

Reflections on Human Rights as the Frontier of Emancipation

Reflections on Kathryn Sikkink's essay
Human Rights: Advancing the Frontier of Emancipation
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Before delving into Kathryn Sikkink's essay, I would like to thank her for her important reflections. I admire her ability to summarize complex historical developments in ways that are short and concise. Shortness sometimes opens for deeper understanding. Reading her text feels like looking back on our time from the future, a distance from where dead-end roads can become clearer, while those caught in the middle are often too immersed in the details to see patterns. Allow me to share some examples. Sikkink writes:

The twentieth century saw several other competing visions of emancipation, including nationalism, communism, and anticommunism. Many perceived these visions as more compelling than that of human rights, in part because they appeared to offer a more rapid and complete path to emancipation. Yet each at one time or another has led to mass atrocity because supporters of the great alternative utopias of the twentieth century were often prepared to sacrifice individual humans for some end they believed would lead ultimately to greater human emancipation. Nationalism, communism, and anticommunism all sought utopian ends – a great nation, a classless society, or liberty from totalitarianism – but each came to justify violent and abusive means to achieve those ends.”

...

The twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of deadly new visions of emancipation: Islamic fundamentalism and Western antiterrorism. Islamic fundamentalism imagined emancipation through a world governed by Sharia law under a Muslim Caliph; antiterrorism aimed to emancipate society from the fear of violent terrorism. Both, however, shared a belief that the ends justified the means.

Allow me to go through Sikkink's essay and weave her thoughts into the context of my work and the work of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies. We treasure Sikkink's essay, because it helps us reflect on our path.

The mood is dark

In my view, far from “the province of starry-eyed idealists and sanctimonious imperialists,” the foundational value basis of the human rights vision is the province of the truest of realism. Forty years of global living have shown me that the promise of equality in dignity for all members of the human family is a profoundly welcome promise all around the world. This welcome looms large even underneath the thickest layers of fear of change, the fear of power elites to lose privileges and the fear of subordinates to lose the justification for their sacrifices.

Yet, at the present point in history, this fear seems to have increased rather than decreased, inventing ever more sophisticated backlashes. The mood among human rights defenders whom I encounter around the world has become darker during the past decades, after a moment of optimism at the end of the Cold War. Many resonate with the rather damning conclusion Noha Tarek formulates in her response to Sikkink's essay, namely, that the race for power and resources within and among states undermines the legitimacy of human rights, as does the suspicion that states use human-rights rhetoric only when it fits their interests. I have also learned to understand deeply

where Noha Tarek comes from when she writes that “fundamentalism and violence against women and children at home are not caused by religious scriptures (those are just books that could be used for any purpose)”, but “by wars, poverty, and deterioration of the human living condition, that turns the human’s psyche into a violent domineering unstable mind.” The depth of Noha Tarek’s sense of skepticism and even humiliation becomes palpable when she calls out emphatically: “And guess who’s causing this war and poverty in the South? It’s the governments, militaries, and corporations of the North! But sadly, human rights organizations tend to focus the blame on the ‘weaker’ party, those fundamentalists of the un-modernized societies of the South, but they never direct any blaming finger to those parties who ‘created’ those fundamentalists, who committed genocides and brought about the death and destruction and deterioration that created those fundamentalists. Perhaps it is because those parties are too strong and powerful and internationally-domineering to be blamed!”

Clearly, and also Noha Tarek will surely agree, not only the West is guilty of double standards. Sikkink rightly notes: “Alongside decolonization, African and Asian nations led what was perhaps the most important early and sustained international human rights struggle: the anti-apartheid campaign. As early as the 1940s, the African National Conference (ANC) explicitly embraced human rights as a fundamental goal of its struggle for racial justice.” Indeed, I am among those who admire Nelson Mandela’s path, yet, it stands in stark contrast to the brutal concentration camps that his fellow freedom fighters have implemented, as we can read in Paul Trehwela’s book from 2009, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO*.

In her important 2011 book titled *The Justice Cascade*, Kathryn Sikkink laid out how human rights prosecutions can be a powerful political tool: “Since World War II, and in particular since the formation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998, a dramatic new trend in world politics toward holding individual state officials, including heads of state, criminally accountable for human rights violations has emerged.” Sikkink is right in highlighting that this is “not to say that perfect justice has been done or will be done, or that most perpetrators of human rights violations, particularly among the state’s most powerful actors, will be held criminally accountable.” Rather, this justice cascade “entails a shift in what is considered the legitimate norm of individual criminal accountability for human rights violations and an increase in criminal prosecutions reflecting that norm.”

What needs to be acknowledged more in the West, as I see it, is that Noha Tarek and her friends might not be as lenient: they might feel profoundly hurt by such “imperfect justice” and even humiliated by it being taken so lightly. Unfortunately, as I observe it, people living in Western countries are far too oblivious of the immensely humiliating effects of their own governments’ “too casual display of power” in the rest of the world, throughout the past decades. As Joseph Camilleri points out in his response, the current international legal order, “is a function of the West’s technological, economic, and military supremacy,” and “until recently, this legal order was international only in name.” Noha Tarek gives voice to the devastating results of the Global North’s blindness to their own double standards, and I meet many citizens in the West who are shocked and ask “Why do they hate us so much?” Those citizens do not experience on their own bodies the impact of their governments’ treatment of non-citizens (or those defined as such).

The following illustration from 1994 I find to be valid also nowadays. The UN’s Chief of Humanitarian Affairs, and on several occasions Acting Humanitarian Coordinator in Mogadishu in 1994 wrote to me (I quote with his permission): “During my time in Somalia in 1994, humiliation was never far from the surface. Indeed, it pretty much suffused the relationship between members of the UN community and the general Somali population. In the day-to-day interaction between the Somalis and UN relief workers like ourselves, it enveloped our work like a grey cloud. Yet, the process was not well understood, and rarely intended to be malevolent... Among the political and administrative leadership of the UN mission, however, humiliation and its consequences were far better understood and were frequently used as policy tools. Regardless of intent, it was pernicious and offensive to many of us.”

Empty human-rights rhetoric creates a deeply humiliating expectation gap between talk and practice: it humiliates doubly to first have one's shared humanity recognized, and then betrayed by the denial of that very professed humanity. The West has used its supremacy throughout the past decades in ways that are detrimental to the human-rights message in the rest of the world – the image of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq is yet another poignant illustration. As a result, many of my friends in the Global South, just like Noha Tarek, are surprised when they read about the history that Sikkink so rightly points out, namely, that “the shift from national to international protection of human rights was often championed by activists, diplomats, and jurists from the Global South.” I am glad that Sikkink reminds us that people such as Charles Malik from Lebanon were involved in writing the UDHR, or Peng-chun Chang from China, Hernán Santa Cruz from Chile, Bertha Lutz, a Brazilian biologist, feminist, and lawyer, and Hansa Mehta, an Indian delegate and independence activist. Clearly, one might ask if these “Global South” contributors were not educated in Westernized institutions, as geographical origins do not automatically make individuals legitimate representatives of the concerns of the Global South. Yet, as mentioned above, forty years of global living have shown me that the message of equality in dignity for all members of the human family is ultimately a profoundly welcome message all around the world.

It seems that the end of the Second World War opened a unique historical window of opportunity for human rights promoters, who, in addition, had the strength and courage to actually make use of this opportunity. In contrast, by now, windows seem to close rather than to open. Forty civil society groups were allowed to serve as consultants to the US delegation at the San Francisco conference of 1945 where the UN Charter was drafted (women's organizations, religious organizations, labor groups, and academics). Doubts may be warranted as to whether this would be possible in the same way today. On my global path I witness at close hold how civil society groups and their activities are being curtailed, more covertly in the Global North – it may simply come under the cover of calls for more “efficiency” – while in the Global South many fear for their lives.

Embedding Sikkink's reflections into the work of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies

In my work, I find concepts useful such as Riane Eisler's *dominator model of society* (or *domination system* or *configuration*) versus a *partnership* model. Scholar and diplomat John W. Burton spoke of a *power and war* paradigm versus a *dialogue* paradigm. The partnership and dialogue paradigm has many other names, philosopher Avishai Margalit speaks of *non-humiliation*, philosopher of criminal justice John Kleinig of *non-degradation*, philosopher and political theorist Philip Pettit of *non-domination*, and physicist and educational reformer Robert Fuller calls for the rejection of *rankism*. The dominator configuration manifests through what I label a collectivistic ranked honor culture, while the partnership configuration realizes the motto of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* when it embraces equality in dignity for all individuals, in solidarity with each other and in respect for the carrying capacity of planet Earth. As I see it, the partnership model – thus defined – is the only viable template for a dignified future for human life on planet Earth.

Sikkink reports that “both the American Declaration of Rights and Duties of Man and the UDHR of 1948 had expansive views of human rights, including *the right of all humans to dignity*, non-discrimination, citizenship, due process, health, education, livelihood, and a host of other protections.” In my work, I am interested in finding out how “the right of all humans to dignity” is being defined in different world regions and where on this planet it is being acknowledged and manifested, and if yes, why, and if not, why not. My work thus focuses not so much on the human rights movement itself, but on large-scale transitions and their impact on the global and local *Zeitgeist*, and how this manifests at micro, meso, and macro levels.

As to the right of all humans to dignity, I am deeply aware of a latent in-built problem, namely, that human rights have the potential to violate human dignity if human rights are designed without regard to human dignity. It is indicative that the phrase “dignity” comes before the phrase “rights” in the first sentence in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Political theorist Michael Rosen (2012) even wonders

whether the officialization and institutionalization of dignity as an international and universal human right has not undermined the essential sense of dignity as the right to be treated with proper respect and dignity. Admittedly, rights have the advantage of being more easily definable than dignity. Rights can be defined as specific, individual, and legal, while I see dignity as complex and relational, and beyond current assessment methods except by virtue of perhaps assessing the outcomes of healthy development (Linda Hartling). It may therefore be understandable that the concept of human dignity has long been absent, for example, from the European Convention on Human rights, apparently precisely because rights at first glance seem more pragmatically applicable than the notion of dignity. Yet, this is a short-term advantage, lasting only until the problems occur that Greg Anderson notes in his contribution to Sikkink's essay, namely, that one right claim easily slides into contradiction to another.

In resonance with Sikkink, I see us at a historical crossroads: "resolving complex, transborder crises – climate change, human displacement, nuclear threats – in an interconnected world is simply incompatible with a narrow view of national sovereignty." Yes, rising global interdependence and the overuse of the planet's resources require us to leave behind the sense that planet Earth can be treated like a "cruise ship," where competition for domination can safely be pursued. Rather, we are on a lifeboat, where ideals of equality in dignity in solidarity are not just nice ideas to have as legal instruments; it is a matter of survival that these ideals profoundly inform and permeate human affairs, from the micro level of the individual human psyche to meso levels of cultural configurations to the macro level of global governance structures. All private and all public spheres need to be impacted and interwoven.

What is interesting, and what may induce hope, is that all around the world, when I approach people as fellow human beings, I find that ideals of equal worthiness in solidarity resonate with the core of the human psyche – I discover an ability and desire for equal dignity even underneath the thickest layers of indoctrination in dominator societies where people have internalized that human worthiness ought to be ranked, that higher beings ought to preside over lesser beings. In other words, what I find is that "retrieving the lost worlds of the past" is possible not just for a historian like Greg Anderson in his academic work – out in the world, in daily practice, I find that humans indeed are far from "naturally presocial, monadic beings" (Anderson). Furthermore, ideals of fairness are part of in-group ethics wherever we look, including in the starkest of dominator contexts, while it is out-group ethics that usually condone the opposite. When we look at human rights ideals, we can conclude that they represent *in-group ethics applied to the global community*, in other words, they represent ethics for a global community that is so united that there no longer exists any out-group, a situation that, in extension, also makes out-group ethics redundant. I therefore dedicate my entire life to gathering such a global dignity community.

I compare my view with that of anthropologist William Ury. Ury drew up a *simplified depiction of history* where he pulls together elements from anthropology, game theory, and conflict studies to describe three major types of society in chronological order: simple foragers, complex agriculturists, and a future knowledge society. I use Ury's historical periods as a frame to insert the historical and social development of pride, honor, and dignity. I do that in the spirit of sociologist Max Weber's *ideal-type* approach, which allows for analysis and action to proceed at different levels of abstraction. I label the first 95 per cent of human history, when foraging dominated and circumscription did not yet set limits for migration, as the *era of pride*, or, more precisely, the *era of pristine untouched pride*, the era where the Vivir Bien way of living evolved. I call the past five per cent of human history, the period of complex agriculturalism, the *era of honor*, or, more precisely, the *era of collectivist ranked honor*. I am dedicated to work for a future of dignity, a human rights inspired vision that could be named the *era of dignity*, or, more accurately, a *future of equality in dignity for all, as individuals in solidarity with each other and our planet*, in short, a future of partnership and dialogue.

The distinct historical changes that brought this chronology to us would be too long to discuss here. In my work, I attempt to make *Homo sapiens'* journey through time and space more visible and to deepen the transition toward partnership and dialogue intentionally rather than letting it grow

and shrink haphazardly. Again, my research suggests that transitioning to a future of dignity – a future that retrieves the *Vivir Bien* way of the past – is a global necessity if humanity wishes to survive on this planet.

The year 1757 could be seen as a linguistic marker for the initiation of the latter transition. In the English language, the current sense of humiliation as a violation dates from the mid-eighteenth century. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, the usual sense of humiliation was related to the physical act of bowing and prostrating oneself. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, the original meaning of *to humiliate* was to “bring low,” to “making humble” rather than to what we now associate with humiliation. The earliest recorded use of *to humiliate* meaning to mortify or to lower or to depress the dignity or self-respect of someone occurs in 1757. What we see is that humiliation turned from being seen as prosocial to being deemed antisocial in a rather sharp linguistic u-turn, while humility remained prosocial.

What is at stake now are the ways in which we feel and manifest the transition from a world of honor to a world of dignity – dignity in the sense of *Vivir Bien* – and this includes what I call *honor humiliation* and *dignity humiliation*. Riane Eisler, in her response to Sikkink's essay, describes the world of honor humiliation when she writes, “children learn from these practices is that abuse and violence are permissible, even moral, to impose one's will on others.” In the era of honor, it is indeed the duty of those in power – usually men, for instance, the *pater familias* – to humiliate his subordinates, his family included, and the aim is to teach them a lesson, namely, that they ought to subserviently respect and maintain the dominator system, sustain the ranking of every individual's worthiness. Beating one's wife within the context of this honor system was/is accepted as the duty of the husband who must maintain discipline as the patriarch in the family. The term “domestic violence” is only conceivable in the context of the promise that everybody deserves to be treated as equal in worthiness. In the dominator system, the right to perceive humiliation as a violation, and to get angry, is reserved only to equal superiors – aristocrats can go to duel, not the beaten wife. All other examples that Riane Eisler lists fall into that pattern: it is a transition that starts from the duty of superiors to humiliate underlings to keep them down, with only equal superiors having the right to regard humiliation as a violation among themselves, and from there the transition heads toward a radically new configuration where the notion of *humiliation as a violation* is being “democratized” to the point that everybody is entitled to become angry in response to being devalued or degraded.

Eisler observes: “none of the major social categories we use to describe social systems – right or left, capitalist or socialist, industrial or pre-or post-industrial, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern, etc. – have much, if anything, to say about children or families.” This observation exposes to what degree the culture of honor still today permeates much of our systemic thinking. The reason might be that the public domain is still primarily inhabited by men. Philosopher Agnes Heller, in her theory of the consciousness of everyday life, describes how masculinity, on an ordinary everyday level, reproduces itself through the interplay of individual consciousness and social structures that are primarily defined and designed by a select group of dominant members of society – mostly men, often mostly white men. And historian Donald Kagan suggests that at the national level, honor reigns in today's world no less than it did earlier, only that “national honor” is now partly concealed by human rights rhetoric and no longer invoked as openly as in the past.

To formulate it provocatively, avenging honor humiliation is “for men,” while crying about dignity humiliation is “for women.” In the world of honor, honor is like an armor, and this armor must be defended in duel-like responses among equal men. As noted above, honor humiliation has a tradition of requiring aristocratic elites to go for duel-like revenge, while underlings might whine, yet, are expected to succumb in meek and subservient humility. Almost all women belong to the latter category and a beaten wife cannot challenge her husband to a duel. A man of power, in contrast, needs to keep up his armor of honor among his peers, and if he fails, he is expected to feel shame and anger over his weakness. A man of honor will not cry about children or families, he might not even mention them, except as part of his responsibility to protect his honor, if need be, through heroic war.

I deeply resonate with Sikkink's statement that "liberating human potential lies at the core of human rights." I have lived in and studied honor cultures, and I observe that, while they entail a number of very helpful elements, other elements have harmful effects. Not least during my seven years of working as a clinical psychologist in Cairo, Egypt, I learned to appreciate, from the very inside, how the caring aspects of collectivism can offer a great sense of protected belonging, yet, how it can also become chokingly oppressive. I often use the image of the human body to describe the damage that ranked unequal honor perpetrates: Elites are allowed to use the right arm, the sword arm, to devise strategies and give orders (as a medical doctor, I see the similarity to the sympathetic system of the body that prepares for flight or fight). Their left arm, the one that stands for maintenance and care (the parasympathetic system in the body), is bound behind their backs. Their subordinates suffer the inverse infliction. None can use both arms, none can reach an inner balance, none can unfold their full potential.

The potential to heal this handicap lies precisely in equal dignity and its capacity to facilitate emancipation toward the participation of all, in solidarity with each other, as part of our planetary environment. This sentence shows that the notion of "emancipation" needs to carry farther than simply implying the goal to "disconnect" from domination, as laudable as it seems. If the endgame is ruthless individualism, it is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Anderson argues that the "expansiveness" of human rights is at least as much a weakness as it is a strength." This applies also to "emancipation" and, incidentally, also to "empowerment": these notions fall dangerously short if they simply provide frames for disconnection, if they only teach to forget about the left arm and produce narcissistic right-armed lone heroes. If this happens, new obstacles to *full participation* are erected, rather than facilitating everyone's healthy development. The "utopian" efforts of nationalism, communism, or anticommunism failed because they did not move toward the full participation of individuals, indeed, toward the opposite (Linda Hartling).

Jeffrey Newman, in his comment, highlights the fundamental necessity of balancing rights with duties. Also the term duty needs to be qualified. Duties can be defined in vastly diverging ways – some see it as a duty to routinely humiliate inferiors to keep a dominator configuration in place, others see it as a duty to compete for domination in a "free world," while the human rights message only resonates with the duty to see the world as a lifeboat where all have to give what they can to keep afloat and nobody is thrown overboard. My mission is therefore to nurture *entrustment* rather than empowerment, and to promote emancipation into *mutual connection in care and responsibility* rather than into disconnected individualism. Like Anderson, I work for a world "which presupposes human interdependence rather than human individuality," and I suggest, that "we can learn from the innumerable non-modern, non-individualist ways of being human that have flourished in both the present and the past."

Refolution

Sikkink writes: "Human rights doctrine stands in stark contrast to this history of repression and atrocity. The human rights path to emancipation insists that the ends do not justify the means; rather, the means are the ends." Indeed, human rights ideals call for equal dignity for all, and this represents a direct affront against established elite power. Human rights defenders stand in square opposition to power elites who believe that their privileges are legitimate. Human rights defenders, however, call not just for the dismantling of abusive elites, they also work for the dismantling of the hierarchical system of ranking human worthiness itself. Human rights defenders do not want to replace old abusive elites with new abusive elites, but change the entire system, where all must move in the direction of dignity, and do so by dignifying means. As a result, human rights defenders stand in opposition not only to old elites, but also to new elites, namely, to those angry revolutionaries who try to violently replace their masters and form new oppressive regimes. Thus, human rights defenders are positioned in between reluctant oppressive old established power elites (the former white elite in South Africa, for example), and angry subjugated people who are on the

rise (Rwanda, for instance, was the arena of horrific genocidal killings perpetrated by recently risen “servants” – *Hutu* means “servant”).

The reason for why human rights defenders face so much anger even within their own camp, is the strength of the feelings of humiliation, particularly those of *dignity humiliation*. Dignity humiliation is more intense than honor humiliation as the promise of equal worthiness for all is a higher promise than the traditional dominator system has to offer where everybody is born into a certain rank. In a ranked system, being pushed down does not necessarily exclude a person from humanity, while being pushed down from equal dignity immediately translates into being pushed out of the human family altogether.

Feelings of humiliation are at the center of the human rights revolution. They are the emotional correlative of the capacity of human rights ideals “to expand,” which “is key to the power of human rights as a tool for emancipation,” as Sikkink cogently observes. Feelings of humiliation may even be called the “fuel” of the human rights revolution. Human rights defenders typically bring to the surface feelings of humiliation in those deemed as inferiors, feelings that these inferiors did not experience prior to becoming aware that their lesser social standing may not be divinely ordained or part of nature’s order. The process of eliciting emotions has often aided the human rights revolution in that these feelings encourage underlings to redefine their lowly position. The social worker will “teach” the beaten wife the right to feel humiliated and resist her husband’s beatings. Paulo Freire speaks of *conscientization* – turning conscience into action for dignity. Sikkink describes this conscientization when she writes: “When discussing the precondition for creating social change, community organizer Saul Alinsky said that one needs a blend of anger, hope, and the belief that one can make a difference. Some see anger as the primordial emotion of justice. But while anger stimulates action, in the absence of hope and sense of efficacy, it can burn out quickly and lead to apathy. It is this delicate balance of grievance, vision, and sense that one’s actions matter that shapes the chronicle of human rights.”

Sikkink rightly warns that anger alone is dangerous. Indeed, freshly elicited feelings of humiliation carry the potential of endangering the very revolution they inspire, and this happens when enraged rising underlings, instead of ending humiliation, merely intensify the spiral of humiliation with another turn. As noted above, recently risen underlings, instead of dismantling the abusive ranking of their old masters, may want to reinstate a new ranking order, and human rights defenders risk being caught in the middle and aggressed when they resist this. This is the conundrum human rights defenders find themselves in: Human rights ideals of equality in worthiness for all unleash an emotional force that is so strong that it can endanger the very implementation of these very ideals – the promise of equal dignity creates a stronger sense of humiliation and anger when betrayed than before – while the implementation of equal dignity requires a higher level of moderation and restraint than before.

Also established power elites use the notion of humiliation, however, in radically different ways. As noted before, in dominator contexts, only masters are permitted to defend their honor against attempts to humiliate it, for example in duels, or duel-like wars, while underlings have to meekly learn humility. Old established elites thus often regard human rights defenders as underlings who need to be taught lessons (meaning, being humiliated) so that they should understand where they belong, namely, somewhere down in the ranking scale of human worthiness.

Nelson Mandela’s inclusive dismantling of Apartheid showed the way: Mandela could easily have unleashed a genocide on the white elite – he could have taken what happened in Rwanda as a path to follow also in South Africa. However, instead, Mandela worked for a constructive and inclusive dismantling of the oppressive hierarchical order.

Such a revolution will never be completely “finished” and will always remain vulnerable to backlashes. Sikkink is right that human rights are increasingly “inspiring demands for social and economic rights to food, water, and housing as well.” Yet, human rights also inspire backlashes. As I observe it, the futile expectation that this revolution ought to be “finishable,” unfortunately, contributes to discrediting it, to creating a level of despair in the face of backlashes that undermines the resolve of human rights defenders to keep working at it.

Backlashes come in many forms. Often human rights defenders resonate with the diagnosis of social ills offered by others, but balk at suggested solutions. For instance, human rights advocates and peace activists will be horrified when reading statements such as this:

I prefer the old Adam of strife and carnage to the new Prometheus of peace and human rights. Better a world torn apart by Husseins and Qaddafis, better a war to the knife between the PLO and the Likud Party, between Zulus and Afrikaaners, than a world run by George Balls and Dag Hammarskjölds, because a world made safe for democracy is a world in which no one dares to raise his voice for fear that mommy will put you away some place where you can be re-educated ("Further reflections on violence," by Thomas Fleming, *Chronicles*, November 1990, p. 15; Thomas Fleming is a traditionalist Catholic writer for a "paleoconservative" audience).

A telling example of backlash is the aftermath of Earth Day 1970, which helped spark a popular citizen's movement. It may have caught polluters off guard, who then set out to mount an increasingly sophisticated counterattack and organize climate change denial (Dunlap and McCright, 2011) to undermine the new laws over the next thirty years: "Today, corporate polluters and their money have infiltrated every level of our political system. Lobbyists for polluters now run most of the regulatory agencies charged with protecting Americans from pollution," writes environmental attorney Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in 2018.

In sum, we find ourselves in a historically unparalleled transition, which currently proceeds two steps forward, only to fall back one step again. It could be said to represent history's first *continuous revolution*, a revolution that will never "finish" and will always be somewhat precarious, since it depends on being held alive by large populations from one time period to the next. *Refolution* is a term coined by Timothy Garton Ash to connote a mix of reform and revolution. Human rights defenders promote a revolution, however, a new kind of revolution, a revolution that is more inclusive and less violent than earlier revolutions, thus a *refolution*, a refolution that will never end and is in needs to always be kept alive pro-actively.

Unity in diversity

This refolution needs to be informed by the motto of *unity in diversity*. *Unity in diversity* is the very frame within which dignity can flourish, a frame in which "the competing claims of universalism and cultural relativism" (Joseph Camilleri) can be brought together. Rather than uniformity, equal dignity generates unity that is enriched by diversity.

To use traffic as a metaphor, we, as humankind, need to unite on whether left-hand or right-hand driving ought to be the norm, while diversity can reign with respect to the kind of vehicles and driving styles we use. For such a transition to be successful, everybody may choose the vehicles and driving styles they like, however it is detrimental to allow those who prefer left-hand driving to continue. If the transition from left-hand to right-hand driving is done too slowly, and "respect" is shown to those who prefer left-hand driving, the resulting accidents will make some people mistake right-hand driving to be the culprit, and they may want to go back to left-hand driving. The transition from unequal honor to equal dignity resembles this situation in many ways, with left-hand driving entailing that large vehicles can rig traffic lights in their favor, while right-hand driving requires a superordinate authority that is enabled to protect an even playing field for all.

There is another problem: *uniformity in division* has reigned during the past millennia of human history, and most new-borns are still today being socialized into it. This frame generates uniformity without diversity within in-groups, in a context of a world of division without unity – in other words, a world where one dominator entity is pitted against the neighboring dominator community in mutual fear. The backdrop for this predicament is what political scientists call the *security dilemma*, a dilemma that was strong in the divided world of the past millennia, roughly from the Neolithic revolution onward. The security dilemma is tragic because its logic of mistrust, fear, and paranoia is inescapable: "I have to amass weapons, because I am scared. When I amass weapons,

you get scared. You amass weapons, I get more scared.” In this context, security is *military* security – rather than *human* security – and military security is conceptualized through the lens of the geopolitical balance of power. This is the realism theory that was and still is the dominant view in the field of international affairs today. Wherever the security dilemma is strong – or, as it happens now, is being re-stoked – applying unity in diversity and human rights ideals to “the enemy” is seen as “treason.” The guiding motto is *If you want peace, prepare for war*. (To use the traffic metaphor, it means that everything, down to the kind of vehicles and driving styles, is forced into uniformity within the city, in fearful division from neighboring cities). Only in a globally united human community can human rights ideals flourish everywhere, can partnership and dialogue become mainstream. Ronald Glossop is right: “war and preparation for war must be brought under control before it is too late.” This can only be done by global governance structures that follow the motto of unity in diversity. Then Mahatma Gandhi's *There is no path to peace. Peace is the path* can manifest. This is why I dedicate my life to nurturing a global dignity community.

Kathryn Sikkink is right that “the idea of human rights has animated campaigns for women's rights; racial equality, including the opposition to apartheid; and the rights of minorities, such as the disabled and the LGBTQ community.” Yet, what has been overlooked by the campaigners are the grievances felt by those who now vote for right-wing parties, those who perceive such campaigns as treason. Sikkink: “The doctrine of popular sovereignty stresses that sovereignty ultimately rests with the people of the country, not with the leaders. The people at all times have the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government. A government cannot use sovereignty to justify human rights violations against citizens, since those citizens would then have grounds to revolt and to alter their form of government.” We might ask: What if “the people” decide to re-introduce let us say, slavery? The term popular sovereignty was used in the 1850s in *Bleeding Kansas*, for instance, when violent proponents of slavery tried to influence the elections.

Kathryn Sikkink rightly draws attention to an alternative understanding of sovereignty, namely, what Stephen Krasner has called *international legal sovereignty*, where states ratify treaties that permit and even invite “international supervision of their domestic human rights practices.” Again, this underlines that popular sovereignty needs to be global, embedded in continuous efforts to balance global unity in local diversity.

As I observe it, most people think that unity in diversity is a zero sum game, that diversity has to be sacrificed for unity, and vice versa. Most cannot fathom *nondualism*, meaning that both, unity and diversity can be nurtured and amplified at the same time. Unity in diversity can be operationalized through the principle of *constrained pluralism*, comprising three complementary sub-principles: *irreducibility*, *subsidiarity*, and *heterogeneity*, as Paul Raskin has explained so well in his *Journey to Earthland* in 2016. Sikkink speaks to that when she observes that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reflects a worldview in which “blending the unique capacities of individuals into an interdependent whole lies at the heart of thriving societies,” and, “a state is necessary but, as history demonstrates, utterly insufficient: some form of redress for human rights through international law and institutions must also have authority.”

Incidentally, also the notion of humiliation can be conceptualized in ways that harmonize the competing claims of universalism and cultural relativism in the spirit of subsidiarity. Complex as it is, the concept of humiliation can be systematically analyzed, and in my work, I deconstruct it into seven layers: First, there is a core that expresses the universal idea of “putting down.” Then there is a middle layer that contains two opposed orientations towards putting down, treating it as, respectively, legitimate and routine, or illegitimate and traumatizing. Then, at the periphery, one layer pertains to cultural differences between groups and another four layers relate to differences in individual personalities and variations in patterns of individual experiences of humiliation.

Economy

Kathryn Sikkink writes: “Many of the coups and the anticommunist authoritarian regimes that followed were supported by the US government, which prioritized anticommunism and economic

interests over the promotion of democracy.” Here Sikkink puts the finger on the greatest worry that I have. I observe that we, as humankind – and many human rights defenders are included – seem to believe that *market pricing* (Alan Page Fiske's coinage) ought to define how we arrange our affairs with each other in our planetary environment.

Anthropologist Alan Page Fiske offers what he calls *metarelational models* that describe configurations of social relationships. A metarelational model is a motivated, emotionally evocative, and morally constructive model that governs configurations of basic relational models for thinking about, creating, understanding, coordinating, judging, sanctioning, and redressing a configuration of social relationships. Fiske found that people, most of the time and in all cultures, use four elementary and universal forms or models for organizing most aspects of sociality, models that mirror the mathematical scales of measurement of *nominal*, *ordinal*, *interval*, and *ratio*. Interaction can be structured, (1) according to what people have *in common*, Fiske calls it *communal sharing*, (2) according to *ordered differences*, Fiske calls it *authority ranking*, (3) according to *additive imbalances*, or *equality matching*, and (4) according to *ratios*, or *market pricing*.

At the present point in history every aspect of life, and I observe this at all corners of the planet, is being moved toward market pricing, and this includes human rights ideals. These ideals are being tweaked – for instance, dignity may be defined as mere autonomy rather than as solidarity, care, and responsibility. Unfortunately, market pricing is the least comprehensive configuration, the one that degrades quality into the quantity of a calculus. On the surface, in official rhetoric, this is intended to benefit all, yet, statistics of rising inequality show that its underlying *raison-d'être* might be to benefit a few. The price paid by all is the wearing down the social and ecological fabric of the entire world – the price is sociocide and ecocide.

Indigenous psychologist Louise Sundararajan recommends studying Fiske's insights carefully, not least because many indigenous communities give primacy to communal sharing as guiding principles for their social and societal life. And they combine it with the caring version of authority ranking, rather than allowing life and society be defined and thus impoverished by less comprehensive frameworks such as equality matching or market pricing.

Fiske and his colleagues use the label *kama muta* for their research on *being moved and touched*. *Kama muta* is Sanskrit for “moved by love” and many languages have similar labels for the feeling. “*Kama muta* is the sudden feeling of oneness – of love, belonging, or union – with an individual person, a family, a team, a nation, nature, the cosmos, God, or a kitten” (kamamutalab.org).

Sikkink suggests that “supranational human rights institutions and doctrines of popular sovereignty offer a legitimate reference framework within which violations of human rights within the borders of a single nation, whether by a government or another party, can become subject to external parties seeking corrective action.” In the face of rampant sociocide and ecocide, I would add, “corrective action is needed globally to change our economic structures.”

Sikkink continues: “Some have called human rights ‘minimalist’ in the sense that they focus on procedural guarantees and the rule of law. Why would we see human rights as minimal? If a person had all the rights declared in the UDHR of 1948, not only would that person have protections of life, liberty, and security; freedom of thought and religion; and the right to participate in politics, but they would also have access to education, social security, work (and equal pay for equal work), freedom of movement, and a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services. They would have equal protection under the law and be protected against discrimination, and have a right to leisure, including paid vacations,” and, Sikkink continues, “Another instance of embracing new rights categories is the right to a salubrious environment, implied by the ‘health and well-being’ provision of the UDHR, which is now widely recognized a universal norm by both government and civil society. In a similar vein, rights to a gainful livelihood and minimum guaranteed income are now embedded in human rights discourse.”

When I see concepts such as “work and equal pay for equal work,” or “paid vacations,” or “gainful livelihood and minimum guaranteed income,” I worry. These concepts are embedded in

very particular assumptions of how economics ought to function, and I find these assumptions to be utterly self-destructive for us as humankind. Everything is lost when dignity is defined merely as individual autonomy, when the human rights message is used as a vehicle for hyper-individualism and anthropocentrism (Anderson), as a vehicle to disconnect people from each other and from our planetary context. Eva-Maria Swidler reminds us that “conquered societies in the colonial world which valorized individual liberties were considered to be barbaric in direct proportion to the presence of those liberties,” and thus she puts the finger on how widely divergent freedom and liberty can be conceptualized. Indignity is the result when the human rights message is used to disconnect people to the point that they become vulnerable to accepting that they ought to become *Homo economicus* and compete for domination. Systemic humiliation is the result when freedom comes to mean freedom for might to become right. As Anderson warns, it would be disastrous if our universal human rights “end up serving as a kind of legitimation device, allowing us to pretend that our world is still somehow ‘civilized’ despite so much evidence to the contrary.”

Deep psycho-geo-historical roots inform this recent trend to highlight autonomy. There are many arguments for protecting, for instance, freedom of expression, but all seem to come down to one of three values, or a combination of them: truth, democracy, and individual autonomy: “Freedom of expression must be protected because it contributes to the public’s recognition of truth or to the growth of public knowledge, or because it is necessary to the operation of a democratic form of government, or because it is important to individual self-realization, or because it is an important aspect of individual autonomy” (Richard Moon, 2009). In continental Europe, truth and democracy appear to be more prominent as values, while in the United States of America individual autonomy is a more deep-felt desire – many settlers who arrived from “Old Europe” indeed fled from oppression. Interestingly, also in England and in Norway the desire for individual autonomy is a strong gut feeling, in this case perhaps because their marginal geopolitical location protected them from being embedded into oppressive dominator systems as thoroughly as others were. Nomadic cultures are often similar – in their case, it was their lack of natural resources and their mobility that protected them – for instance, my Somali friends tell me that they feel that American cowboy culture is very much like Somali culture, and that the *pastoral democracy* of Somalia could very well be made to work if it were informed by a more suitable delineation of solidarity.

When I studied medicine in the 1980s, debates were waging between proponents of two basic strategies. The classical school often places the emphasis on *fighting the enemy of cancer or microbes by surgical or pharmaceutical strikes*. Alternative schools highlight the more preventive approach of *strengthening the entire body system to make disease less likely to find fertile ground* (Lindner, *Making Enemies*, 2006, p. 95). We learned, however, that patients benefit most when both strategies are used, supporting one another. In the global arena, building a sustainable world based on human rights would be equivalent to the preventive *strengthening* approach. Dissuading, isolating, and marginalizing extremists – such as terrorists – would correspond to *strikes*. Current disagreements seem to focus on how the two should be calibrated. “European hesitation confirms American suspicions that Europeans are not capable of being decisive and courageous and that Americans are the world’s most visionary and strong-minded leaders. Americans are good surgeons so to speak, and Europeans are weaklings who cannot stand the sight of blood. From the European point of view, American strategies risk being counterproductive – the wrong strikes at the wrong time – exacerbating the disease instead of healing it” (Ibid.).

Clearly, all three values need to be balanced in due recognition – truth, democracy, and individual autonomy. As a result, when in the U.S. I am more European, while I am more American when in Europe: everything can go too far if maximized without regard to the other. “Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep” is a quote from philosopher Isaiah Berlin. If autonomy means freedom for the wolves, then democracy and truth are in danger, and due to the cultural and political power of the United States of America and its the global outreach, this is now a global danger. I am personally impressed by the cultural heritage of Norway, which is equal dignity (*likeverd*), solidarity (*dugnad*), and global responsibility (Fridtjof Nansen’s work), and I choose Norway as a main platform for my global dignity work.

Political economist Karl Polanyi used the term *double movement* for the doomed project of first dis-embedding the economy from society to give market pricing priority – including “false commodities” such as land, labor, and money – and then trying to remedy the damage by re-embedding the economy into society through social interventions such as labor laws. Philosopher Howard Richards advises us to look at Roman law and their successors that now define the world-system, and to reframe their ground pillars. As Anderson remarks, it must be questioned whether rights are the mechanisms best equipped to secure “the connective tissue” that could bind together “disparate movements” and “awaken” a “global citizenry.” At this moment in time, commercialization offers myriad false choices and fuels unnecessary conflicts, while the necessary conflicts remain unattended, among them that global uniformity driven by commercialization destroys both social and ecological diversity.

In this situation, as I see it, improving *regulatory* rules will not help; without better global *constitutive* rules it will be impossible to fulfill the human rights promises of dignity, and this impossibility will lead to ever new spirals of humiliation. The recent dignity revolutions failed because their promoters did not understand this impossibility. Therefore, I wrote a book titled *A Dignity Economy* in 2012, and highlighted the role of economic terror in my 2017 book titled *Honor, Humiliation, and Terror*.

This is also why I take great care to use language that moves us toward equality in dignity, trying to remain alert to how much contemporary language is still infused with shadows of the dominator model of human relationships. I attempt to avoid terms that bring to mind undignifying images of militarism, such as *fighting* for human rights, or any undignified, oversimplified language that suggests the market pricing of human experience; I would say, for instance, that the modern human rights doctrine provides a global *platform* for activists working for justice.

Outlook

Sikkink's closing sentences show the path into a decent future: “The contemporary drift toward a fortress world of wealth disparities, intolerance, and regressive nationalism signals a difficult struggle ahead to create a just and sustainable planet. The universal, supranational, emancipatory, and expansive character of human rights is poised to serve as a connective tissue binding disparate movements and awakening a global citizenry in a super-movement capable of accelerating a Great Transition.”

I very much like the encouragement with which Joseph A. Camilleri ends his response to Sikkink's essay. He admits that official rhetoric is often used to advance the short-term interests of political elites, yet, “the manoeuvrings of states should not deflect civil society from pursuing the immense opportunities presented by civilizational dialogue.” He continues: “By drawing on the deepest insights of their respective traditions and reaching across civilizational boundaries, the voices of civil society could fashion a rich normative dialogue that can nurture the evolution of international law and serve as a transformational arena in which the rights and needs not only of humans but of all living things can be articulated and negotiated.”

I call for the globalization of care, trust, and responsibility, rather than the globalization of competition for domination and exploitation that we see today. Only in such a context can human rights ideals flourish. Unfortunately, as I observe it, obstacles are on the rise. Fear of change has rebounded and backlashes have become stronger and more sophisticated during the past decades.

Globalization of exploitation has been so aversive to many human rights defenders forget that dignified localization needs dignified globalization as a larger frame. All around the world, I meet well-intentioned local initiatives, yet, as soon as they hit the larger frame, they produce disappointed, if not cynical idealists – the larger frame works to first tire out and then eliminate those idealists (*deferred elimination*, Pierre Bourdieu). This larger frame, unfortunately, is increasingly being defined by what anthropologist Alan Page Fiske calls *market pricing*, and it must be expected that, if this trend continues, the human rights message will continue to fall victim to a destructive mission creep. This mission creep is mainly driven by the Global North, while many in

the Global South understand Fiske's frame of *communal sharing* much better. In the Global South, people risk their lives for it, while the Global North aims to make a profit by pushing everything, including even the human rights message, into "competitive" monetization. Competition for domination as a way of life emerged at the fault lines between political entities in the context of the classical *security dilemma*, while a similar dynamic now plays out at the fault line between the majority "99 percent" and the few "1 percent." Unfortunately, those few have the power to ride on the millennia-old socialization into competition of domination, particularly the socialization of males. This socialization entails that unity in diversity is misunderstood as a zero sum game, that diversity is pushed into division, that unity is allowed to degrade into uniformity, and that it is overlooked that the human rights revolution represents a never-ending balancing act and a unity-in-diversity *refolution*. All this happens in an atmosphere of ever more heated feelings of humiliation, overheating not least because the human rights promise of equality in dignity for all is a higher promise than the world of honor has on offer with its promise of ranked worthiness. Whenever the promise of equal dignity is being betrayed, the feelings of humiliation which result – I call them *dignity humiliation* – are stronger than those of honor humiliation. Not least the blindness of the Global North toward their own double standards has heated up those feelings of dignity humiliation in the Global South. And all this happens while the human rights movement, to succeed, needs the opposite of hot anger, namely, firmness and resolve carried out with measured moderation and restraint. The transition from a world of unequal honor to equal dignity – the transition from a dominator world to a partnership world – is like shifting from left-hand driving to right-hand driving, and this should be done firmly enough and fast enough, otherwise accidents accumulate; at the same time, it should be done slowly and cautiously enough so that unity in diversity can flourish.

Perhaps we no longer need any "isms" if we want to achieve a decent future. Yet, if we do, what if we think of *dignity-ism*, or *dignism*? Dignism, for me, 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. A world, 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 building trust and respecting human dignity and celebrating diversity, where we prevent unity from being perverted into oppressive uniformity, and keep diversity from sliding into hostile division.

Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS) is a global transdisciplinary community of concerned scholars, researchers, educators, practitioners, creative artists, and others, who all collaborate in a spirit of mutual support to understand the complex dynamics of dignity and humiliation (humiliationstudies.org). Linda Hartling is the director and I am the founding president. In 2011, we launched our World Dignity University initiative (worlddignityuniversity.org) and our not-for-profit publishing house Dignity Press (dignitypress.org). We organize two conferences per year: We gather for one global conference at a different location each year, which has led us since 2003 to Europe (Paris, Berlin, Oslo, Dubrovnik), Costa Rica, China, Hawai'i, Turkey, New Zealand, South Africa, Rwanda, Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand, and Indore in Central India. Then we come together a second time each December for our Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict at Columbia University in New York City.

We wish to stimulate systemic change, globally and locally, to open space for dignity, mutual respect and esteem to take root and grow. Our goal is ending humiliating practices, preventing new ones from arising, and fostering healing from cycles of humiliation throughout the world. We do our best to cultivate a relational climate characterized by dignity, walking our talk, and mutual growth. For more than a decade, our relational approach has been sustainable, it has offered a new model of collaborative action, a replenishing relational-organizational climate that is constantly evolving and growing with, rather than at the expense of, the people involved. Our work is a labor of love and maintained entirely by volunteers who give their time and energy as a gift. The nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015, 2016, and 2017 gave all our members great courage; it has been lifesaving for many who risk their lives and livelihoods to advance dignity in the world.

We know we aren't alone with our work. Joining a chorus of visionary activists and practitioners, our community calls for the globalization of care, trust, and responsibility – in other words, the globalization of dignity.