What is human nature? Does it condemn us to hate, fight, compete for dominance, and exploit each other and the planet? Or can we cooperate in solidarity? If we can, can we do so globally? After all, no country, no region, can tackle global challenges alone. ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ is an African saying. Can our global village become a village that raises its children in dignity and keeps them safe? Is the following a valid promise or empty rhetoric, ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’? Can equal dignity and equal rights be the moral compass for a decent future for humankind? Or not? Is there hope? What if clashes of civilisations are harmless compared with clashes of humiliation? What if clashes of humiliation undermine our best chances for cooperation? What if only mutual care and trust can save us?

Where do we stand, as humankind? The author of this book offers this analysis: We have dug ourselves into a multitude of perilous crises, both despite and because of what we call progress. We engage in systemic humiliation — ecocide and sociocide — we shred our relations with our habitat and with each other. We degrade our sociosphere, not least through damaging our cogitosphere, to the point that we sacrifice our ecosphere and thus embark on our collective suicide as a species.

At the same time, there is also an immense window of opportunity waiting for us to use. Unfortunately, so far, instead of recognising the depth of the crises we are in and grasping our historic opportunity to exit, it seems that most of us choose to stay shortsighted and myopic.
This is the opportunity: 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.

Perhaps we need a crisis that is big enough to urge us to use this opportunity? We can only hope that the coronavirus crisis that began to unfold at the end of 2019 is a wake-up call — we are fortunate that the virus is not as deadly as the Ebola virus. If we think of social factors such as dignity and humiliation, then the pandemic highlights both in unprecedented ways — the more the world interconnects, everything spreads out farther and faster, be it the nemesis of new viruses, the promise of shining ideals such as equal dignity, or the pain and anger that emerges when dignity is felt violated.

Present-day’s most definitorial systemic humiliation is a world-system that gives priority to profit maximisation rather than common good maximisation, a state of affairs that sends humiliation into every corner of the world. Not least the coronavirus pandemic was a ‘predicted crisis’ due to this predicament, as decades of warnings were overheard in the rush for profit at any price, a rush that at the same time brought humans in close contact with novel pathogens that can spread around the world and kill hundreds of thousands in a few months. The coronavirus pandemic throws into stark relief the fact that global care for the common good is paramount, while the profit motive is destructive when it takes the lead rather than being of service. The crisis calls for an ‘economy of life’ rather than an ‘economy of death’ — it calls for a dignity economy. It calls on us to remember that humans are capable of solidarity, that we can find it fulfilling and meaningful to stand together.

To counter the widespread myopic trend, this book focusses on all of human history — on big history — because only a wide view makes the primary problems visible that spawn secondary, tertiary, and quaternary ones. The book looks at Homo sapiens’ journey on this planet and conceptualises the so-called Neolithic Revolution as definitorial turning point that merits renewed attention today because it saw humankind’s primary problem emerge. Competition for domination was Homo sapiens’ master survival strategy during the past three per cent of our history, and it was once useful. The core problem of our time is that this strategy outlives its usefulness, and it does so the more interconnected the world grows and the more overstretched Earth’s carrying capacity becomes. In an interconnected and finite world, competition for domination transmutes into a collective suicide strategy. This is why, as humankind, find ourselves in a historically unprecedented situation. It is a situation where history does not repeat itself, where the lessons of our forebears no longer hold. In this new context, the only realistic aim is to work for global mutual trust and global partnership through unity in diversity in equal dignity for all. During the past millennia, such ideas were deemed wishful and unrealistic dreaming. Now humankind finds itself in the historically unprecedented situation where global partnership in mutual solidarity represents the only life-saving strategy.

This book explores the concept of dignity and the opportunity it entails to show us a path into the future. The book approaches dignity from many directions, among others, by inquiring about the violation of dignity, namely, humiliation. The first part of this book has the title ‘Humiliation and humility — A timeline from 1315 to 1948’. The second part looks at dignity under the heading ‘Equal dignity for all’. The third part of the book wonders: ‘Where do we go from here?’

Part I: Humiliation and humility — A timeline from 1315 to 1948
Part II: 1948 and beyond — Equal dignity for all!
Part III: Where do we go from here? A future of solidarity?

The author of this book has been living on all continents for the past forty-five years. On her global path, she has witnessed how the promise that is entailed in the sentence ‘all human beings are
born free and equal in dignity and rights’ has become a foundational value, far beyond mere legal concepts. This promise seems to be a genie that, once it was unleashed, cannot be put back into the bottle anymore, despite the fact that it is betrayed widely and frequently. The promise has force now. Despite its complexity and despite its betrayal, the notion of dignity has found its way even into the centre of many constitutional texts. It speaks to the deep human desire to rise up from being pushed down — it is an embodied longing, beyond language, beyond legal instruments. It is the simple and straightforward yearning to be respected as an equal human being among fellow human beings.

On dignity

The word dignity comes before rights in the sentence ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’. Since 1948, however, rights moved into the foreground and the term human rights became normalised. The message of this book is that the time has come to take dignity more seriously. As philosophers have pointed out, human dignity represents the moral source of human rights, which are merely specifications of human dignity. This book therefore speaks of human rights ideals, in an effort to point at both, dignity and rights.

Undeniably, rights have the advantage of being more easily definable and pragmatically applicable than dignity. Yet, that does not mean that the notion of rights is without problems. Some prefer the idea of human needs to rights, as needs are biologically anchored and socially and culturally emergent, whereas rights draw on conceptual authority that is disputable. Worse, some argue that the officialisation, professionalisation, and institutionalisation of dignity as an international and universal human right may even unintentionally undermine the essential sense of dignity.

Worse even, what if dignity is a useless concept altogether? The book explores also this criticism. What if dignity is merely the need to obtain voluntary and informed consent from people and the requirement to protect confidentiality? Perhaps autonomy is a more practical and specific term than dignity? Or, what about replacing the terminology of dignity with that of respect or pride?

If we consider human dignity to be a useful concept and if we seek its guidance for human rights, we face new complexities. Neglecting rights can violate dignity, yet, it can also be the other way round — rights can violate dignity when they are insufficiently anchored in dignity. This means that we cannot leave the nurturing of dignity to the legal field and its professionals alone. Dignity needs intentional and pro-active nurturing, rather than being taken for granted. Both neglecting and heeding rights can violate dignity.

As soon as we have a serious look at dignity, more questions arise: Is it possible to define dignity? Or at least describe it? What we learn is that the word dignity alone is insufficient. Dignity is an enthymeme (Greek: ἐνθύμημα, enthūmēma). Enthymeme means that a speaker spells out only certain aspects of an argument and leaves other parts out because she assumes that the audience holds those parts in their minds (en thymo). In a broader usage, the term enthymeme describes all incomplete arguments. In the case of dignity, it is not respect, nor pride, nor simply dignity alone that describes the core of the new moral universe built on human rights ideals, it is respect for equal dignity for all, as responsible individuals in solidarity with each other and with our ecological foundations.

This equal dignity is an embodied sense, a sense of being able to stand tall and carry one’s head high. It means looking into the eyes of other fellow human beings as equals, rather than being humiliated and bowing down in submissive meek humility. At the same time, it is not sticking one’s nose up in haughty arrogance. Some describe dignity as an ‘orthopaedic challenge’ — the art of walking upright. It is a posture of dignified humility — or humble pride — neither looking down on others with arrogant superiority nor looking up from humiliated inferiority. Dignity means that superiors stop arrogating supremacy and refrain from humiliating inferiors and that inferiors become aware that they need not accept humiliation in docile meekness.

Mere equality is not enough though — it needs more. Human rights ideals invite everyone to
open their arms for the other in loving acceptance and respectful solidarity, they invite everyone to stop having their elbows sticking out in divisive mutual rivalry, or smothering others with choking embraces. All are invited to meet in the middle between top and bottom — at the level of equal dignity in shared humility and solidarity, joining hands in building a decent future together.

Human dignity is thus not merely a philosophical abstraction or a legal construct. It is a phenomenological reality that has its basis in human consciousness and in the body, more precisely, in the bodymind. Dignity is a relational concept that is at the same time a radical individualised and radical socialised moral concept, influenced by its social, political, and cultural context — dignity is both inherent to every human being and requires affirmative action and recognition from others. In this sense, dignity cannot be confused with individual autonomy, it rather speaks to philosopher Martin Buber’s notion of I-Thou relationships, to dialogical encounters that entail a dimension that is larger than life, encounters that are so awe-inspiring that the word divine is warranted.

In her work, the author speaks of the literacy of love, with love being the very foundation for human dignity. She values the following words, ‘Our emotional life, in the tension between passion and suffering, confronts us with love as the basic premise of human life in all its complexity.’

**On humiliation**

In the English language, the concept of humiliation has traversed a fascinating journey throughout the past centuries. The year 1757 is of particular significance. From 1757 onwards, in the English language, humiliation is no longer the pro-social duty of superiors to show inferiors their due lowly place, it is the anti-social violation of dignity. The year 1757 thus provides an important historical linguistic marker, a marker that signals a remarkable transition of the Zeitgeist, first in the European cultural realm, then globally. Broadly speaking, it reconnects to a Zeitgeist that might have existed prior to the Neolithic revolution. It points at a very particular form of how we imagine a person and society, namely, at the ideal of equality in worthiness for all people, connected in mutual care and responsibility, embedded in the larger planetary ecological context of which we all are only a small part.

The notion of humiliation is part of an intricate web of related phenomena and concepts, as there are, for instance, honour and dignity. The author of this book came to study dignity through researching its violation, namely, humiliation. Only later did she understand the historical path that went from ‘mask-like’ collectivist and ranked honour to equal dignity for individuals, with the notion of decorum forming a bridge between honour and dignity. In 1757, decorum began to be bestowed on the individual, while still being inscribed in the context of collectivist ranked honour — still today, the word dignity signifies a ‘higher being’. Finally, the historical path of the Zeitgeist went on to the ideal of equal dignity for all individuals as adopted in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948.

Today, we could say that the Zeitgeist is divided: One group strives for equal dignity for all as individuals in solidarity, while others aim to re-create a world where ‘dignitaries’ preside over lesser beings. Some among the latter group openly reject the idea of equal dignity as a humiliating project — after all, it means that dignitaries lose their privileges — all forms of open supremacy fall into this category. Others use a more subtle strategy and strive to preserve a might-is-right context through interpreting dignity as nothing more than individual autonomy — rugged individualism fails into that category.

The philological journey retraced in this book — with the generous support of peace linguist Francisco Gomes de Matos and peace philosopher Howard Richards — shows how, due to the rise of human rights ideals, the word humiliation is being used in radically different ways today than during the era of honour. There is a fundamental difference between what the author calls honour humiliation on one side and dignity humiliation on the other side. When equality in dignity is promised but withheld, recognition gaps open, dignity gaps — or indignity traps — that are more hurtful than honour gaps. A person who experiences being ranked lower than expected in a ranked honour system may feel hurt, still, she is not immediately exiled from the human family. In contrast, being placed lower than expected in a context of equal dignity immediately evicts one from the
human family entirely. This experience assaults one at the core of one’s being — one is no longer part of humanity. To recognise a person’s humanity and then hypocritically betray the promise of dignity, humiliates in the most devastating way by denying the very humanity professed.

As a result, the violation of dignity smarts more than the violation of honour. In a system of honour, it may be regarded as utterly legitimate to lower the rank of a person, be it that the person herself comes to this conclusion or her peers. Wherever and whenever people accept their debasement quietly — they may think of debasement as nature’s order or God’s punishment — there is no apparent disruption of order. As soon as human rights ideals become more known, however, these very ideals stand in the way of such bland interpretations of humiliation. Human rights ideals offer the unconditional right to everyone to be considered as equal in dignity, just for the sake of being born as a human being. The promise of equal dignity is thus much higher, and breaking it humiliates much more intensely, than when honour is being infringed: There is no legitimate ‘excuse’ for dignity humiliation, while the world of honour provides myriad justifications for honour humiliation.

As the violation of dignity carries the potential to lead to more intense reactions than the violation of honour, feelings of dignity humiliation can manifest in extreme forms of hatred and violence and escalate to dangerous levels of terror, war, or genocide. Only Gandhi-like figures can inspire the transition to peaceful social action that is consistent with dignity. Yet, the novelty of this situation is such that people might not fully realise it for a while, with the result that also feelings of dignity humiliation may be endured as quietly as feelings of honour humiliation, only for different reasons. While people subscribing to values of honour may tolerate honour humiliation in quiet subservience because they think it is a legitimate arrangement of relationships, feelings of dignity humiliation stem from a betrayal, the betrayal of the promise of equal dignity in relationships, and it may be the very intolerability of this betrayal that causes the response to appear quiet.

Human rights ideals represent an act of universal love, they represent humanity’s loving invitation to all fellow humans into the human family as equal members. Millions of people all around the globe take this invitation seriously, and they respond with love. Love, however, is known to turn into the bitterest of hatred when threatened or betrayed — we only need to look at domestic violence to know how deep the wounds can be that are inflicted by thwarted love, and how horrific the outcomes can be.

Mohandas K. Gandhi and Nelson Mandela mobilised masses to rise from humiliation. Gandhi and Mandela inspired constructive social change, they resisted the temptation to counter humiliation through unleashing ever new and more destructive cycles of humiliation. Adolf Hitler, as well, mobilised masses, however, he mobilised them into mayhem. In all cases, the immense strength and force of feelings of humiliation became visible and how this force can be used for good, as by the Gandhis and Mandelas of this world, or for destruction, as by the Hitlers of this world. Therefore, the author calls feelings of humiliation, and in particular, feelings of dignity humiliation, the nuclear bomb of the emotions — be they felt spontaneously or fomented by leaders. The genocide that the Hutu perpetrated in Rwanda against their Tutsi neighbours in 1994 showed how a sense of humiliation could be whipped up and weaponised in ways that surpassed traditional weapons. Some victims even paid for bullets to be shot dead themselves rather than hacked to death by the machetes of their neighbours.

Apart from dignity humiliation being more hurtful than honour humiliation, two more factors aggravate the situation. First, the promise of equal dignity democratises the right to resist. In the past only aristocrats could call for a duel in response to dishonour, or loss of honour, as humiliation of honour could only be resisted with violence among masters who held equally superior positions in the social order. Slaves or servants could not engage in duels with violent masters — a beaten wife could not go to duel with her violent husband. Human rights ideals, in contrast, grant the right to resist humiliation to every single person. Whoever feels aggrieved or humiliated anywhere in the world may now ‘go to duel’.

Second, would-be ‘duellists’ have now access to means of destruction that were previously unimaginable — a single angry hacker who feels entitled to seek retaliation for perceived
humiliation can attack an entire country’s electronic infrastructure. Would-be Hitlers driven by a sense of humiliation can establish global dictatorical mafia-like structures with hitherto unseen ease.

Apartheid in South Africa may illustrate how difficult and sometimes incoherent the rise of awareness of dignity can be. Apartheid means segregation, and when it was devised after the trauma of the Boer Wars, it was regarded as a thoroughly legitimate solution. It was void of any taste of violation, as painful as it was for those at the bottom. The global rise of the promise of equality in dignity gave this pain legitimacy, to the point that it had the strength to drive conscientisation — as Paulo Freire formulated it — the motivation to work for constructive social change. The anti-apartheid campaign led by African and Asian nations is often hailed as the earliest sustained international human rights struggle alongside decolonisation. The depth of the dignity humiliation that apartheid fomented could have led to horrific genocidal killings — similar to what happened in Rwanda at the same time — had not people as Nelson Mandela channelled its force into constructive societal change.

Apartheid demonstrates also how newly emerging feelings of dignity humiliation in subordinates have the potential to trigger a sense of honour humiliation in masters and their successfully indoctrinated followers. The very notion of equality in dignity feels humiliating for rankists, as they perceive human rights ideals as humiliation rather than as liberation. People who are beholden to a ranked honour system are likely to perceive the call for the humility needed to embrace equal dignity as humiliating. Therefore, feelings of dignity humiliation professed by the downtrodden risk unleashing raging anger in masters who feel entitled to their privileged supremacy. For many in the South African white elite it felt humiliating to be asked to step down from arrogating superiority.

Examples are not confined to politics. A husband who feels justified in beating his wife to teach her humble respect for his superiority will get angry with the social worker who hinders him. The social worker — or any defender of equal dignity ideals for that matter — risks being accused of being a humiliator who creates conflict where there was ‘peaceful order’ before. So-called honour killings provide an even starker illustration. In an honour context, a raped girl might be perceived of having brought dishonour upon her family and she might be killed in order to restore humiliated family honour. In a dignity context, in contrast, the very idea that killing can heal humiliation is humiliating for the dignity of all involved.

Cross back is the term the author uses when she sees feelings of dignity humiliation being acted on not with dignity but with the toolkit of revenge for honour humiliation. Cross back happens when the Hitler path is chosen in response to feelings of dignity humiliation, even though dignity calls for the Mandela path. The Hitler path follows the traditional strategy of removing tyrants while keeping tyranny in place and the formerly oppressed becoming the new oppressors. Human rights ideals introduce a second transformation after the first — after deposing a tyrant, what must follow is the dismantling of the very system of tyranny, and this must be done with peaceful means, without violence and humiliation. This implies that if humankind wants to achieve a dignified future, it needs to engage in much more inclusive and sophisticated peace making and bridge building than in the past. The formerly oppressed cannot become the new oppressors. Oppressors and oppressed need to come together and join hands, just like Nelson Mandela when he aimed at including all South Africans into their shared home country.

Humiliation entrepreneurs, as the author calls them, drive cross backs to perfection when they use feelings of dignity humiliation in populations to exploit the script of the heroic and glorious warrior, the script of aristocratic elites who have power over obedient underlings. In Norway, a young man, Anders Behring Breivik, felt he was a ‘Templar Knight’ when he shot his ‘enemies’, thinking he was entitled to use the traditional toolkit for violent revenge for honour humiliation that was formerly reserved for aristocrats. In Rwanda, radio propaganda from ‘above’ sufficed to bring subservient masses to use their household machetes to commit horrific genocidal killings.

Human rights defenders need to learn from such examples that ‘empowerment’ can go too far. A social worker should not ‘empower’ a beaten wife to humiliate her husband — let alone kill him — even though the husband humiliates her. Instead, the social worker should encourage the wife to engage in constructive action, such as securing her personal safety and seeking support from

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surrounding social networks to change the husband’s outlook on honour and dignity. The self-esteem movement in Western societies may have suffered precisely such an overshoot of empowerment. Some say it has created a social climate of solipsistic narcissism characterised by chronic indignation and anger entrepreneurship by all against all. This is the result when aggressive ways of turning the tables on humiliators are being democratised, when license is given to everyone to arrogate the former elite sense of entitlement to privilege. This is why this book avoids using the term empowerment and replaces it with entrustment. Entrustment suggests that there are limits to uprisings. ‘Lesser beings’ should not become ‘higher beings’. The traditional notions of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ are to be transcended. Everyone is called on to meet in the middle between the top and the bottom — at the level of equal dignity — and shoulder the responsibility for nurturing a better world together, in mutually dignifying humility.

Where do we go from here?

In the third part of the book, the author asks ‘Where do we go from here?’ One of the chapters offers a list of factors and circumstances that make the present historical juncture more challenging than any crisis humankind ever faced before in its history. The author predicts that our time will once be called ‘the dark era of the twenty-first century’, an era when the dominator model overstayed its raison-d’être, when social and ecological resources were sold out, sometimes even under the cover of human rights rhetoric.

In feudalism, communal resources were appropriated for an aristocracy who relied on a supposed divine right of kings. Then came entrepreneurs who did the same, only that they relied on the guiding hand of the free market and claims of equality of opportunity. Moral philosopher and pioneer of political economy Adam Smith was an egalitarian, hoping to heal the ills of his time by elevating avarice from a vice to a virtue, from sin to ‘advantage’ and ‘interest’. Today, avarice has been let loose to the point that ‘private government’ has taken over — there is neither state control nor is the market free.

The author has coined the term dignism (dignity + ism) to describe a world where every newborn 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.

Dignism means ending the cycles of humiliation that emerge when promises are broken in a context where human rights are promised but not delivered. Dignism appeals to the enormous counter-power entailed in the hope for equal dignity that modernity has created but not fulfilled. Dignism means care for the common good of all of humankind as co-inhabitants in a finite habitat. It means building social and governance structures that humanise and dignify globalisation.

The author has also coined the word egalisation, meaning equal dignity for all, which entails the ending, healing, and prevention of cycles of humiliation. Egalisation aims at matching the word globalisation, while differentiating equal dignity from notions such as equality, equity, egalitarianism, or identicalness. To be humanised, globalisation needs to adopt egalisation to become globegalisation. When we look at liberté, égalité, fraternité, then we see that globegalisation draws together the first two, liberty and equality. If we wish to include also fraternité/sisterhood, or solidarity, then the task of our time is co-operative globegalisation, or in one single short word — co-globegalisation.

We can realise this task through principles such as subsidiarity and the harvesting of all dignifying aspects from all cultures that ever existed, be it Africa’s ubuntu philosophy or the likeverd tradition in Norway. This book is written to chart a path to the kind of dignity of solidarity where all stand together in dignified humility rather than a world where ‘honourable dignitaries’ hail humiliation as a useful tool to force subordinates into obedient meekness and subservient humility. The book is written to call on all of us to shun humiliation as an unacceptable violation of dignity and understand that humiliation has the potential to violate dignity so deeply that fatal

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Humankind stands at a historically unparalleled crossroads, and this is the author’s plea: We are in a situation where we must find better ways than competition for dominance to manage the win-lose dilemmas of the past millennia and prepare for the many lose-lose impasses the future will likely bring.

The Neolithic Revolution could be understood as the first major turning point in human history, as it introduced a radical transition from what game theorists call a win-win situation — a context of mutually beneficial arrangements of relationships — to a win-lose situation. The author conceptualises the Neolithic Revolution — or the rise of complex agriculture from the foraging and gardening cultures that existed before — as the endpoint of humanity’s first round of globalisation.

It was the time when the species of Homo sapiens had completed its campaign of populating all easily accessible lands on planet Earth and had arrived on the last so far untouched continent — for the first time in history, human beings walked on all continents. What began to make itself palpable at that point was what anthropologists call circumscription — Latin circum, around, and scribere, ‘to write’ — meaning limitation, enclosure, or confinement. The author uses the term circumscription to describe the surprise when something that hitherto was believed to be unlimited reveals itself to be finite. Around the time of the Neolithic Revolution, the fact that planet Earth has a finite surface began to make itself palpable. The experience of circumscription did not affect all world regions at the same time, some were spared until the times of colonisation, however, if planet Earth were larger, we might still live as migrant foragers, still follow the wild plants and animals that nature provides, and still populate one new continent after the other. Clearly, this narrative is highly simplified, it follows Max Weber’s ideal type approach.

War is one of the ways in which we, as humankind, have adapted to circumscription, and this led to the kind of political integration that we now are proud of — we call it civilisation. Through war, in a context of circumscription, dominator societies emerged, led by strongmen, who eventually subjugated ever-larger territories and formed ever-larger political entities, finally forming states. The so-called security dilemma became definatorial in this situation, ‘I have to amass weapons, because I am scared. When I amass weapons, you get scared. You amass weapons, I get more scared’. The guiding motto became If you want peace, prepare for war. Later, as geographical imperialism transmuted into ever more unrestrained capitalism, this motto became compounded with If you want wealth, invest in exploitation. Circumscription affects ever-larger areas by now, as humanity’s ‘party ing’ in a world of seemingly unbounded abundance is ending in all spheres of life. The second round of globalisation now reaches the limits of planet Earth’s carrying capacity.

Today, we, as humankind, have the choice of proceeding unimpeded with ‘business as usual’ towards the global depletion of planet Earth’s last resources, or we can rethink and shape our future path by inventing new ways of arranging our affairs on this planet. Never in our species’ history have we encountered challenges that are more serious.

It is always a shock when limits are reached that hitherto were imperceptible. Sudden tipping points change conditions so drastically that it is difficult to bring about equally drastic adaptations. Humanity stands at such a sweeping turning point now. The significance of the Neolithic transition matches the significance of present times and we need to bring about similarly important adaptations as our forebears, only more intentional and better planned. After millennia of hierarchical domination, the practice of subjugating people and nature transmutes into a collective suicide strategy. The new Zeitgeist asks those who regard themselves as superior ‘dignitaries’, who think they are entitled to exclusive privileges, to learn dignified humility and stop exploiting, oppressing, and humiliating allegedly ‘lesser’ fellow human beings and non-human species. The Humilocene waits to manifest, the ‘epoch of humility’. The year 1757 offers a linguistic marker in the English language for this second major transition in humankind’s history.

As alluded to above, few people seem to take in that Homo sapiens lives in a historical moment that is unparalleled in terms of the opportunity it offers. History does not go in circles. For the first time, humanity can fully appreciate its place in the cosmos. Unlike our ancestors, we can see pictures of our Blue Marble from the perspective of an astronaut. Unlike our forebears, we can feel
‘the ecology of the living’ taking place within one circumscribed biopoetic space that is shared between all beings. We have access to a much more comprehensive knowledge base about the universe and our place in it than our grandparents ever had. We can humanise globalisation and reap the benefits that flow from the global ingathering of humanity.

We know from research that human nature is neither ‘good’ nor ‘evil’ but social, and that much of human action depends on the ways constitutive rules frame relational contexts. As it stands now, current systemic frames incentivise selfishness and cast suspicion on selflessness, in the belief that Adam Smith’s invisible hand will come to rescue. As a result — and the author observes 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’. Feminist economists have long reminded us, in vain, that our economies depend entirely on ‘invisible’ work, particularly that of women, and they warn that personal autonomy is a myth while dependency is the reality. One economist asked a fitting question: ‘Who cooked Adam Smith’s dinner?’

The only realistic hope — 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. The hope is that enough people understand that it is feasible to attenuate the security dilemma and that we can overcome the commons dilemma. It is feasible to create global human security rather than military security and to turn the tragedy of the commons — when people’s short-term selfish interests to exploit resources destroy long-term group interests — into the blessing of the commons. In an interconnected world, long-term demise for all is the result when a few strongmen elites strive for domination over the rest and engage in the exploitation of humanity’s common planetary resources.

Clashes of humiliation are dangerous, while clashes of civilisations can be enriching. Clashes of humiliation are dangerous because they undermine and possibly reverse the global interconnectedness of humanity that entails the potential to attenuate the security dilemma. 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, that make feelings of humiliation arise more forcefully than ever before, feelings of humiliation in the face of acts and systems of humiliation. The author foresees that dynamics of humiliation will therefore become the strongest obstacle to a dignified future — particularly dignity humiliation, or what she calls the ‘nuclear bomb of the emotions’. Clashes of humiliation can re-divide the world and re-instigate the tragedy of the security dilemma that held our ancestors in its grip. Cycles of humiliation can turn a potentially united ‘global village’ into a divided war zone.

Cycles of humiliation can re-fragment the world and bring back the classical security dilemma. The more the classical security dilemma attenuates through the ingathering of humanity and the rising awareness of humanity as one family on a finite interconnected vulnerable planet, and the more ideals of equal dignity become salient, the more the various fields of psychology will gain in significance, and political science will lose it. Global inter-human relations are increasingly in demand, overtaking inter-national relations. In this situation, global human-to-human trust building is everyone’s responsibility, rather than allowing the Global North to abuse the world as business opportunity and leisure park while leaving the navigation of ‘foreign relations’ to diplomats.

The global village has all it needs to transcend competition for dominance and embrace dialogical partnership. We can leave behind the idea that freedom can only be secured through maintaining a Hobbesian ‘Wall Street world’ where ‘competitiveness’ means having the most horrific weapons and the strongest bullies as leaders, where selfishness is a virtue and selfless service is regarded as a psychological deficiency. We can make multi-lateralism work by building a global village that deserves its name. Human rights ideals represent global in-group ethics, the very ethics that the global village needs if it wants to create a decent future for itself. The scope of ethics and of empathic identification that a village usually reserves for itself within its borders can now include the entire global village — the care and loyalty that we used to offer to fellow members in
an extended family or in a traditional tribe, we can apply it to all human beings. We can turn our planet into a planetary ‘territory of life’.

Now we can form a global citizens movement that jointly envisions deep transformations — dignity transitions towards new global generative mechanisms and new constitutive rules. Convivialism and inclusionism can make us embrace our planet as We the planet with sustenance for all species. We can heed the African adage that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ and become a global community of unity in diversity that raises its children to be stewards of our planet as our shared commons. Small indigenous groups have shown us how to protect commons, and research demonstrates that also larger groups can do so. We have learned that nurturant parenting instills the intrinsic motivation in children to act pro-socially, and when these children grow up, they will need no carrots and sticks to be responsible citizens, they will fill their communities with dignity of their own volition.

Let us take this knowledge as starting point for a transgenerational transmission of loving empathy — no longer the transgenerational transmission of trauma. A future of dignity, a future without systemic humiliation is possible. Equal dignity in solidarity — in short, dignism — can become reality. It may sound like utopia and it is utopia. However, humankind’s survival depends on this utopia. The alternative is environmental collapse and a militarised world that ends in mutual destruction until the entire population of the Earth is dead. Global dignism is a necessary utopia, and it remains necessary even if the probability of its realisation may be small. The list of dignifying peacebuilders such as Bertha von Suttner, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rachel Carson, Paulo Freire, or Nelson Mandela waits to become much longer. Let us roll!

The Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship (HumanDHS, humiliationstudies.org) aims to convene a global dignity community since 2001. Together with relational psychologist Linda Hartling and a dedicated core group of scholars and educators, the author of this book has the honour of nurturing this collaborative fellowship of people who walk the talk of dignity. We are a global trans-disciplinary network of concerned scholars, researchers, and educators of all academic fields, together with practitioners, creative artists, and many others, who all 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 suggest that a frame of cooperation and shared humility is necessary — rather than a mind-set of humiliation — if we wish to build a better world, a world of equal dignity for all in solidarity.

We have convened more than 30 conferences all around the world since 2003 — two conferences per year — and we wish to invite you, the reader. We come together for one global conference at a different location each year, which has led us to Europe (Paris, Berlin, Oslo, Dubrovnik), Costa Rica, China, Hawai’i, Turkey, Egypt, New Zealand, South Africa, Rwanda, Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand, Indore in Central India, and the Amazon in Brasil. Then we come together for a second time each December, namely, for our Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict at Columbia University in New York City, with late Morton Deutsch as our honorary convener since 2003.

A new educational effort emerged from the network in 2011, namely, the World Dignity University Initiative, and we invite all learners and educators for whom dignity is central to contribute. Dignity Press, with its imprint World Dignity University Press, is in existence since 2012. All our works are a labour of love and maintained entirely by volunteers who give their time and energy as a gift. All our efforts are pro bono and not-for-profit endeavours.

We meet many people around the world who are intelligent and diligent, hard working and prolific. Few, however, are sensitive to humility, to understand the significance of dignity (and humiliation as its violation). This sensitivity is like a foreign language that some people speak and others not. This language is difficult to learn — some people seem to know it intuitively, perhaps through particularly harsh life experiences. This sensitivity is what is most valuable for us, more important than any ‘tangible product’ or achievement.

We think very long-term and plan our cooperation in our community to last throughout our

Evelin Lindner, 2020
lifetimes. The nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015, 2016, and 2017 gave us great courage and has already been life-saving for many of our members around the world who stand up for dignity in situations of adversity. We invite people who embody and cultivate the language of dignity through their efforts. We are not about money, power, or other quantifiable markers of success — our dedication to dignity is our ‘dignity credential’. Those who live by material markers often mislabel our dedication as ‘humiliation credentials’. Through our work, we wish to spell out in ever-more depths what the new language of dignity means, the language of which so few people have an inkling. We ourselves, of course, are only learners as well, perpetual apprentices.

Our dignity fellowship is a fluidly evolving cooperative community rather than a monolithic organisation that speaks with one voice — neither do we wish to be a monolithic organisation. Rather, we wish to manifest dignity by holding space for unity in diversity. In this context, the author of this book wears two ‘hats’. When she gathers the global dignity family, she is a unifier who strives to protect the diversity of all members so that everyone can forge their own path to dignity in their lives. On the other hand, she is also part of the diversity of the network, for instance, when she writes books, articles, or give lectures. In this book, for example, she speaks only for herself as an individual researcher, and it is important for her to make clear that her views do not define any ‘official’ view of the dignity movement.

As she hails from a displaced family who was deeply affected by the two world wars of the last century, she is particularly aware of the vulnerabilities of our human arrangements on this planet. All her life, she has 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. Together with Linda Hartling and other close collaborators, she is helping to nurture another moment like this through their dignity work, hoping to be among the co-authors of this moment and eager to contribute with their approach of big love.

When Rachel Carson published her book *Silent spring* in 1962, many were full of hope for a substantial turn-around. The Brundtland Commission of 1987, and the Earth Summit of 1992, the Nobel Peace Prize for 2007 to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the 2016 Paris Agreement on global warming, all these were moments of ‘yes we can turn around’ enthusiasm. Yet, in the end, corporate interests won out. Still in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly set Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, and Goal 8 shows an exponential economic growth curve, a curve that is absurd in a finite context. We went from ‘Earthrise’ in the 1960s, to ‘profit versus planet’ around 1970–1987, we turned environmentalism into ‘sustainability’ around 1987–1997, and finally into ‘market environmentalism’ from 1998 to 2018. In 2019 came Greta Thunberg, and in 2020 the Covid-19 virus. They question us why we, the human family, have missed so many invitations to unite in response to our global challenges. They ask us why we let grim dire and kind invitations to act pass alike: We let the invitation of the September 11 attacks pass in 2001 and the enormous financial crisis in 2008, and we even turned down the kind invitation of the end of the Cold War.

As the world watches the heart-breaking coronavirus pandemic unfold, it is still possible to be full of hope for an exponential change of heart so that global unity rooted in respect for our local diversities becomes possible. When a new Eleanor Roosevelt moment finally comes, humanity may be ready for a Universal Declaration of Human Vulnerability. This book invites the reader to answer the following question together with the author and her colleagues: *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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