a Western ideal, proudly claimed

by its politicians to be a symbol of the West's superiority. Now it has become a global standard, a cross on which the West itself may be crucified.

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Evelin Lindner comes from a German family displaced from Silesia after the Second World War. She is a cross-cultural psychologist with vast international experience who speaks several languages. She has lived and worked in Norway, New Zealand, Rwanda, Somalia, Egypt, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Israel, Portugal, Germany and the United States. Evelin Lindner works in the Psychology Institute at Oslo University and is a consultant to transnational companies and NGOs. Evelin's personal background and life experiences have made her deeply interested in the part played by humiliation within the personality, at the level of society and in international relations. In her research she has been subjecting her initial intuitions to empirical tests and developing her understanding through theoretical analysis. This has included extensive fieldwork in Rwanda and Somalia.

Evelin Lindner has been joined in her theoretical and empirical exploration of humiliation by Dennis Smith who is Professor of Sociology at Loughborough University, UK. He is an acclaimed international scholar, editor of Sociological Review, and the author of several well-known books on historical sociology, social theory, human conflict, urban sociology, modernity and globalization. His recent books include Zygmunt Bauman. Prophet of Postmodernity (Polity), Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory (Sage) and Whose Europe? The Turn Towards Democracy (Blackwell).

Dennis Smith's parents are both migrants from Britain's 'Celtic fringe.' His father came to England from the South Wales coalfields and his mother from County Limerick in Ireland. Dennis Smith has always been fascinated by social and psychological mechanisms of exclusion and repression and the relations between insiders and outsiders. His extensive historical and sociological researches have covered a wide range of civilisations and cultures. He has explored the part played by violence, power and conflict and the role of pride, humiliation and ideas about justice and equality in driving social change.

Lindner and Smith bring together the resources of social psychology, historical sociology, cultural theory, political science, philosophical studies and conflict-resolution studies in The Death of the West and How to Avoid It. The project is ambitious but it is undertaken in an unpretentious spirit. The authors draw attention to a theme that urgently requires further analysis. The intention is to open a critical debate on the nature of

humiliation and the potential for overcoming its worst effects. Lindner and Smith propose an agenda for discussion and invite others to join in.

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## **PART I THE ROAD TOWARDS VIOLENCE**

### **Chap 1 The Roots of Terror**

Why does humiliation lead to violence?

Terrorist violence is rooted in humiliation. Europe's recent history carries a lesson for the whole world about the significance of humiliation.

In 1918 Germany was defeated after World War I. The Treaty of Versailles humiliated the German people. It treated them as being deeply unworthy. The result was Nazism, the Holocaust and the Second World War. Since 1989 a similar cycle, albeit on a smaller scale, occurred in the Balkans.

If the West does not learn how to acknowledge and rectify the humiliations suffered by its global neighbours the story of Europe in the twentieth century is likely to be repeated on a global scale in the twenty-first.

The murderous behaviour of terrorist groups and individuals around the world is, typically, rooted in a profound awareness that they and their people have suffered humiliating indignities. Terrorism may be an attempt to 'even up the score' by humiliating the humiliator. It may also be an attempt to stop the humiliator from continuing to act in an 'immoral' way.

In other words, terrorism says: ‘stop it!’ It also says ‘if you don’t stop, then we will stop you!’

The most effective way of removing the threat of violence brought by terrorism is to recognise that it is part of a complex discourse between humiliator and humiliated – and then work to transform this discourse into a dialogue focused upon the task of achieving understanding and reconciliation.

## **Chap 2      The Logic of Humiliation**

What is humiliation?

Humiliation draws its power from a dense web of ‘hot’ filaments wired into the tissue of culture. They give it a potentially explosive character that is too little recognised. The authors probe this dense web and explain how it got its present character.

Humiliation creates barriers between individuals and groups. It emphasises difference. It encourages stereotyping and misperception. It inhibits peaceful co-operation between groups.

Humiliation is not simply an extreme or marginal condition but a central feature of the social order. The elements that constitute humiliation are fundamental mechanisms in the formation of modern society.

Two great movements have shaped human history. One is the imposition of coercive hierarchies upon people who were previously ‘free’ (although they did not know the meaning of that word until they lost their freedom). The other great movement of human history is the protest against coercive hierarchy at every level from patriarchy to colonialism.

The first movement was the Imposition of Hierarchy. The second was the Revolution of Human Rights. The Imposition of Hierarchy involved the humiliation (or forceful subjugation) of the majority of the population. Overlords took the lion’s share of wealth and status. Societies became stratified. Inequality between lords and commoners, between husbands and wives, between parents and children and between masters and slaves was maintained by daily humiliations: insults, beatings, homicide.

In coercive hierarchies such as patriarchal families and colonial empires there is a fundamental divide. It is between supposedly ‘superior’ and supposedly ‘inferior’ beings. Within societies based upon coercive hierarchy humiliation was resented but normal and ‘legitimate.’ Imposing humiliation upon others was the accepted way to defend your honour as an individual or as a member of your group.

The Revolution of Human Rights was a frontal assault upon the principles and practices of coercive hierarchies. It declared that all human beings were equal in worth and dignity. Once this change of attitudes had occurred in a person or a group, the routine humiliations that went with coercive hierarchy became intolerable. Their nature was transformed. They became seen as a fundamental attack upon the victim's very humanity.

### Chap 3

### **The Revolution of Human Rights**

Why does the ideal of human rights make humiliation more unbearable and violence more likely?

Coercive hierarchies stifle talent and kill initiative. In many cases, underlings are told to believe that the pyramid of power is God given. They may reconcile themselves to their lowly lot. However, the rulers within coercive hierarchies pay a high price for their oppressive behaviour. Their societies lose out in competition with others where modern markets and modern bureaucracies have developed.

These modern institutions support a radical principle. This is that everybody can be considered for every task and role. This also means that every one has an equal obligation to obey the rules of the market and everyone must follow bureaucratic procedures. The idea of equal human obligations entails another powerful idea: equal human rights. The idea of equal human rights 'dignifies' every self.

The idea of human rights intensifies and extends the experience of humiliation. The routine humiliations of coercive hierarchies become intolerable. This is because it invites the poor and weak to judge their own condition against the condition of every other human being, including the rich and powerful.

For converts to human rights who are still trapped in coercive hierarchies, the 'normal' becomes the 'intolerable.' For 'liberated' individuals and groups freed from coercive hierarchies, the idea of equal human rights clashes with the fact of gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power.

So far human rights has meant two things: a set of unfulfilled expectations in the world population and a license for global capital to exploit 'free' labour in less developed countries.

Rich and powerful people in the West set the standard for what are 'normal' and 'acceptable' conditions for a decent human life. Their

leaders declare that they wish these standards to be applied to the whole world.

In spite of this, millions of people who believe in human rights find they have not got the slightest chance of achieving those standards for themselves. They are faced with two alternative explanations for this situation. *Either* they and people like them are responsible for this situation *or* the rich and powerful in the West are responsible.

If they themselves are responsible, then their failure is due to personal inadequacy. If the rich and powerful in the West are responsible, then they have duped the poor and weak. Both explanations are deeply humiliating for those who have lost out.

## **PART II AT THE CROSSROADS**

### **Chap 4 African Tragedy**

What does Africa teach us about the causes and the costs of humiliation?

This chapter gives a first-hand account of the workings of humiliation in Africa. Evelin Lindner travelled to Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia in 1998-99 and interviewed survivors and perpetrators of genocide, massacre and rape. From 1984 – 1991 she lived in Egypt where she worked as a clinical psychologist and consultant.

In Rwanda and Burundi genocide was a controlled release of tensions built up in profoundly hierarchical societies whose internal oppressions had been intensified by European colonialism. The pressures and conflicts found in these two African cases have some striking similarities with those in inter-war Germany. All three societies (inter-war Germany, Rwanda and Burundi) were very orderly, very well-regulated and able to commit genocide with great efficiency.

Compared to Rwanda and Burundi, the Somalis were less deeply touched by colonialism, especially in the northern part of the country. The Imposition of Hierarchy has occurred to a much lesser extent in Somalia than in many other societies. As a result, Somali society has a much stronger tradition of equality than Rwanda. Somalis have a strong sense of personal pride. However, here also there were episodes of mass killings directed in this case against specific clans (e.g. Isaaq).

In Somalia the killings mainly occurred after a dictatorship had been imposed. The dictator had waged an unsuccessful war against a neighbour and the centralised political regime was becoming unstable. In Rwanda the

genocide occurred when the Hutu government was confronted by an invasion by their old masters, the Tutsi.

In Germany, Rwanda and Somalia national humiliation was confronted within a polity in which an unequal socio-political structure had become weakened. In all three cases, the intense fear and anger released was directed by the state against a group (the Jews, the Tutsi, the Isaaq) who were defined as a threat to the rest of the population.

Apart from these historical parallels, the African cases show how intervention by international agencies such as the UN and NGOs may actually increase the sense of humiliation experienced by those who are already suffering.

In a later chapter, these examples of the *logic of humiliation* at work in Africa will be contrasted with the way the *logic of humanisation* has operated in Egypt and South Africa.

## **Chap 5 Asian Drama**

How have Asian societies been shaped and driven by the experience of humiliation?

The African cases will be contrasted with three Asian cases: India, Japan and China. All three societies suffered the humiliation of Western intrusion into their affairs. In all three societies the humiliation imposed by the West was interwoven in a complex way with the routine humiliations associated with their own practices.

The Indian caste system, the Chinese system of kow-towing, and the low Japanese bow all expressed and reinforced strong hierarchies. These Indian, Chinese and Japanese hierarchies were all constructed, historically, around the practices of ritual humiliation.

The Asian drama is the story of how the humiliation process unfolded, both internally and externally. In the case of India, Gandhi mobilised hatred of the British through his passive resistance movement. However, these energies were then dissipated in the conflict between Moslems and Hindus. The caste system remains strong.

In the case of China, Mao mobilised two forces: hatred of arrogant foreigners and resentment against the patriarchal clan system, especially among the young, and among females. The Chinese communist party offered a way to hit back at both sources of humiliation.

In the case of Japan, the leaders of the Meiji Restoration exploited the deep loyalties of Japanese people to the established social hierarchy. The people were ready to follow wherever their leaders led them in order to resist the threat of foreign domination. Now, at the turn of the millennium the economy collapsed and there were no foreigners to blame. Only now are ordinary Japanese beginning to question their own social hierarchies. Only now do they begin to realise that the sacrifices and humiliations they have endured were not balanced by effective paternalistic care from above.

## **Chap 6 American Opportunity**

Can the United States take a lead in healing the wounds of humiliation?

The United States is the most powerful nation in the world. It is very well placed to take the lead in helping the world to heal the wounds of humiliation. America has a wealth of experience in wrestling with conflicts between the demand for human rights and the humiliations imposed by coercive hierarchies.

Most Americans have a root-and-branch commitment to the fundamental egalitarian principles which seem destined to be the basis of the global order that is emerging. At the same time they have first-hand experience of coping with the legacy of inter-racial bitterness left by slavery.

Within their own society Americans are already deeply engaged in the task of seeking truth and reconciliation that still has to be undertaken world-wide. The increasing size and confidence of the Afro-American middle-class is one indication of the progress that is being made.

At the start of the new millennium America is the pivot on which the world turns. The United States is the key player in the awkward and dangerous transition from a modern world dominated by the European empires to a truly global society in which power, influence and wealth are shared between continents and cultures. That has been its role in the 'American century' that we have just left and will be its burden for some time to come.

## **PART III THE ROAD TOWARDS PEACE**

### **Chap 7 The Rise of the Network Society**

How does the network society promote peace and cooperation?

So far it has been argued that the practices of humiliation introduced by the Imposition of Hierarchy were outlawed by the Revolution of Human Rights. Now it is argued that the Revolution of Human Rights has been aided and abetted by a third movement: the Rise of the Network Society (see Castells).

The new network society coming into existence is based on the following ideas. Societies are extremely complex and their parts are thoroughly interdependent. As a result, no one can survive alone. Every person is a potential resource and has something creative to offer. The key to cultivating that resource is education. The key to releasing it is persuasion. The only basis for persuasion that is effective in the long term is mutual respect.

Networks operate most efficiently in cultures based on the assumption that everybody is fundamentally equal with everybody else. Humiliation has no place in such society. It is not only abhorrent but also highly dysfunctional. Humiliation stifles human creativity which is the crucial resource within such networks. It also creates barriers between individuals and groups. This prevents the free exchange of ideas and inhibits constructive criticism.

Three developments have given added strength to the movement away from coercive hierarchies towards the network society. One is technological change, especially the increased power of communications technology and the increased availability of cheap and rapid long-distance transport.

Another is the increasing willingness of people to subject received wisdom to the trial of experiment and critical argument.

Finally, there is the brute fact that natural resources are in increasingly short supply as globalisation makes the earth more crowded. The most precious remaining resource is human creativity. The network society is a much more efficient and effective means of releasing that creativity than coercive hierarchies.

## **Chap 8      The Logic of Humanisation**

What does Africa teach us about the strategies and strengths of humanisation?

Egypt (where Evelin Lindner spent many years working as a cross-cultural psychologist) has handled the experience of colonialism and Western intervention in many respects in a mature and creative way. This has kept

the damage done by humiliation to a reasonably low level. Long before other Arab states, Egypt was prepared to talk peace with Israel.

In South Africa the leading representatives of the humiliators and the humiliated have been prepared to work together. They are attempting to construct a new South Africa in which all races co-operate to advance their common interests. This has involved some painfully frank exchanges in the cause of truth and reconciliation. This has made the dismantling of apartheid much more peaceful than was feared.

Both South Africa and Egypt are special places. The Revolution of Human Rights is occurring within them in a relatively peaceful way. They are important sources of ideas and techniques for creating a humane global society.

Egypt and South Africa are different in many ways but they are linked by a common strategy: open and creative dialogue is encouraged by giving all people respect, and encouraging them to join together in accepting the responsibility to confront meaningful challenges.

This is the approach followed by the most productive international agencies. The best agencies do not bring in 'pre-packaged' solutions. They concentrate upon identifying practical needs, ordering priorities for reconstruction and building the basis for constructive dialogue.

This is the logic of humanisation. It confronts the logic of humiliation at every point: equality instead of hierarchy; open dialogue instead of hostile closure; flexibility instead of rigidity; creativity instead of destructiveness; and peaceful co-operation instead of violent conflict.

## **Chap 9      The Roots of Peace**

What should the West do?

Fighting the accusation of double standards and broken promises will not be easy for the West. Its best hope will be to put its weight behind the new logic of humanisation that is competing with the old logic of humiliation. At the start of the new millennium the struggle between the two logics is evenly balanced. Sustained efforts by governments and by leaders in every walk of life could make a difference to this struggle, pushing it one way or the other.

It is important for all concerned to become much more aware of the logic of humiliation and the way it poisons global relationships both between the North and the South and between the West and the East.

Instead, practical steps should be taken to promote practical equality, open dialogue, flexibility, creativity, and peaceful co-operation. This requires high levels of material investment. This must be paid by those who can afford it most easily. They, after all, will benefit most since they have most to lose if the spirit of destruction prevails.

The investment required should definitely not just take the form of a transfer of funds from rich to poor within structures that are left unchanged. There is an urgent need is for investment in the creation of *new structures* within nations and at the global level.

These structures should promote ever-denser cross-linkages between networks and a strong spirit of cooperation between all parties. There are some impressive precedents for this approach. After the Second World War, the American victors gave very strong encouragement to the movement for economic integration in Europe. There was a very strong steer from Washington in favour of creating permanent institutions enabling governments and peoples that had been bitter enemies to work together for their joint prosperity. The eventual outcome was the European Union.

More recently, following the Balkan War, the same strategy is being applied to Southeastern Europe. Nato and the EU are encouraging the Balkan states to establish close co-operative relations between themselves to rebuild the region and, eventually, become part of the European Union.

These two cases have a common pattern: a devastating war linked with genocide, a determination to avoid it in the future, and active institution-building to encourage creative peaceful co-operation.

If the logic of humiliation prevails or intensifies, the stage is set for a replay of this scenario on a global level. It is true that the main victims of humiliation belong to the South which is much poorer and weaker than the North. However, it may one day be in the interests of some government in the East – China, perhaps, or an Islamic state – to lead a crusade against the West on behalf of the South. The rhetoric might well have genocidal overtones, evoking the dreams of mass destruction already enacted in a small way through terrorist bombs.

At the very least, the scale of violence is liable to escalate. At some point, the desirability of promoting the logic of humanisation will become clear. During the late 1940s and 1950s, the French began to learn that the Germans were human and could be dealt with peacefully and constructively on a permanent basis. During the first decades of the new millennium, neighbours in the Balkans will be under considerable pressure to learn a similar lesson about each other. It is not too soon for the West to

learn the same lesson about the Chinese and about their Islamic ‘enemies’  
– and *vice versa*.