GREAT TRANSITION INITIATIVE
TOWARD A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION AND PRAXIS

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Dignity Now

Contribution to GTI Forum After the Pandemic: Which Future?

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What We Can Do

We humans have dug ourselves into a multitude of perilous crises, both despite of and because of what we call progress. Still, few people seem to realize that we live in a historic moment of unparalleled promise. For the first time, humankind has the capacity to bring about the changes we need for a Great Transition. Unlike our forebears, we have the privilege of growing awareness of the planet-as-a-whole and the understanding that we humans are one species living on one tiny planet. The conditions are in place for nurturing mutual trust and solidarity as a global species, and acting to humanize globalization and reap the benefits that flow from our interdependence.

What We Do

Instead of realizing this potential, we continue to shred our relations with our habitat and with each other—ecocide and sociocide. We degrade our sociosphere and our cogitosphere, our sphere of thinking and reflection, to the point of compromising the resilience of the ecosphere, a path to our collective suicide as a species.

At the current historical juncture, two new historic forces—the emergence of a globalized system and the rise of human rights ideals—combine to leave a gap between the expectation of living lives of dignity and the ubiquitous humiliation that continues to infuse actual lives. Rampant humiliation can turn a potentially united "global village" into a divided war zone.

Humiliation today is a product of a world-system that gives priority to the maximization of profit rather than of the common good, a dehumanizing state of affairs that penetrates every corner of the world. The coronavirus pandemic was an outcome of this predicament. The obsession with profit at any cost brings humans in contact with devastating novel pathogens, while downplaying decades of warnings.

The tragedy of our moment is thus the gap between the immense historic opportunity waiting to be seized and the world of crises we let persist through our myopia and inaction. Indeed, Paul Raskin's Barbarization scenarios have arrived.

The Spirit of Love

All my life, I have been preparing for the next "Eleanor Roosevelt moment," when a window of opportunity would open for human dignity to get the attention it deserves. In the global dignity movement that I have helped to build, we work for such a moment, contributing an approach we call *big love*. I am therefore delighted to see the word "love" mentioned in this forum. Kavita Byrd's diagnosis is also mine, namely, that the global capitalist system has caused the crisis and "will cause many more to come," and that the "spirit of love" needs to be "expressed in our consciousness, actions, and world." Mamphela Ramphele mirrors my observations that huge benefits flow from the leadership of "progressive women who are demonstrating the power of the feminine to operate within a values framework that emphasizes interconnectedness, interdependence, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibilities and complementarities."

The Hope

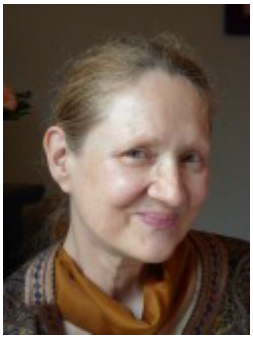
The only realistic hope I see—as faint as it may be—is that a critical mass of people will awaken to the contemporary reality: in an interconnected world, it is essential to move towards a world-system that enables trust and mutual solidarity to emerge both locally and globally. Global human-to-human trust building is everyone's responsibility now; we cannot leave the navigation of "foreign relations" to diplomats, while allowing the Global North to abuse the world as business opportunity and tourist destination. The rising awareness of humanity as one family on a finite, interconnected,

vulnerable planet gives salience to the ideal of equal dignity. Global inter-human relations must overtake inter-national relations in shaping our shared future.

I have coined the term dignism ("dignity" + "ism") to describe a world where every newborn finds space and is nurtured to unfold their highest and best potential, embedded in a social context of loving appreciation and connection, where the carrying capacity of the planet guides the ways in which basic needs are met. It is a world where we unite in respecting human dignity and celebrating diversity, and where, on the one hand, we prevent unity from devolving into oppressive uniformity and, on the other, keep diversity from sliding into hostile division.

As the world watches the heartbreaking coronavirus pandemic unfold, our hope is for an exponential change of heart so that global unity rooted in respect for local diversity becomes possible. The central question we face, which we must ask and answer together, remains, how can we arrange our affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible over the long term?

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.

About the Publication

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