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Logics of the Human Story

Contribution to GTI Forum [Big History and Great Transition](#)

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I have dedicated my entire life work to forging narratives that capture the past in ways that open dignifying horizons for the future, as Big History does. Having lived on all continents for the past decades, I can attest that people everywhere crave narratives that anchor them in the world. Religion often provides such narratives, as do family legends or clan and national myths. Such narratives are sometimes so important that people are willing to die for them.

Modern secular Western science does not usually provide equivalent long-term explanations of life's meanings. Physicists have several narratives on offer, as they are still looking for a grand unifying narrative (unifying theory) that connects their subnarratives (theories of subsets of forces). Social scientists on their part wrestle with other uncertainties, for example, whether "man" is aggressive by nature or not, a question that holds great importance as we begin to realize our responsibility for managing our home planet.

So far, emotionally engaging and globally unifying and dignifying narratives are lacking. Through my work, I try to formulate such a narrative, one that draws on new scientific findings and at the same time not only describes the past but also offers a dignifying compass into the future.

Four Logics and Three Eras

I suggest a metanarrative of four basic logics at the core of the human condition to help understand *Homo sapiens'* history and to find a way into the future: the *pie of resources*, the *security dilemma*, the *future time horizon*, and *social identity*.¹ We can trace these logics through the three major eras of human existence: a) the *era of pristine pride*, b) the *era of honor*, and c) the *era of equal dignity in solidarity*.²

- The first logic addresses the question as to whether and to what extent the *pie of resources* is expandable. Game theory is relevant here, as developed within the discipline of philosophy.
- The second logic concerns the *security dilemma* and whether it is weaker or stronger, drawing on international relations theory, as developed in the field of political science.
- The third logic asks whether a long-term or a short-term future time horizon dominates, as described in many academic disciplines, e.g., cross-cultural psychology. The Indigenous seven-generation sustainability rule is an important example.
- The fourth logic concerns the human capacity to tighten or loosen identifications, drawing on social identity theory, as developed in social psychology. This logic sees emotions as history- and culture-dependent phenomena and addresses how psychological mindsets such as pride, honor, *dignity*, *humiliation*, and *humility* inspire narratives—be they narratives of dignity that foster peaceful unity in diversity or narratives of humiliation that justify belligerent divisions without unity.

Most importantly, the fourth logic issues the alert that the human rights ideal of equal dignity for all (in contrast to unequal honor for all) introduces a new form of humiliation, namely, *dignity humiliation*, which is more hurtful than *honor humiliation* and thus can create fault lines of polarization and confrontation that are unprecedented and have the power to undermine, obliterate, and malign the most benign processes.³

If we inscribe these four logics into the chronology of human history on Planet Earth, then we can hypothesize that for the longest period of our history, roughly until the so-called Neolithic Revolution, our forebears enjoyed pristine pride in small egalitarian groups that followed wild food that was abundant and represented an expandable pie of resources for them. Then came the Neolithic Revolution, the time when our species had completed what we could call the first round of globalization (*Homo sapiens* had populated all continents). In a rather brief historical timespan, resources that previously seemed abundant became bounded, a win-win situation turned into a win-lose situation, and circumscription spawned the security dilemma and the commons dilemma. Our forebears responded with a new ethos and emotional coinage, and the era of honor began, which legitimized the vertical ranking of human worth into “higher” and

“lesser” beings. Presently, we are participating in yet another radical shift, with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the year 1948 as one of its most prominent markers, aspiring to an ethos and emotional coinage of equal dignity in freedom and solidarity, a shift that is as significant as the one twelve thousand years ago.

The most destructive scenario combines a short future time horizon and a context where the pie of resources is fixed or even decreasing, where a strong security dilemma reigns or is even willfully ignited, where individuals and groups are exposed to humiliating systems and treatments, and where they retaliate with counter-humiliation that deepens rifts rather than healing and preventing them. Particularly when the transition from unequal to equal worthiness is promised but betrayed, feelings of humiliation can become so strong that they fuel revenge in the name of honor and divide society so deeply that forward-looking co-creation of dignity becomes impossible.

The most constructive scenario is a global knowledge society that treats knowledge as an expandable pie everyone has free access to, while remaining mindful of the finitude of the pie of all ecological resources except solar energy. I work for a world where all people conceive of themselves as part of one single global in-group, as one-planet-one-humanity, where systems and practices of humiliation no longer have legitimacy, where we transcend the security dilemma by building global trust so that we can unite in solidarity in an atmosphere of respect for diversity in equal dignity. I work for a world where we draw appropriate lessons from long past time horizons for the sake of future time horizons that reach far beyond seven generations, so that we can protect and replenish the planet as humanity’s commons in the long term.

The Usefulness of the Four Logics Narrative for the Great Transition

Even though this is such a simplified model of the human condition, it offers an overarching metanarrative for a dignified course into the future in times of crisis. It offers the important warning that dynamics of humiliation become more significant in their destructiveness the more the other parameters veer to the benign side.⁴ It warns that even the most benign scenario is vulnerable to turning malign when feelings of humiliation are allowed to grow, because cycles of humiliation have the potency to malign all otherwise benign trends.

The four logics model also opens space for compassion for our challenged species *Homo sapiens* and can therefore relieve us from having to despair at ourselves or turn on each other in rage. Throughout the past millennia, many were proud of the human ability to compete for domination and control, and male identity became associated with valor in battle, predicated on the assumption that human nature is aggressive, with societies unaware that this strategy was suboptimal at best—never bringing lasting peace, only ceasefires—and that it will bring us all down in the end if we keep at it. We live in times of polycrisis, in times of *ecocide* and *sociocide*, risking *omnicide*, all of which could have been avoided if we had disallowed our dominators to continue with outdated short-term mindsets of competition for domination in the first place. The four logics model shows that only global trust building and cooperation can forge a dignified future, that courage and valor can no longer be sought in competition for domination between “villages” but in bringing the human capability for loving care to the fore in one single global village. As soon as dignity is defined as equal dignity for all in mutual solidarity rather than as the autonomy of lone heroes competing for domination and control, the concept of dignity can unify all religions of the world, all faiths, all life-giving ideologies.

For the first time, humanity has the power not just to extinguish all forms of life on the planet, but also to do the opposite and protect all forms of life. Never before have we been equipped to build the trust needed for solidarity at a global scale. We have all the resources required to reap the benefits that the global ingathering of humanity provides. We can draw on all experiences, past and present, from the oldest Indigenous wisdom to the newest scientific knowledge.⁵ In short, the co-creation of a decent global village is within the reach of our present possibilities.

Endnotes

1. Adapted from Evelin Gerda Lindner, "The Psychology of Humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany," PhD diss., Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Department of Psychology, Oslo, 2000, 437. This model has been developed further since 2000; see, among others, Evelin Gerda Lindner, *From Humiliation to Dignity: For a Future of Global Solidarity* (Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press, 2023).
2. See also William Ury, *Getting to Peace: Transforming Conflict at Home, at Work, and in the World* (New York: Viking, 1999).
3. Evelin Gerda Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*, ed. Chris Stout (Westport, CT, London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 45. See also Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole, 1979).
4. Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*, 45–48, and Lindner, *The Psychology of Humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany*, 437.
5. For "harvesting" from all cultural traditions and achievements, see, among others, Evelin Gerda Lindner, "Avoiding Humiliation — from Intercultural Communication to Global Interhuman Communication," *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, SIETAR Japan 10 (2007), www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php.

About the Author



Evelin Lindner is the founding president of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, a global transdisciplinary fellowship, and co-founder of the World Dignity University Initiative. She has taught in numerous international settings and published widely. Her books include *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*; *Gender, Humiliation, and Global Security*; *A Dignity Economy*; and *Honor, Humiliation, and Terror*. She holds an MD and a PhD in psychology from the University of Hamburg.

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