

Evelin Lindner's reflections compiled after the 31st Annual Conference of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, in Cairo, Egypt, 21st - 24th September 2018

See also www.humiliationstudies.org/publications/newsletter/31.php

30th September 2018

Dear friends! I am still filled with fond memories from our conference and miss you all. I am amazed how you taught me to understand ever more, how important the work of relationship building is! The *dominator model of society* (Riane Eisler's coinage) of the past millennia still guides mainstream society, and this includes conferences. I am so thankful to all participants for taking the risk of being part of a conference that is self-organised, rather than rigidly pre-planned and conducted in a top-down manner.

Our Dignilogue days were unbelievably enriching for me! The intellectual sharing was so much enhanced by the fact that we also connected emotionally. It became so palpable to me how the concept of 'sharing ideas' without emotional person-to-person connection risks failing to open up for the deep understanding and learning that the Dignilogue format intends. This does not mean that I do not enjoy 'helicopter presentations' as well, where people 'fly in and out' for their presentations, and I, sitting in the audience, learn a lot. However, it is so interesting to observe how this enjoyment is so different when deep sharing happens in Dignilogues! The entire conference was such a wonderful learning experience for me, for which I wish to profoundly thank you all!

Relationship-building is usually vastly underrated: As I observe it, not only the academic community lacks what might be called emotional literacy. After living globally for the past forty years, I observe how the work of creating trusting human-to-human connections fails to be done in so many contexts, not least the academic context: it is still seen as a negligibly 'female' task. What happens instead is that a 'male' script of throwing one's weight around turns what should be a community into a scary battlefield where mistrust becomes the 'smartest' skill to practice. To say it in a caricature: the traditional professor/director was a man, who had a female secretary, who did all the relationship-building work for him, she smoothed over his relational rough edges, soothed those he had insulted, and even bought the flowers for his wife's birthday. By naming this situation, I do not wish to blame the professor/director or the secretary, since this was 'the way it was'. However, in present-day's world, it becomes dangerous to maintain this habitus and remain blind to these arrangements, blind to these blind spots. Particularly, if we wish to nurture a global citizens movement, people from different backgrounds will have to come together, and relationship-

building work will need to be carried out much more broadly and intentionally than has been so far. No technical innovation can replace this, no ever-so 'professional' approach can remedy this. Notions such as 'family', 'friend', 'colleague', or 'stranger' will have to be brought together into a sense of being part of a global dignity family. This relationship-building work is therefore one of the main foci of our work in the global HumanDHS fellowship. Linda Hartling, our director, and her expertise in relational-cultural theory, as developed by her mentor Jean Baker Miller, is therefore crucial for our work.

I recommend my book *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*, because there I discuss how difficult it is to make the transition from a hierarchical system to equality in dignity. (Please ask me and I share my private review copy with you.)

'Dignitaries' who feel entitled to arrogate superiority may define their superiority as essential for their dignity, and may violently resist any call to join the rest of society at the middle, at the line of equality in dignity, let alone help those from below to rise up. They may passionately refuse any attempts to humble them and will interpret those attempts as humiliation. A man who beats his wife, for instance, may feel entitled to do so, and he may interpret any endeavour by the social worker to make him equal to his wife as humiliation. He may accuse the social worker of being a troublemaker who disturbs the peace of the house and spoils his wife's willingness to be obedient. Furthermore, he may accuse his wife of 'hating men' if she calls for equal dignity and rights. Feminism is therefore among those movements that have become victims of this polarising bias. Or, another example: Many white supremacists in South Africa were proud that 'their' fellow black citizens had a better quality of life than in many other African states; in their eyes, their fellow black citizens were simply ungrateful whenever they called for equal rights and dignity.

Those who have privileges typically are blind to those privileges and do not notice the systemic disadvantages others suffer. If they do notice their privileges, many of them tend to be convinced that they deserve them. And even if they intellectually understand that they do not necessarily merit having those privileges, they will resist giving them up due to the simple human weakness called loss aversion. Loss aversion means that one hesitates to give up what one has, even if what one would receive in exchange would be better. Wealthy people therefore tend to live in social 'bubbles' that reinforce their sense of entitlement and paint those in society who wish to rise up from below as undeserving 'enemies'.

As I explain in the *Making Enemies* book, also those at the bottom of the hierarchy encounter countless challenges, not just outside of themselves in society, but also in

their own psyches. The beaten wife, for instance, or any other person at the bottom of the ladder, may staunchly defend her lowly position as her inherent dignity, her inherent identity, and therefore defensively resist external attempts to raise her to the level of equality in dignity with all people. Or, others may use their lowly position as a justification for why they cannot even make an effort to rise up. Or, they may revel in their sense of victimhood and turn victimhood into an asset. One section in my *Making Enemies* book addresses the 'addiction to humiliation'.

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Also in my other books, including my new book on *Honor, Humiliation, and Terror*, I address these problems.

The way out of all these challenges is to think comprehensively and acknowledge the problems that are to be expected when a hierarchy is to be dismantled. Those at the bottom and those at the top are called on to discontinue vilifying each other and instead to help each other overcome all obstacles. Obstacles are the systemic humiliation engrained in societies after many hundreds or even thousands of years of hierarchy, and the conditioning this has engendered in the minds and souls of the population. Any liberation from the chains of oppressive hierarchy is bound to be difficult for the first generation - it will produce to many disappointing results - and only the next generation may find space and be wise enough to nurture the liberation constructively. During the transition period, the revolutionaries will be punished by all those who had been successfully brainwashed, over centuries, into believing that their superiority or inferiority is god-given or in line with nature. The first generation of revolutionaries will also not have the skills to align structure with feelings in

constructive ways.

1st October 2018:

The problem of true love:

It is interesting for me to compare my experience in India last year, with my experience in Egypt this year. When coming to India, I learned from the young students that they wish for less pressure from their extended families, most importantly, they wish for what they call 'love marriage' rather than arranged marriages. They wished for authentic, mutually beneficial connection, rather than relationships primarily designed to achieve some form of strategic advantage.

I promised them that our conference would offer them the very 'training in dialogue' that they will need in case their wish is fulfilled and they have the opportunity to make love work in daily life. Cultivating relationships based on authentic connection, mutuality, and love involves practicing new ways of being in relationship. This can be much more complex and demanding – yet far more emotionally rewarding – than engaging in a relationship that has been arranged by others or a relationship of superficial infatuation. To build loving, authentic connections, dialogue skills such as 'listening-others-into-voice' are indispensable. I wrote a book on 'Big Love', and I send the links to all my books and articles as my gift to everybody who is interested. 'Big Love' is needed not just in marriage, it is needed in all of society, locally and globally.

Let me offer a kind of timeline for liberation:

1. In a traditional *dominator model of society* (Riane Eisler's coinage), spouses are expected to be dutiful, they have rights and duties. Feelings on all sides are imprisoned in a rigid societal structure. Only when the *partnership model of society* is realised, are feelings allowed to flow and shape the official form of the relationship (including marriage and divorce).
2. True love goes beyond duty and is spontaneous, it cannot be forced, ordered, or commanded by contract. True love contributes to the healthy psychological growth and development of both people in the relationship. When love emerges, it still has to be nurtured with dignified dialogue, otherwise it will falter. Infatuation is not yet true love.
3. In partnership societies, when love is missing in a relationship, partners can align their feelings with reality by working through the process of divorce. In a traditional

dominator context, in contrast, the concept of true love might either be unknown, or, if it is known, and if true love lacks, both partners are expected to close their eyes to the truth of their lives without love. Partners may even try to humiliate their spouses into shame about the lack of love in their lives. They may blame each other, for instance, for the fact that true love cannot be ordered as a duty. Or they may choose certain religious teachings and overlook alternative religious teachings so that they can hide the lack of love in their relationships behind those teachings (for instance, some religions offer the view that sex is sinful and should best be avoided, except in marriage, where it is part of duty but should be kept at a minimum). Or they may accuse their partners of being selfish if they do not sacrifice their soul to sustain their loveless relationships for the stability of family and society. The subordinate partner may unwittingly accept being humiliated, he or she may internalise these arguments that suggest that s/he is required to stay in a loveless relationship, and thus her internalised humiliation transforms into self-humiliation.

4. In a traditional dominator context, people are being taught to keep a perfect facade and to believe that it protects the children if all pretend that everything is perfect, even while their feelings betray the opposite. The entire society is being humiliated by the misinformation that pretends to protect families and children. All engage in self-humiliation by believing in this misinformation and, as a result of believing in this, they punish all those who want to liberate themselves from this trap.

5. Traditional dominator societies are often unaware of the significance of the unconscious, internal impact of humiliation and unaware that humiliation and self-humiliation damage the next generation even if it is hidden behind a veil of pretence. Traditional dominator societies close their eyes to the fact that children are hurt and deeply confused by mixed messages of pretending that everything is fine while humiliation is reality. Later in life, those children are likely to make choices that entrench themselves in the same double-bind situation. In this way, the trauma becomes trans-generational.

6. If people blame each other for the fact that true love cannot be ordered as a duty, if they even engage in self-humiliation, they voluntarily multiply, amplify, and intensify the humiliation of the system.

7. If people who live a loveless life seek secret solutions – like having extra-marital affairs – they are weakened even further when they believe that this turns them into sinners.

8. If people believe that society becomes instable if feelings are allowed to shape the official structure of its institutions, and if they are being portrayed as selfish if they

strive to protect their inner integrity, this also multiplies the systemic humiliation.

9. Because the entire society engages in self-humiliation, society is incapable of liberating itself from this toxic system and punishes those who try to liberate themselves.

10. As a traditional dominator society is a context of systemic humiliation, it does not permit people to align their reality with their feelings: divorce does either not exist, or, if it exists, it is too destructive for the reputation of the entire extended family. Dominator society does not permit people to fully align their thoughts about reality with their feelings. Thoughts and feelings must remain in a state of permanent and perpetual disconnection. In these conditions, people are cut off from experiencing the richness and energy that flows from experiencing true love that fosters the alignment of thoughts with feelings.

11. In this way, only those who are lucky to have true love in their marriage are living fulfilled lives. All others are condemned to pretending. Spending one's life without true love often resembles a death-sentence, like waiting for death instead of living. Only an accomplished partnership society can offer psychological health to its citizens, namely, the absence of systemic humiliation, the absence of having to live lives of pretension, the absence of disempowerment through blaming and shaming.

12. If we search for the reasons for these misconceptions to exist in the first place, we see that the traditional dominator model of society does not want people to develop independent thinking. Its rulers need obedient underlings who are tools in their hands, and this is achieved through systemic humiliation. It is achieved by forcing everybody into rules that are so rigid and inhumane so that it is humanly impossible to fulfil them. The result is a populace that is weakened and made governable through shame. Among others, the misconception is disseminated that love can be forced by contract or that children are protected through pretending. The true reason for such misinformation is that the dominator system needs obedient underlings and that forcing people into false expectations and pretension creates weak underlings who can be ruled more easily.

Solutions:

1. When a person suspects she is being humiliated, he or she needs to look this humiliation in the face. This person should not allow a humiliator or a humiliating system to brainwash her to the point that she voluntarily humiliates herself. For humiliators, it is the maximum of success when they can groom their victims to agree with their humiliation and commit the humiliation on themselves. For humiliators, this

is full success, when the victim voluntarily destroys her own inner integrity. Therefore, the first solution is to face humiliation, that is, 'read it' and 'name it' in order to 'oppose it' and 'replace it' before it is converted into self-humiliation (Ward, 2000).

2. This means: Stop believing that a toxic system is a good system, stop believing that humiliating practices and arrangement of relationships are god-given. Stop saying: 'That is how life is, we are powerless'. Humiliation is insidious in its ability to instil inertia in its victims.

3. Stop self-humiliation. Do not allow the humiliator to succeed in destroying your inner integrity. For instance, stop believing you are a sinner if you seek extra-marital solutions in case your marriage is a loveless prison.

4. Stop believing that pretending protects your children. Your children will always see through this façade.

5. Be frank with your children. Only frankness can protect them from destroying their inner integrity through self-humiliation later in life. Teach your children to look humiliation into the face, teach your children to avoid believing in lies that only serve a toxic system and destroy their integrity. It is a misconception that true love can be ordered and forced as a part of duty and that pretending protects children. Look into the face of the fact that these misconceptions have another function, namely, to keep a dominator system in place.

6. Give the next generation the strength to get rid of the dominator system and create a partnership system. Teach your children that the dominator system is human-made and that humans can therefore also change it. It is not god-given. When you do that, at least your children have a chance to be liberated. Throw away the societal chains that imprisoned your life, that you learned to put on yourself, and stop passing these chains on to your children.

7. Stop believing that sacrificing your soul is needed for the stability of a family and a society. Stop believing that the health of a family requires anyone to keep a prison-like life in place. The prison is intended to keep the dominator system in place. The price paid by all involved is that it ultimately damages the soul of all people, victims and dominators. There are now societies that prove this. As soon as a whole society accepts that aligning the official structure of your life, aligning your thoughts and experience with your feelings, rather than amputating your feelings in service of a disabling social structure, opens the door to constructive adaptations. The alignment of structure with feelings can be highly beneficial for all, children, parents, and

society as a whole. All of society becomes a much better place when the gap between official facade and inner feelings is closed, and when this is done in loving dignity. Nobody has to kill their soul or lie and hide and live secretive lives anymore. The whole society becomes a better place when the partnership model of society is accomplished.

8. However, the transition from the dominator system to the partnership system is difficult in the first phase. The reason is that in the dominator system, people do not learn how to nurture true love. They learn to think in terms of duties and rights and not in terms of loving dialogue. After having liberated themselves, your children will wish for a life full of true love, but they will only have learned the skills of fulfilling duty. To nurture true love, it requires completely different skills than the skills of fulfilling your duty. Nurturing true love requires the skills of deep listening, empathic understanding, and mindful dialogue with your partner. Teach your children what true love is. Use the nurturant parent model of pedagogy rather than the strict father model: Cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe the strict father model, a pedagogical framework that produces obedient inferiors, in contrast to the nurturant parent model that nurtures responsible and aware citizens. In particular: be aware of the destructive influence of the currently reigning Homo economicus ideology. True love cannot flourish in a context where everybody competes for domination, where everything is measured in terms of performance, where quality is replaced with calculating quantities.

The problem of money

Love marriage is not the only thing young people in India wish for, the other thing I heard was: money.

While they wish for money, we all know that the priority given to money in today's world is precisely what destroys our social relationships and our planetary environment. Many ask me whether I find new and future-oriented thinking in India's and Egypt's academic worlds, and whether Indian and Egyptian scholars have suggestions for how to solve our many local and global economic crises, which are intertwined with our environmental and social crises (for instance: producing more plastic products is profitable, but soon there will be more plastic waste in the oceans than fish...). I am told that we cannot wait for Wall Street or London City to find solutions. Countries like India and Egypt are now expected to think in completely new ways to find solutions.

Indeed, the economic arrangements that we have in the world create ever more 'forgotten people', people who are likely to vote for extreme or even extremist leaders.

In the Balkans, where we had our 2016 Dignity Conference, such leaders started horrible wars. A core aspect of these crises is the way money is being created and disseminated. Young students around the world, particularly in countries like India and Egypt, have therefore now the responsibility to work for the reform of global economic thinking, especially reform of the institution of money. I would therefore like to invite all to become part of the global groups of scholars who reflect on future-oriented sustainable ways of organising our global economic frameworks, so that also local approaches and solutions can become more dignifying.

You might like to look at my 2012 book on *A Dignity Economy*, just download the Pdf file. I recommend also www.greattransition.org, where you see discussions on 'Money for the people', 'Round Table on Money', and so on. See, furthermore, the work of Howard Richards, a philosopher who is part of our dignity network's global advisory board since many years. He draws on experiences from Chile and South Africa. His book *Economic Theory and Community Development* is forthcoming in Dignity Press. See also another book co-authored by him for Dignity Press in 2013: *Gandhi and the Future of Economics*, 2013. Howard sends you all his love!

Please meet also Kamran Mofid on our Global Advisory Board. You might like to learn about his Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI).

In conclusion, both the traditional dominator model of society and the 'modern' Western society are destructive for the health of a society and its people. True love is prevented from flourishing in both systems. None of those systems gives space to true love. The traditional dominator model keeps everybody weak through systemic humiliation that imprisons all involved in shame, guilt, and fear, while the systemic humiliation in 'modern' Western society is carried out through degrading quality into quantity by measuring everything and basing it on the ratio calculus of market pricing, with the result that everything can be bought with money. True love can only flourish when people liberate themselves from both forms of humiliation, from submission under direct oppression and from submission under economism. Openly oppressive domination tries to bring people to mutilate their souls voluntarily, but it meets resistance, while indirect domination through economism no longer meets resistance and thus represents the ultimate success of domination: people mistake economism as freedom, and thus they voluntarily bring about their own bondage. True love can only flourish when people liberate themselves from both forms of systemic humiliation.