

Cities at Risk: From Humiliation to Dignity

Evelin Lindner, in dialogue with Kjell Skjellstad

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‘Cities at Risk - From Humiliation to Dignity’

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ABSTRACT

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Dan Smith, director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and former director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and International Alert in London, has this forecast for the future of the world: Unless there is dramatic change in how economies are run, population growth and fast-paced urbanisation will drive continually increasing demand for natural resources across the next 20 years, leading to wide-spread social disconnection. This scenario will combine with rising prices as a result of growing competition for access to natural resources. Among the ‘winners’ will be the conflict entrepreneurs, the gang leaders, the under-bosses, who will recruit their foot soldiers among disaffected young men. Most people will be caught in between.

Contemporary examples of so-called foreign fighters show that, indeed, young men, particularly those suffering from a sense of humiliation for being ‘losers’, are vulnerable to being recruited into becoming foot soldiers by promises of honour.

The majority of people will be caught in between and will suffer indignities from all sides, both from the destructive economic systems themselves, and from the social and ecological damage these systems cause. In the worst-case, the world, its cities included, could turn into many small-scale off-limits war zones, and thus combine *ecocide* with *sociocide*.

If we follow the African adage that ‘it needs a village to raise a child’, then the number of disaffected children and youth in the global village will rise, who, in turn, may increasingly willingly follow humiliation-entrepreneurs who will further weaken or even ravage this village.

How can such a future of humiliation be avoided, and a future of dignity be attained? Lindner calls for the ‘global street’ to stand up and, humanise globalisation by *egalisation* (short for ‘equal dignity for all’) into *globegalisation* and co-create *dignism* (dignity + ism), which 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 everybody’s basic needs are met,
- a world, where we are united in respecting human dignity and celebrating diversity, where we prevent unity from being perverted into oppressive uniformity, and keep diversity from sliding into hostile division.

KJELL SKYLLSTAD

Our conference on urban risks could not have come a minute too early in view of the overwhelming events of recent days, all characterized by the use of open violence. And then, behind the facade, there is the structural violence and oppression hidden from sight that from time to time fuels these violent eruptions.

No doubt, important questions will be raised at the conference: Do we have to prepare ourselves for permanent living in violent cities? And then, no doubt, also the issue of radicalization will surface.

History tells us that the fight against tyranny, apartheid, and colonialism have been fought by movements that could be called radical in the political context of their times, using radical means. But history also tells us how nonviolence may have achieved a much more lasting change. Because violence begets violence and revenge take precedence over forgiveness.

I may be a hopelessly romantic musicologist, who researches how the arts can be seen to connect to the nonviolence movement. Mozart in his last year gave us three documents on the use of nonviolence for social change. *Die Zauberflöte* and conflict transformation, *La Clemenza di Tito* and forgiveness, and *Requiem* and peace.

This is the basis for our Urban Research Plaza, our *Journal of Urban Culture Research* and our conferences. Standing up for citizen rights, disclosing urban mismanagement in all shapes, promoting participatory governance, giving the voiceless a voice, building partnerships for change, turning humiliation into dignity for all.