Egalisation: Equal Dignity for All

Evelin Lindner Medical Doctor, Psychologist Dr. med., Dr. psychol. 2020

Adapted from an early draft of Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2022). From Humiliation to Dignity: For a Future of Global Solidarity. Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press

I have coined the word *egalisation* as a short version of *equal dignity for all* and I call for the ending and healing of existing cycles of humiliation as well as the prevention of new cycles. The term egalisation aims at distinguishing equal dignity from notions such as equality, equity, egalitarianism, or identicalness, while at the same time avoiding claims that there should be no differences between people. When we look at the maxim of unity in diversity, egalisation is the opposite of oppressive uniformity, while at the same time guarding against attempts to legitimise inequality in the name of diversity. Egalisation inscribes itself in the *alter-globalisation* or *alter-mundialisation* movements that build on historical precursors such as the workers' movement, the peasants' movement, the decolonisation movement, or the women's rights movement. Alter-globalisation movements emerged in the late 1970s, when a new phase of capitalist globalisation unfolded, the phase of neo-liberalism and financialisation. These movements support global cooperation and interaction while they oppose the negative effects of economic globalisation, on the environment, on economic justice, on labour protection, and protection of indigenous cultures, peace, and civil liberties.

I meet widespread misinterpretations when I speak of egalisation. Some associate egalisation with the undoing of diversity and the imposition of uniformity. Some cry 'Gulag!' I always make clear that the point with using the term egalisation is precisely that it should *not* to be confused with uniformity, that it does *not* mean that everyone should become the same. Equal dignity is exactly the opposite of any enforced levelling of differences. 'Equal dignity should not be misconstrued as a strategy to equalise individuals through social conformity,' are the words of Linda Hartling.¹

Admittedly, however, there exists an important connection between the levelling of differences and equal dignity, and this connection is 'hidden' in the human rights stipulation that equal opportunities and enabling environments for all are necessary to protect human dignity. Equal dignity means equal chances for all to unfold their diversity, and this presupposes a certain amount and a certain kind of equality on the ground. Dignity is not truly equal in a context of unequal chances. Only equal chances make diversity possible, the very diversity that is precisely the opposite of uniformity. Egalisation opposes humiliating differences, egalisation opposes the spirit of 'since also poor people have dignity, attention to economic equality is unnecessary'. As I wrote in chapter 4, I see the Lévinasian-Buberian interpretation of dignity fitting this path more than the Kantian interpretation.²

A related misunderstanding occurs when equal dignity is taken to mean that there should be no hierarchy. Egality can perfectly coexist with certain forms of hierarchy when all participants are regarded as endowed with equal dignity.³ Egalisation cannot coexist, though, with a hierarchy that defines some people as worthier than others, that sees some as higher beings and others as lesser beings. The pilots of a plane can serve as an example. These pilots have a clear leadership role vis-à-vis their passengers when in the skies, clear hierarchy and stark inequality characterise this relationship where roles and authority are of crucial importance. This does *not* mean, however, that the pilots should look down on their passengers as *lesser* beings.⁴ Indeed, as also discourse analyst Michael Karlberg observes, a dignified social order cannot be without hierarchy. We need apt pilots, caring teachers, and nurturing parents. What hierarchy should no longer represent, however, is a structure of dominance born from power-seeking behaviour. 'Organic hierarchy provides the

organisation, coordination, and efficiency by which the diverse potentialities of autonomous individuals can be realised and their energies can be applied in productive ways that promote the common good'.⁵

If we look at the maxim of the French Revolution, *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité* — liberty, equality, and solidarity, cooperation, and care — then all three goals are lost if only liberty is aimed at. To truly manifest, liberty requires equal dignity that is informed by the dignified generosity and humility of solidarity, it needs responsible mutuality. The word *egalisation* aims to connote precisely this, namely, equal dignity that is free of humiliatingly imposed hierarchy, and at the same time free of forced equalisation. Thus defined, egalisation can dignify globalisation so it becomes *globegalisation*. When we add solidarity, we can draw together all three, liberté, égalité, and fraternité, into one phrase, namely, *co-operative globegalisation*, or, in one single word — *co-globegalisation*.

If we imagine the human world as a container with a height and a width, then *globalisation* addresses the horizontal dimension, the shrinking width, while *egalisation* speaks to the vertical dimension, the height of power differentials and inequality. Egalisation is a process that moves away from a very high container with superior masters at the top and inferior underlings at the bottom, towards a flat container where all enjoy equal dignity as individuals who are free to engage in loving solidarity with each other, and who live in mutually dignifying connection with all life on this planet.

The horizontal line in the middle of Figure 1 represents the line of equal dignity in shared humility and solidarity. It illustrates a worldview that refuses to essentialise secondary differences into primary differences, that refuses to define the core of human worthiness as something that is ranked, it resists rankism. Passengers in a plane are equal in dignity with the pilots, the pilots are not 'higher' beings. Even though the pilots have absolute power, their power does not diminish the passengers' essence as equal human beings. The middle line in Figure 1 does not signify that all human beings should be identical or the same. Being forced into uniformity is the opposite of equality in dignity. Equal dignity is a unifier that unites the power difference between the pilots and passengers as much as the diversity among the passengers. The middle line signifies that the pilots are part of a functional hierarchy without which the plane would not fly. The plane has no difficulties, however, to fly without a first class, flying does not require that the passengers are offered different levels of care. The passengers' diversity, if it is freely chosen and all have access to the same range of vital services on board, does not undermine equal dignity. The situation is different when rankists claim that the first class has the same legitimacy to make decisions as the pilots' cabin, and pretend that the passengers have freely chosen this inequality, thus overlooking the structural reasons behind this inequality. 8 In other words, the line of equal dignity only accepts diversity that is free of enforced inequality, it rejects inequality that dresses up as diversity.

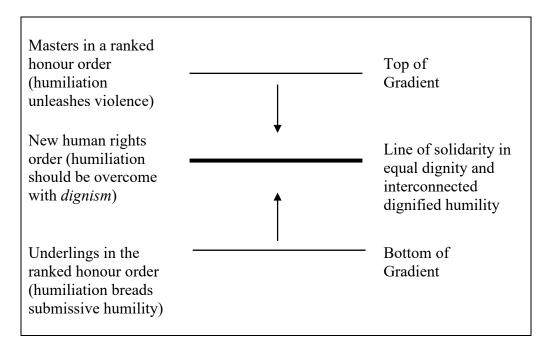


Figure 1: The historical transition to egalisation

Egalisation invites masters to step down from arrogating superiority and it encourages inferiors to rise up from humiliating subordination, up from being held down, released from having lesser value and worth ascribed to them. Overlords are humbled and underlings elevated, and all are entrusted with the co-creation of a new future of equality in dignity for all, as responsible individuals in solidarity. This is the way to true freedom.

While in former times only the tyrant was removed and the tyranny was kept in place, and the formerly oppressed became the new oppressors, a dignified future requires a level of peace making and bridge building that goes further. Former oppressors and former oppressed need to come together, just as Nelson Mandela strove to include all South Africans into one shared home country. First order change is not enough, second order change is needed — 'the power must be taken out of power'. Linear, transactional, partial, and quantitative change of behaviour within an existing system is insufficient when causes call for qualitative and discontinuous leaps, when multidimensional and multi-level transformations of the system itself are needed. Conflict resolution and compromise are insufficient when deep transformation is waiting to be manifested that engenders new enduring realities. We are in another 'story' now: 'from the liberation of the various "I's" (individuals, groups) we are immersed in the liberation of "we" (the global community of life on Earth). In opposition to life dominated by stakeholders, we have begun to write the history of the common universality of life'. 11

We all understand that millennia of cultural moulding will not be undone in a moment. The considerable psychological damage that this moulding has caused is still with us. During the past millennia, the overall geopolitical context of a strong security dilemma favoured the dominator system, and it is therefore unsurprising that even reformers with the loftiest aims sometimes continue with this script, that they frame life as a combat with winners and losers and engage in anger entrepreneurship. Their primary victims, unfortunately, are usually fellow reformers who have transcended such scripts.

Bill Baird is a reproductive rights pioneer and his experience can illustrate this predicament. He is being called the 'father' of the birth control and abortion-rights movement and was jailed eight times for lecturing on abortion and birth control. His wife kindly explained to me the reasons for why she and her husband call themselves *equalists* rather than feminists. ¹² Bill Baird was shunned and even invalidated not just by opponents of birth control, but also by feminist leaders. He was banned from speaking at and attending 'no men allowed' demonstrations with arguments such as: 'We women are capable of speaking for ourselves, thank you!' Or 'Baird's struggle is the same as

ours but it's our struggle!' Or 'What happened to him [Bill being banned from speaking] happens to women all the time!' Joni Baird explains:

I felt that such discrimination hurts a movement's ability to reach common goals. As Equalists, we believe that 'labels disable' and create 'us versus them' dynamics unnecessarily fragmenting movements. Therefore, Equalists focus on the content rather than the form of the world's many imbalanced, fear-based paradigms. Equalists believe all human beings are citizens of Planet Earth and set multiple goals for their liberation. We believe that in order to be collectively harmonious, abundant and balanced, certain universal tenets apply. Those tenets are inherently feminist with regard to our desire to radically change the current domination paradigm (occupied by all genders) to allow for equal pay, freedom from aggression, child friendly work environments, and gender diversity. Through this shift, matriarchy and patriarchy are changed to 'humanarchy'. ¹³

Not only are certain strands of feminism still beholden to millennia of cultural moulding, it also inspires backlashes against feminism. 'No men allowed' increasingly meets angry men's 'no women allowed' now, particularly among young males. The world is full of 'shitty women', this is the view of some MGTOWs, meaning Men Going Their Own Way, men who vow to refrain from serious romantic relationships with women, especially from marriage. ¹⁴ Biological and Darwinian determinists have a growing following when they hark back to concepts of maleness that are associated with 'activity', 'productivity', and 'conscious and moral/logical strategising', while regarding females as passive, unproductive, unconscious, and 'amoral/alogical' — all views that philosopher Otto Weininger expressed already in 1903 when he attributed general 'amorality' to women. ¹⁵ The message is that gender, gender roles, and dominance hierarchies are 'all firmly entrenched in our biological heritage and not to be toyed with'. ¹⁶

When I meet proponents of such views, I try to model *humanarchy* by explaining that the co-called *attribution error* may be at work, meaning that they attribute intrinsic factors where extrinsic ones are at work.¹⁷ Humanity was exposed to the brutal grip of the security dilemma during the past millennia and this forced them to embrace competition for domination and control in ways that neither women nor men were free to act according to their 'nature', on the contrary, they often acted against it.¹⁸ The case of the Nairobi slums reported earlier throws this into the starkest of relief. Social Darwinism as an intellectual school has a victim of this error and has rightly 'declined during the twentieth century as an expanded knowledge of biological, social, and cultural phenomena undermined, rather than supported, its basic tenets'.¹⁹

The only way to create a dignified future is to create a world where the systemic frames which organise human affairs enable all humans to live in resonance with human nature rather than having to mutilate it. The wounds of humiliation of the past wait for healing, and the wounds of humiliation that may occur in the future wait for prevention. During the transition, we must be aware of the danger that looms when those we ask to step down from arrogating superiority, those we ask to let go of privileges, will become interlocked in mutual cycles of humiliation with those who wish to rise up from subordination. Such dynamics carry the risk to completely derail a transition that otherwise could succeed. In short, egalisation also means that those who step down and those who rise up avoid humiliating each other.

Egalisation, to be operationalised, needs the principle of unity in diversity, because the solution is precisely *not* the eradication of all differences in a new totalitarian world that makes everyone the same. Further down, I will explain that I heed this insight even with respect to my own sense of identity. 'Sunflower identity' is the name I have coined for my personal global unity-in-diversity identity of fluid subsidiarity, and this identity helps me in my work of trying to contribute to the humanisation of globalisation.²⁰ This identity helps me conceptualise what is wrong with present-day *globalitarism*, the ideology that 'aims to propose the teleology of the market as the new master narrative of Western modernity'.²¹ Globalitarism has led to global polarisation and has cast a veil of silence over the obscene increase of inequalities both within and across boundaries.

To lift this veil is my aim, and to 'bring flowers to the ceremony' where *globalisation* marries *egalisation* to become *globegalisation*. A world full of lonely disconnected individuals cannot be our aim, as equal and 'free' as they may be, they also need to lovingly connect and collaborate. We need to include *fraternité*/sisterhood, or solidarity. When we look at the maxim of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, then globegalisation can draw together the first two, liberty and equality, yet, only in an incomplete way.²² The task of our time is loving *co-operative globegalisation*, or in one single short word — *co-globegalisation*.²³ Co-globegalisation is needed more than ever now. It is a question of humanity's survival or demise.

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I first formulated the phrase "taking the power out of power", in the course of my therapy work with parents. The phrase was in essence a goal I saw as worthy — one that meant the possibility of taking the air out of power struggles and putting the emphasis on discipline through relationship. I had begun to see there could be no authentic discipline without self-discipline for one. And then power alone seemed to be a dead end, leading to disaster in one way or another. I saw how ongoing power struggles could be the downfall of family intimacy, leading to children addicted to fighting — to taunting and to revenge. Or on the other side I saw the emergence of children so meek as to refrain from risking having their own uniqueness of personality or of opinion... Taking the power out of power would be to interrupt the use and abuse of power against us. It would also interrupt the tendency to turn our sense of inadequacy outward, as in ridiculing others — even our friends — and insisting we are better, righteous, morally superior.

If power is not taken out of power, the result risks to be this: 'The gullibility pandemic: Why America seems to be such fertile ground for conspiracy theories', by William Becker, *Wall Street International Magazine*, 8th January 2021, https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/64551-the-gullibility-pandemic.

¹ Hartling and Lindner, 2018.

² See note 188 in chapter 4.

³ See also physician and sociologist Nicholas Christakis, 2019, and his argument that *relative egalitarianism* (mild hierarchy) is one of eight 'natural desires' expressed in some form in every human society, the other seven being the capacity to have and recognise individual identity, love for partners and offspring, friendship, social networks, cooperation, preference for one's own group (that is, 'in-group bias'), and social learning and teaching.

⁴ Lindner, 2006, p. 52.

⁵ Karlberg, 2013.

⁶ Lindner and Desmond Tutu (Foreword), 2010, pp. 149–153.

⁷ See Fuller, 2003, and Fuller and Gerloff, 2008. In a human rights context that stipulates that all human beings ought to be treated as equal in dignity and rights, hurtful psychological dynamics of humiliation are set in motion when *rankism* is practiced, when, for instance, 'women' are regarded as a lowly category, or 'children', 'the elderly', 'foreigners', and so forth. It is a privilege to have Robert Fuller as an esteemed member in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship.

⁸ I thank Øystein Gullvåg Holter for discussing with me the problem with *equal dignity* (*likeverd*) and *gender equality* (*likestilling*), and how the notion of equal dignity can be abused to undermine gender equality with the argument that inequality is nothing but freely chosen diversity. See the 2nd International Conference on Democracy as Idea and Practice at the University of Oslo, 13–14th January 2011, with Workshop 5. Democracy, Gender and Dignity in a Global Perspective together with Holter. See www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/pics11.php#demokrati, and www.stk.uio.no/om/historie/bulletine/2011-1/Bulletine-01-2011.pdf.

⁹ 'Taking the power out of power', by Carol Smaldino, *Medium*, 10th January 2021, https://carol-5441.medium.com/taking-the-power-out-of-power-91de574c1a41:

- ¹⁰ Watzlawick, et al., 1974. I thank Diane Perlman for sharing with us her foundational thoughts for the Coalition for Second Order Change (COSOC) in a personal communication, 12th May 2019.
- ¹¹ 'Health for all? The conflict between dominant and dominated social groups is now clear and strong', by Riccardo Petrella, W*all Street International Magazine*, 21st December 2020, https://wsimag.com/science-and-technology/64383-health-for-all. Riccardo Petrella, 79, is an Italian living in Belgium, an Emeritus Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium), Dr H.C. of eight universities from Sweden, Denmark, France, Canada, Argentina and Belgium. His research and teaching fields have been regional development, poverty, science and technology policy, globalisation. See also his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'After the pandemic: Which future?' 3rd June 2020, where he calls for large-scale systemic change to put an end to:
 - the commercial, agricultural, industrial, and techno-scientific financial capitalist system which has imposed itself on the Earth as the "dominant system" over the last two centuries. The capitalist system has enslaved the world, the individual and collective creativity of human beings, and the Earth in pursuit of short-term financial return.
 - the political-institutional system of human communities represented by States based on the principle of 'absolute national sovereignty'. 'National sovereignty' has been increasingly exercised in the name of 'national security', i.e., the security of the interests and power of the local dominant social groups. Hence, the growing and apparently inexorable militarisation of the economy and of life, that is, the substantial power of maneuver reserved in priority for military powers, in particular nuclear powers.
 - the new imperial system of the technocratic oligarchies which, in the new phase of dematerialisation of knowledge and technology, is engulfing the power of the old industrial and military oligarchies. I refer, in a precise way, to the transfer of power from the kings of the railways or steel of the 19th century to 'Big Pharma' (based on patents on living organisms) and the GAFAM Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft (based on patents on artificial intelligence).
- ¹² Why i call myself an equalist! by Joni Baird, 2018, Huntington, NY: Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, http://humiliationstudies.org/documents/BairdanEqualist2018.pdf. It is a privilege to have Joni Baird as an esteemed member in our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship.
- ¹³ Why i call myself an equalist! by Joni Baird, 2018, Huntington, NY: Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, http://humiliationstudies.org/documents/BairdanEqualist2018.pdf. It is a privilege to have Joni Baird as an esteemed member in our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship.
- ¹⁴ Smith, 2013.
- ¹⁵ Philosopher Otto Weininger, 1903. Weininger wrote in his last diary entries before he committed suicide at the age of twenty-three: 'Der Haß gegen die Frau ist nichts anderes als der Haß gegen die eigene, noch nicht überwundene Sexualität'. Translated to English, 'The hatred of women is none other than the hatred of one's own, not yet overcome sexuality'. In other words, in the spirit of the correspondence bias, Weininger attributed amorality to women without considering that they may only appear to be 'anti-moral' due to the systemic pressures they had to adapt to for centuries. One may conclude that Weininger's own sexuality (together with his Jewish background) fell prey to a sad misattribution.
- ¹⁶ 'I was Jordan Peterson's strongest supporter. Now I think he's dangerous', by Bernard Schiff, *The Star*, 25th May 2018, www.thestar.com/opinion/2018/05/25/i-was-jordan-petersons-strongest-supporter-now-i-think-hes-dangerous.html. See also 'Nuance: A love story: My affair with the intellectual dark web', by Meghan Daum, *Medium*, 24th August 2018, https://medium.com/s/greatescape/nuance-a-love-story-ae6a14991059.
- ¹⁷ Correspondent inference theory indicates that we infer that other people's actions correspond to their underlying personality and disposition. Some psychologists have used the terms correspondence bias and fundamental attribution error interchangeably. See, among others, Gilbert, 1998. Others theorize that they are independent phenomena, with the correspondence bias resulting from a much wider range of processes. See, among others, Gawronski, 2004, Gawronski and Bodenhausen, 2006.
- ¹⁸ See also Lindner, 2019, *Human nature, honor, and dignity: If we continue to believe in the evilness of human nature, we may be doomed,* a book proposal:

I suspect that the survival of humankind on planet Earth may depend on how the story of human nature is narrated... I consider the topic of human nature, with all its intriguing aspects, to be perhaps the most important topic for humankind.

See also Lindner, 2017, chapter 3: Also human nature and cultural diversity fell prey to the security dilemma, in the book *Honor*, *humiliation*, *and terror*.

A vast body of literature is available. See the work of primatologist and ethologist Frans de Waal, 2009, who disagrees with the proverb *Homo homini lupus est* (man is wolf to man) by saying that it both fails to do justice to canids and denies the inherently social nature of our own species. See also the work of anthropologists William Ury and Robert Carneiro, as well as of world-systems scholar Christopher Chase-Dunn, all discussed in chaper 9 of this book.

¹⁹ 'I was Jordan Peterson's strongest supporter. Now I think he's dangerous', by Bernard Schiff, *The Star*, 25th May 2018, www.thestar.com/opinion/2018/05/25/i-was-jordan-petersons-strongest-supporter-now-i-think-hes-dangerous.html. See also 'Nuance: A love story: My affair with the intellectual dark web', by Meghan Daum, *Medium*, 24th August 2018, https://medium.com/s/greatescape/nuance-a-love-story-ae6a14991059.

²⁰ Lindner, 2012. See also Svašek and Skrbiš, 2007.

²¹ Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 2003, p. 48.

²² See also Lindner, 2006, p. 27.

²³ Lindner and Desmond Tutu (Foreword), 2010, pp. 149–153.