

After the Pandemic: Which Future?

Reflections by Evelin Lindner

in contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion of May 2020

<https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/great-ethics-transition>

See the long version of this text at

www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/evelin/ReflectionsWhichFuture2020long.pdf

The comments below draw on

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www.transcend.org/tms/2020/05/the-coronavirus-pandemic-as-opportunity-in-the-midst-of-suffering-for-a-future-of-global-solidarity/.

See also

'From Humiliation to Dignity: For a Future of Global Solidarity — The Coronavirus Pandemic as Opportunity in the Midst of Suffering', Evelin Lindner's contribution on 30th May 2020 to Panel 20

'Solidarity, Accessibility and Self', of the virtual conference 'The Psychology of Global Crises', convened by the American University of Paris, 20th–30th May 2020. See

<https://youtu.be/k3QtIwqTpDg>.

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Dear Paul, Jonathan, and all across the Great Transition Network, please accept my deep appreciation for this extremely rich and enlightening discussion. As always, the depth and breadth of your knowledge and wisdom humbles me. Paul and the Global Scenario Group's essay from 2002 and its follow-ups have been foundational for my work.

A positive note: What we can do

In this group, we all seem to agree that we, as humankind, have dug ourselves into a multitude of perilous crises, both despite and because of what we call progress. Notwithstanding, allow me to begin my comments with a positive note. Few people seem to take in that *Homo sapiens* lives in a historically unparalleled promising moment. For the very first time in its history, humankind is in a position to succeed in bringing about the kinds of adaptation that are needed. Unlike our forebears, we have the privilege of experiencing the *overview effect* with respect to our planet, which helps us understand that we humans are *one* species living on *one* tiny planet, so that we can embrace *biophilia*. We have everything needed to build global mutual trust and solidarity, we can humanise globalisation and reap the benefits that flow from the global ingathering of humanity. As Arthur Dahl notes, 'the forces of integration have also been building momentum, with information systems uniting the world as never before and empowering a sense of belonging to one human family.'

What we do

Instead, however, we engage in systemic humiliation — *ecocide* and *sociocide*; we shred our relations with our habitat and with each other. We degrade our *sociosphere* and our *cogitosphere*,

our sphere of thinking and reflection, to the point that we sacrifice our *ecosphere* and thus embark on our collective suicide as a species.

At the current historic juncture, two historically new forces — globalisation and the rise of human rights ideals — create expectation gaps, or *dignity gaps*, or *indignity traps*, which make feelings of humiliation arise more forcefully than ever before, feelings of humiliation in the face of acts and systems of humiliation. Cycles of humiliation can turn a potentially united ‘global village’ into a divided war zone.

Today’s defining systemic humiliation is a world-system (Wallerstein’s notion) that gives priority to profit maximisation rather than common good maximisation, a state of affairs that sends humiliation into every corner of the world. The coronavirus pandemic was a ‘predicted crisis’ due to this predicament. The rush for profit at any price is bringing humans in close contact with novel pathogens that can spread around the world, killing hundreds of thousands in a few months, while at the same time pushing aside decades of warnings.

Despite the immense window of opportunity waiting for us to use, unfortunately, so far, instead of recognising the depth of the crises we are in and instead of grasping our historic opportunity to exit, it seems that most of us choose to stay shortsighted and myopic. Like Vishwas Satgar from South Africa, I see that Paul Raskin’s Barbarism and Fortress World scenarios have arrived.

What stands in the way of what we can do

French Aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) authored the classic text *The Ancien Regime and the revolution* in 1856. He observed that the chance for uprisings is greatest not when dearth is so severe that it causes apathy and despair, but when conditions had been improving, and even more so when this improvement benefitted a privileged few more than the rest. What Tocqueville alluded to was the *expectation gap* that opens when improved conditions raise hopes without fulfilling them. When raised hopes get disappointed, retaliation may ensue, retaliation that is more impactful precisely through the improved conditions that give better access to resources.

I see current systemic frames creating dearth to the point that people become paralysed. As I observe, people are not able to act on their feelings of rage over acts and systems of humiliation in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s *conscientisation* and Nelson Mandela’s strategy of inclusiveness because *sociocide* and *cogitocide* stand in the way.

Cogitocide comes from Latin *caedere*, or the killing of the *cogitosphere*, the realm of thinking and reflection. Humanity is drowning in data, yet it is a sightless infosphere — artificial *intelligence* is a misnomer — it is artificial *sightlessness*. *Sociocide* is brought to people not least through systemic frames that incentivise selfishness and caste suspicion on selflessness, in the belief that Adam Smith’s invisible hand will come to rescue. As a result – and I observe this all around the globe – people are being morally and psychologically crippled to the point that they lack the courage to envision and create systemic frames that would invite pro-social behaviour with ‘visible hands’.

The spirit of love

All my life, I have been preparing for the next ‘Eleanor Roosevelt moment’, like in 1948, when a window of opportunity stood open for dignity to get the attention it deserves. In the global dignity movement that I help to build, we work to nurture another moment like this, and we hope to be among the co-authors of this moment, contributing with our approach of what we call *big love*. I am therefore particularly delighted to see the word ‘love’ being mentioned in this discussion by two women, Kavita Byrd and Mamphela Ramphela. Kavita Byrd points out that the Covid pandemic has illuminated the regenerative potential of love, care, and solidarity, and that a ‘just, loving, caring world, a reverence for the sacred on this Earth and beyond’ is possible, but, of course — only if we act. Her diagnosis is also mine, namely, that ‘the global capitalist system’ has caused the crisis, and ‘will cause many more to come’, and that the ‘spirit of love’ needs to be ‘expressed in our consciousness, actions and world’. Mamphela Ramphela mirrors my observations after forty-five years of what I call ‘global living’ — of being at home on all continents — namely, that huge

benefits flow from the leadership of ‘progressive women who are demonstrating the power of the feminine to operate within a values framework that emphasises interconnectedness, interdependence, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibilities and complementarities.

The hope

The only realistic hope I see — as faint as it may be — is that enough people will wake up to understand that in an interconnected world it is not only practical, but essential for our continued existence on our planet to move towards a world-system that enables trust and mutual solidarity to emerge both locally and globally. Cycles of humiliation can re-fragment the world and bring back the classical security dilemma. Global human-to-human trust building is everyone’s responsibility now, rather than leaving the navigation of ‘foreign relations’ to diplomats, while allowing the Global North to abuse the world as business opportunity and leisure park. The more the classical security dilemma attenuates through the ingathering of humanity and a rising awareness of humanity being one family on a finite, interconnected, vulnerable planet, and the more ideals of equal dignity become salient, the more the various fields of psychology gain significance, and political science loses it. Global inter-human relations are increasingly in demand, overtaking international relations.

I have coined the term *dignism* (dignity + ism) to describe 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 everybody’s basic needs are met. It is a world where we unite in respecting human dignity and celebrating diversity, where we prevent unity from devolving into oppressive uniformity and keep diversity from sliding into hostile division.

As the world watches the heart-breaking coronavirus pandemic unfold, our hope is for an exponential change of heart so that global unity rooted in respect for our local diversities becomes possible. We hope to be ready to answer the following question together with everyone: *How must we, humankind, arrange our affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible in the long term?*

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