

# CREDO

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DIGNITY | XXXII 2021

# Dignity

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**Dear Readers,**

According to Immanuel Kant, dignity is the absolute, intrinsic worth that humans possess, and is something that can never be forfeited. The philosopher illustrated this absolute worth by contrasting it with the relative value of things, which is inherent in them as long as they function. He believed that humans always have worth – regardless of where they come from, what their last name is, or whether they work, are healthy or are terminally ill.

Cristina Cattaneo, the subject of our cover story, has a different perspective on dignity. Shaken by the realization that hardly anyone is interested in the thousands of refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean, the forensic scientist has devoted herself to identifying them. She feels it is the duty of Europeans to do everything they can to find out their names: “That’s the only way they become human beings.”

In an interview, Gerhild Becker reveals that she shares Kant’s idea that dignity can never be lost, regardless of external conditions. “People die individually in the same way that they have lived individually,” says the medical director of a palliative care clinic. She therefore feels that defining the meaning of “dying with dignity” would be presumptuous. Our Report focuses on the people of Bougainville, who, in contrast, are dreaming of living a dignified life. Christina Schott talks to courageous women who are reclaiming their pride and self-determination. In an essay, Ubaka Ogbogu explores the concept of dignity, which he feels must be more clearly defined in order to serve as a means of assessing whether human cloning is morally justifiable.

Dignity is also a familiar subject in the arts: Johann Kräftner introduces us to Christian Seybold’s “Self-portrait”, and Ijoma Mangold accompanies Ernest Hemingway’s old man to the sea, where he defends his dignity in a day-long battle with a marlin. I wish you an enjoyable read!



H.S.H. Prince Philipp von und zu Liechtenstein  
Honorary Chairman LGT



# Fighting against indifference

Text: **Sacha Batthyany**

**Forensic scientist Cristina Cattaneo has made it her goal to identify the bodies of the nameless refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean. She gives them back their names – and thus their dignity.**

Wearing a white coat, Cristina Cattaneo stands in the laboratory of her institute in Milan and looks through her microscope at a human tragedy. She dissects tissue, analyzes bone splinters, examines blurry documents, toothbrushes and children's drawings washed ashore by the waves. Cattaneo is one of Europe's most renowned forensic scientists, and for years, she has been committed to identifying the nameless refugees who drown every day crossing the Mediterranean.

“A society is measured not only by how it cares for the living but also by how it cares for the dead.” It is the duty of us Europeans, she says, to do everything we can to give the dead bodies a name. “That's the only way they become human beings.”

Cattaneo's mission began seven years ago, on 3 October 2013, when an old fishing boat capsized 800 meters off the Italian island of Lampedusa. It had departed from the Libyan port city of Misrata and had been at sea for three days when the engine failed. More than 500 men, women and children were exposed to the wind and the current. The first lights on the nearby island were already visible when a few refugees lit blankets to signal for help. As they swung them back and forth, a piece got caught in the engine room and the fire raged out of control. Some passengers jumped into the water, others were trapped below deck. Local fishermen who happened to be nearby pulled 155 people out of the water; 366 people drowned.

October 2013: 150 Syrian refugees are rescued off the coast of Sicily. The following day, a fishing boat capsizes near the island of Lampedusa. A total of 366 people die. This marks the beginning of Cattaneo's mission.

Refugees had been dying in the Mediterranean before this shipwreck in October 2013. But never before had so many coffins been seen at once. The television images of the tragedy brought the refugee crisis into the well-heated living rooms of the people of Europe, who until then had so effectively managed to block out what was happening on the sea every day. It was suddenly no longer possible to look away.

### The value of a human life

Cristina Cattaneo was in her apartment in Milan when she heard what had happened off the coast of Lampedusa. Suddenly, a question formed in her mind that has preoccupied her ever since: how can it be, she asked herself, that in the case of every earthquake, every plane crash, everything is done to identify the victims. Specialists travel to the scene and take DNA samples, relatives are informed and supported through the mourning process, because that's the way it should be. Even in bloody wars, bodies are often treated with respect. It is only for the dead in the sea that nobody seems to show interest. "Are Nigerians, Syrians or Afghans worth less than Danish, Americans or Swiss citizens?"

They die anonymously, without names, without history, as if they had never lived. They sink to the bottom of the sea, decay into mere numbers and cold statistics that end up in brochures that no one wants to read: ciphers of one of the great tragedies of our time.

Cattaneo's father died shortly before the accident at sea in 2013, and this triggered many questions and feelings inside her. In her job, she often had to deal with the relatives of victims: as a forensic scientist, she says, death and grief were part of her everyday professional life. But it was only when her father died that she truly understood what it meant to lose a loved one and to feel the emptiness that suddenly surrounds you. Perhaps that is why she could not get the refugees in their body bags out of her mind. The urge to take action against the anonymous deaths at sea began to grow in her. An urge that almost became an obsession.

That was seven years ago. Since then, not a day has passed without Cristina Cattaneo standing in her lab, sitting on podiums, studying death lists with colleagues and doing everything she can to track down the names and stories of the people who died crossing the sea.





**Cristina Cattaneo**

Born in Italy in 1964, she studied biomedicine, osteology and paleopathology in England and Canada. Since 2000, she has been a professor of forensic medicine at the University of Milan, where she heads the Labanof Institute. Day after day, she fights for her mission to identify the nameless refugees who drowned in the Mediterranean – and calls on European politicians and society at large to never forget this recurring tragedy.



On 6 August 2015, Syrian migrants jump into the sea off the Libyan coast as their boat threatens to capsize. The day before, 200 people traveling in the same type of boat drowned, despite an Italian ship providing emergency aid.

## Sympathy is followed by disinterest

Getting in touch with Cristina Cattaneo is not easy, she is “extremely busy,” as she wrote in a first e-mail. Her assistant says she doesn’t like to plan too far in advance; an emergency could arise at any time for which she would have to drop everything. And the forensic scientist is well-acquainted with emergencies.

The 57-year-old studied in England and Canada. As a committed, fearless professor of forensic medicine at the University of Milan, she made a name for herself early on through her work on very difficult cases: child abuse, rape, torture, murder. For years, she has been investigating anonymous corpses, which, if the search for their identity fails, are buried nameless somewhere in Italy.

The institute she heads, with the somewhat Russian-sounding name Labanof (the abbreviation of “Laboratorio di Antropologia e Odontologia Forense”), has always been concerned with the examination of corpses; sometimes they belong to mafia victims found in highway pillars, sometimes to lonely widowers with

out relatives who die in gray and anonymous suburbs of Milan without anyone noticing they are missing. But it was the 2013 shipwreck that opened Cattaneo’s eyes to the fate of refugees and led to Labanof becoming the center for identifying migrants who have drowned.

And to the matter becoming a political issue.

Cattaneo’s mission costs money, of course – which no one wants to pay. In the beginning, everything went surprisingly well. In 2013, the Italian government launched a humanitarian aid operation, operation Mare Nostrum, which saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of refugees who would otherwise have drowned during their journey. Cattaneo also received significant support. “The population showed real sympathy, and even politicians gave me the sense that they wanted to do something about the tragedy at sea and those who died.” But in politics, like at sea, the direction of the wind can change very quickly. Mare Nostrum became operation Triton, which was followed by operation Themis; the Italian navy was deployed purely for



Cristina Cattaneo: "I saw the dead people in the shipwrecks when we recovered them. The world is in the process of forgetting all of that again. That can't happen."

border security, because it was said that otherwise, incentives would be created to encourage even more people to venture across the sea. Citizens lost interest, the Italian authorities cut budgets and Cattaneo's work and her institute continue to suffer the effects thereof to this day.

### Bones that talk

As much as the 2013 shipwreck shook Europeans up, they soon got used to the daily mass deaths and the fact that around 30 000 people have lost their lives at sea since 2001. Often, all that remained of them were their life jackets.

This makes Cattaneo's work all the more important. Under a microscope, she follows up on every clue, no matter how inconspicuous. "Bones talk," she says when we finally meet, weeks after first making contact. "You just have to listen carefully."

Some bodies are also found carrying belongings, money, phone numbers, wedding rings and photos of loved ones; quite a few have a bag with some soil from home with them, the

forensic scientist says. "They are people like us. That's what we experience when we empty their pockets – they contain the same things that our pockets do." In the case of a 14-year-old boy from Mali, she found a school report card in a jacket pocket. "Often it's young people who leave their homeland with high hopes and having made great sacrifices. Also financially." No one leaves their homeland with a light heart and embarks on the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean in overcrowded rubber boats just for fun, she explains.

### A needle in a haystack

Cattaneo has alert eyes and thick blond hair that she tucks carelessly behind her ears as she speaks. Documents and books are piled up on her desk, "I don't have the time to tidy up." She compares the found objects and bone parts that she analyzes and documents against existing databases – of the Red Cross, for example – and hopes for a match. Her work requires immense perseverance and patience and "a large dose of optimism," as it is like the proverbial search for a needle in a haystack.

She has repeatedly called for the creation of an international task force, a network that would collect and compile information from autopsies as well as relatives. “If we had a global database, it would greatly increase the likelihood of identifying victims.” But her demands have so far gone unmet, her calls for more dignity for the dead unheard.

She says that what is most painful, however, are the visits from parents who have not heard from their children since the crossing. In hour-long interviews, Cattaneo inquires about every conceivable detail: age, broken bones, body structure, about the position of their teeth. She relies on precise descriptions, but for the fathers and mothers it is psychologically very stressful to remember the physical details of their missing daughters and sons. Often, Cattaneo shows the parents objects that have been found, scraps of clothing or toys that lie behind display cases in her institute like in a museum, hoping they might recognize one or the other. Most of the time, however, the parents just shake their heads.

This is another aspect that is forgotten and suppressed in the horrific daily media reports: every time an inflatable boat capsizes, families and friends panic. Fathers and mothers, often thousands of kilometers away from the scene of the disaster, search for information about their children; brothers search for their siblings; grandmothers search for their sons and grandchildren, for weeks, months, years.

“Many relatives can’t say goodbye because they don’t know for sure if the missing person is really dead,” Cattaneo says. They can’t grieve because they cling to any hope, however small, like shipwrecked people clinging to driftwood, that their daughters or sons will one day get in touch with them. This is why Cattaneo’s work consists of more than giving dignity back to the dead. “It’s also, above all, about the dignity of the living.”

## A call for a shared vision

The work done by the forensics professor is tough and at the same time very quiet, far from the big stages where politicians give speeches to make a name for themselves ahead of the next elections. With the meticulousness of a scientist, she stands up to the ruling political forces, to repression and to what is probably the most vile of all human scourges: indifference.

“I saw the dead people in the shipwrecks when we recovered them,” she says. “The corpses of the children were stacked up in the bilges. The world is in the process of forgetting all of that again. That can’t happen.” She started out with the proof that

it is possible to identify the dead from the 2013 shipwreck, she says, but now there needs to be a new phase, because the dying doesn’t stop on its own.

Cattaneo wants to take her concerns to Brussels, as she feels the EU can no longer shirk its responsibility and must finally decide what happens to the dead at sea. A shared vision, pooled expertise and interconnected structures are needed. “Doing nothing and looking the other way is moral surrender,” says Cattaneo, and amounts to a violation of human rights. “Because the people who die off our coasts are also our dead.”

## Learning empathy as a result of coronavirus

The corona pandemic in particular, she says, shows us how important it is to deal with death with dignity. “Thousands of people in Europe became ill, died in solitude, without saying goodbye, and had a fast-track burial without a funeral.” What had seemed so distant to us as a society suddenly became reality, “even in our country,” she says. Relatives could no longer care for their loved ones because of the virus, they could no longer hug them, could not even touch them, and had to stand back, powerless as they slowly died. “What migrants experience – fear, loneliness, sadness and powerlessness – are things we are now experiencing ourselves as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.”

Death makes no distinctions. Cristina Cattaneo experiences this every day in the autopsy room. She says it is extremely important right now not to forget these refugees who traveled by boat, not to block out their fates. “The pandemic can teach us how to empathize again.”

In the seven years since the 2013 tragedy, Cristina Cattaneo has been able to track down the names of 37 people who died during the crossing. For another 98 cases, she is close, she says. “We were able to inform 37 families about the death of their loved ones,” says Cattaneo summarizing her work of the past years dryly.

It sounds like nothing. A drop in the ocean.

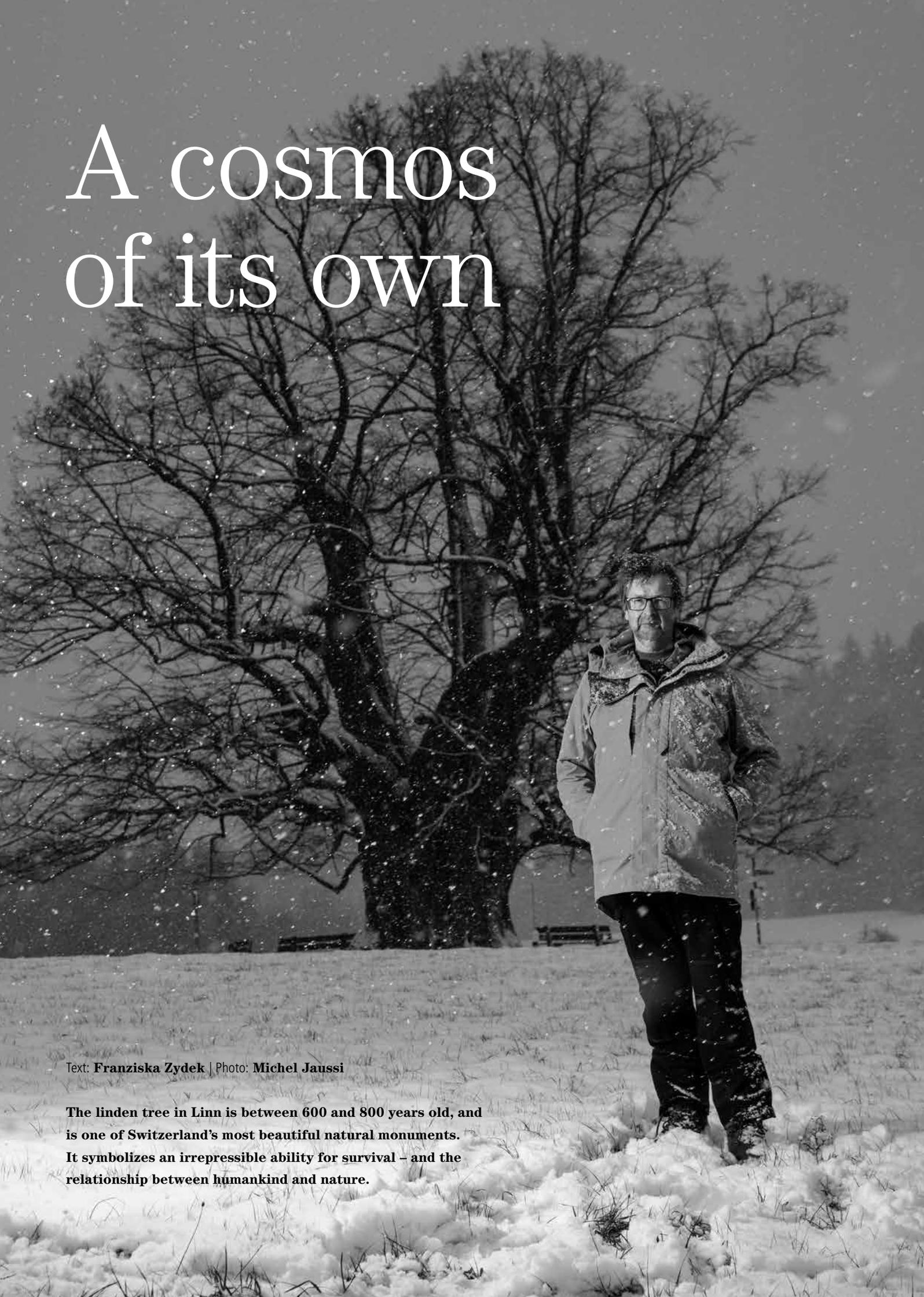
But it means everything. ♦

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Sacha Batthyany is a journalist and author. After spending several years in the US, where he worked as a US correspondent for Tages-Anzeiger, Das Magazin and Süddeutsche Zeitung, he is now an editor for the “Hintergrund” section of NZZ am Sonntag, a role he assumed in 2018.



# A cosmos of its own



Text: **Franziska Zydek** | Photo: **Michel Jaussi**

**The linden tree in Linn is between 600 and 800 years old, and is one of Switzerland's most beautiful natural monuments.**

**It symbolizes an irrepressible ability for survival – and the relationship between humankind and nature.**

The linden tree in Linn, a mighty tree that stands in the middle of a quaint, picture-book rural landscape, has been the subject of many photos.

On this November day, however, the picture is a different one. All that can be seen of the linden tree is an outline, and the village of Linn has been swallowed up by fog.

Asymmetrical and wild, its seven main branches rise up into the white sky. Some of them are hollow, like the linden tree's trunk. Over the years, thick calluses have grown inwards, forming new bark. If you run your hands over the skin of the tree, the injuries that mark its surface can be felt. And this gives rise, for a moment, to the feeling of understanding the meaning of time: this is an organism that has lived for hundreds of years. And it will still be alive when we are no longer here.

### Coming into being and ceasing to be

“Old trees represent a cycle that consists of coming into being and ceasing to be. This cycle has a unique temporality,” says Martin Erb. “Part of them is alive, part of them is dead, part of them is as yet unborn.” In humans, he says, cell division slows down with age. “But a tree like the linden can regenerate itself as needed, and over the years, can replace what has died or broken off.”

Martin Erb is one of the most experienced tree experts in Switzerland. He is a tall man who doesn't make a big deal about what he does. Trees are his passion. More than 40 years ago, he led a team responsible for doing extensive maintenance on the linden tree in Linn. Among other things, this involved removing bark that had grown to encompass a round iron bench and freeing the hollow trunk, which had been roughly walled up with bricks and mortar. He has been doing maintenance on the tree ever since.

Like many people who know a great deal, Martin Erb began at some point to question aspects of the knowledge he had amassed. He would ask himself things like: is that really the case? Perhaps it's actually the opposite? And this is why he says things like, “What's bad for a tree can sometimes be good for a tree.” Trees, he says, are a cosmos of their own, in which biological and chemical processes, as well as countless organisms

and living things – many of which are not even known – act and communicate in a complex interplay. If a tree learns to deal with problems on its own, this system, according to Erb, enables it to grow old. But in the end, only time will tell whether a tree dies – or mobilizes its defenses when required. “We are only beginning to understand how nature works.”

No one knows what challenges the linden tree has faced so far in its long life. However, for a while now, formerly healthy twigs and branches on its crown have been withering – a phenomenon that is thought to be caused by a combination of different fungi that are spreading through the tree's internal vascular system. The hot summers of 2018 and 2019 have exacerbated the dieback, Martin Erb explains with concern. They are trying to help the tree by carefully cutting out the infested wood and using compost to provide the roots with nutrients, he says.

### The dignity of nature

In the early 1970s, the philosopher Hans Jonas (1903–1993) wrote that nature also has “inwardness, subjectivity, interests and goals, and thus values.” Modern environmental ethics distinguishes between the instrumental value (for humans), the inherent value (in a cultural and historical context) and the intrinsic value of nature (which resides in nature itself). The latter is therefore a value that exists independently of the value ascribed to it by humans. Since we do not know what value nature ascribes to itself, the idea of its dignity is a projection: we see in nature our own interpretation of what represents dignity.

### The tree as a source of strength

The linden tree in Linn makes this easy for us. We can respect it for its own sake and rejoice in the fact that it is a tree that – by human standards – has aged with dignity. When the weather is good, many people visit the tree, especially in the current times. They want to commune with it, hug it, find strength and comfort. “I actually don't like it when trees are anthropomorphized,” says Martin Erb. But he is nevertheless touched by the deep attachment people feel for the linden tree.

What do they see in this tree? Life force? The ability to grow older than most other living things? Its immutable bond with the place in which it has grown? Martin Erb suspects that people's love of trees could be the expression of an ancient longing. He explains that at the beginning of human evolution, our ancestors lived freely and autonomously in trees, finding shelter and food there. In his view, this love could therefore be attributable to the fact that humans often long for what they have lost. ♦

Martin Erb in front of the linden tree in Linn, which he has looked after for over 40 years.



## Gerhild Becker

Professor Dr. Gerhild Becker (58) is Medical Director of the Department of Palliative Care at the University of Freiburg Medical Center. She is one of the few Chairs of palliative care in Germany. "We want every medical student to learn proper pain management as well as how to interact well with the dying," she says. Among other things, Becker is a doctor of internal medicine, but she also holds a degree in theology. In 2013, she was ordained as a volunteer pastor.



# “Dignity is not something that can be lost”

Interview: **Michael Neubauer**

**As a theologian and the medical director of a clinic for palliative care, Gerhild Becker is well acquainted with the needs and concerns of terminally ill people – and is critical of the popular term “dying with dignity”. In an interview, she talks about respect for the dying, miracles that happen at people’s deathbeds, doctors who can let go with compassion and having the courage to face the unplannable.**

*CREDO: Ms. Becker, how would you like to die?*

I’m glad that’s not something I can decide, and that I can therefore let it happen to me with a certain amount of serenity. The really important things in our lives, like love and dying, are out of our hands. I find that comforting.

*You see terminally ill people every day at your clinic. What are they typically scared or worried about?*

There are essentially three groups of fears: first, the fear of physically debilitating symptoms such as severe pain or shortness of breath. Then there is the fear that many seriously ill patients have of being a burden on their relatives, for example because they will need care. And then there is often the fear that they will not have a natural death, but a death determined by external factors while hooked up to high-tech medical apparatuses. In palliative care, we try to deal with all of these fears.

*How much hope can you give these seriously ill people?*

Our work has a lot to do with hope, especially very individual and concrete hopes. For example, whether someone can once again spend holidays, such as Christmas, at home, by ensuring they have the right dosage of pain medication. Or sufficiently

alleviating a person’s breathing difficulties so they can take one last bus trip to the North Cape. Or giving someone the possibility to talk to relatives about important matters so that their mind is at peace.

*What can be done in order to enable someone to live out their last weeks, days or hours in dignity?*

Dying with dignity is a popular term these days. But it would be presumptuous of me to say that dying in palliative care, with the symptoms of the illness well under control, automatically means dying with dignity. We humans all have an inalienable dignity. This is not something that has to be established, nor can it ever be lost; it is inherent in our being human – regardless of the external factors relating to our living and dying. People die individually in the same way that they have lived individually. That is why, from the outside, we cannot determine what constitutes dying with dignity and what does not.

*But what can we do to ensure a death that we feel is dignified?*

We can treat a person in a way that recognizes their dignity. This means respecting the other person. A person has the right to live and die in the way that suits them, without me as a doctor, for example, imposing my personal views of dying on them.

*A dignified culture of dying – how should that be practiced in a hospital?*

Every hospital should be equipped to support life, which also includes dying. Dying is a very intense phase of our lives. It is important that we talk openly about it. And that we also have a culture of saying goodbye: for example, rooms where relatives can say goodbye to their loved ones who have died. It is also

important that the deceased be well cared for, that the medical tubes be removed, that they are positioned comfortably in their bed. I have personally always enjoyed visiting the deceased and saying goodbye to them. The other aspect is caring for people who will die at home. That is very important to me.

*Why?*

On average, people who are dying spend only five percent of their last year of life in professional institutions such as clinics or hospices, and 95 percent with their relatives or good friends. That's why it's important in our society not to isolate the dying and their relatives, but to help them through support networks. This includes neighbors who give a helping hand, but also employers who show understanding or even support a relative who is providing terminal care. This will be one of our society's great challenges, especially with the baby boomers reaching old age. In our cities and municipalities, we need civil society to show solidarity, a caring community of professional helpers and citizens.

*Perhaps we are so eager to leave the dying in the hands of medical professionals because medicine is now so advanced.*

Yes, medicine can do a great deal, but we have to ask ourselves: is it good to do everything that we can do in medical terms? It is a question of what is appropriate in each case, of applying the virtue of moderation. We need doctors who can let go with compassion: in palliative care, we have to very carefully weigh what we do and what we deliberately do not do, individually for each patient and together with them. We cannot cure the illness, but we can offer the patient and their relatives a protective cloak: hence the term palliative care, from the Latin *pallium*, meaning cloak. This cloak should always be tailor-made.

*Pain relief is a very important part of that. How far has medicine come in this regard?*

Modern medicine is a blessing, especially in this area. In the past, pain medication worked, but it sometimes left patients very woozy. Today, even our strongest pain medication, opiates, are so well tolerated that they not only work well, but they often allow the patient to remain very present in life. A patient who is seriously ill due to a tumor can still drive a car if they respond well to the medication. Nowadays, we can treat the vast majority of physically limiting symptoms very well.

*You also want to help the seriously ill on a psychological, social and spiritual level. Why is this holistic approach so important to you?*

In medicine, we don't treat illnesses, we treat sick people. Pain

has a physical dimension that I treat with painkillers. But there is also a psychological dimension, because the pain reminds me that I have an incurable disease that leads to death. Moreover, we humans do not live alone, but in social relationships. So the pain also has a social dimension: for example, because I can no longer spend time with my group of hiking friends. Yet it is precisely these people that I need around me in my difficult situation. Pain also has a spiritual dimension. Even if fewer and fewer people today are religious, spirituality is a basic human constant. We ask ourselves: where do I come from, where will I go, what is the meaning of my life?

*What questions do your patients tend to ask at the end of their lives?*

Why am I sick? Why do I have to have this pain right now? In my experience, illness is still seen as a punishment for past mistakes. For example, a woman in her late fifties who was sitting in the outpatient clinic once told me in passing: I put my mother in a nursing home, and shortly after that I got breast cancer. She thinks she did something wrong – that's not the case, but she feels she has – and she now sees the illness as a punishment. If, as a doctor, I don't ask the right questions, I can treat the patient with as much pain medication as I like, but her pain will remain.

*What last wishes do your patients express most often?*

At the end of their lives, people very often look for spiritual peace, they want to put things right. They want to be able to leave this world with things in order. Martin Luther summed this up well in his "Sermon on Preparing to Die". People ask themselves: whom do I have to forgive, who has to forgive me? Sometimes, we doctors have to carefully inquire whether there is anything that a patient has still not addressed. Every once in a while, that little push can lead to small miracles.

*What kind of miracles?*

Sometimes they come in the form of healing or forgiveness. Sometimes a misunderstanding has built up in a family over years and no one manages to take the first step toward reconciliation. In such cases, we can sometimes provide support, for example, our psychologist offers to be present during a conversation. I'm always fascinated by how important this time of dying is; it is a very intense phase of life. Many aspects of life come into focus as if they were being looked at under a magnifying glass. It often amazes me what people who are dying, some of whom are no longer conscious, succeed in doing: they manage to get their family to gather around their bed and suddenly, family members who haven't spoken to each other for decades start talking again.



## Palliative care

Palliative care is the term used to describe comprehensive care for people suffering from an incurable illness that results in death. Various specialists work together to improve the quality of life of these patients, including specially trained doctors and nurses, psychologists and social workers. Palliative care also aims to help the relatives of seriously ill people. "Palliative physicians do not only deal with death, that's nonsense," says Becker. According to her, this holistic support concept is much more about treating physical symptoms such as pain, shortness of breath, nausea and agitation, while also taking into account psychological, social and spiritual aspects, as well as advance care planning.



Gerhild Becker: "At the end of a person's life, what is important is trust and relationships."

*What do you mean by many aspects of life coming into focus?*

When people hear about a palliative care unit, they often imagine it as a gloomy place full of people who are whispering because people are dying there. The fact is, though, that our unit is full of life! We have the children of relatives playing in the ward living room, or maybe two people want to get married, and because they can no longer go to the registry office, the registry office comes to us. A while ago, songs by Howard Carpendale were played for days because a woman was dying and that was the music she had listened to with her husband all her life. For me, the variety we see at the end of people's lives is part of the dignity of dying, which cannot be standardized.

*To what extent do you experience death as a taboo – both among the sick and their relatives?*

Death is not a taboo topic in our ward, because there is an atmosphere there that signals that it's okay to talk about it. Patients say, "I know I have colon cancer and liver metastases, but how will I die, what exactly happens?" Or relatives ask: "I'm taking my father home with me now, and my siblings want me to call

them when he is approaching the end of his life. But how will I even know when that is?" We find that people know less and less about dying because it happens less often at home. So part of our work is also to educate people.

*Do younger people today deal with dying differently?*

In our society, we generally no longer have any experience in dealing with contingency situations, or in other words, with randomness, with the unplannable things in our lives. Smartphones and apps make it possible for us to predict a vast array of things and plan their every detail. For healthy younger people, individuality and self-determination are very important factors. Many of them believe that they have to plan their own death as if it were a final, major project. Older people, on the other hand, whom I see in the clinic, can still approach dying with a certain level of composure and confidence. Generally, people who are dying are no longer concerned with abstract thoughts such as self-determination, for example. Instead, they deal with questions like: am I alone during these, my last hours? Who is sitting at my bedside?



*In the debate surrounding assisted suicide, proponents insist on the importance of autonomy, on a person's own wishes when dying. What is your view as a theologian?*

In this discussion, autonomy is equated with self-determination; that every person should be able to determine his or her own death. The term autonomy comes from the Greek, it means "own law". In ancient Greece, it was used to describe a city's freedom from the arbitrariness of tyrannical rule. Immanuel Kant was also not referring to the personal desires of individuals when he spoke of autonomy. He was referring to every human being's self-legislation. In other words, that a human being may not be instrumentalized by others. The concept of autonomy therefore relates to relationships with others. This corresponds to what we experience every day in palliative care: we are all social beings, dying is neither about independence nor about self-determination. It's about trust and about relationships. According to a cross-sectional survey, if people knew they would need palliative care in a year's time, more than 50 percent would request assisted suicide – for fear of being a burden on relatives or society. The answer to this cannot be assisted suicide, but must

be a socio-political one. How do we change the conditions in our society so that we are not afraid of becoming a burden? As a theologian, I would say: we humans are allowed to be a burden to each other. We are allowed to expect that we will take care of each other.

*Do many doctors still perceive it as a personal defeat when patients die, meaning that they do everything they can to prevent this from happening?*

We start out with an image of ourselves, and the goal of, helping and healing. When a patient dies, this is therefore experienced by many physicians as painful in a narcissistic sense. That's why it's very important to teach medical students that even if they can't cure a patient, being a good doctor means providing them with the proper support so they can die well. As doctors, we have to be able to take a step back. We must be able to let death happen while at the same time being smart in recognizing where we can alleviate suffering. The comforting news is that as a rule, dying is something we humans can do on our own. It's biologically programmed; we very rarely need a doctor to die, and even more rarely a palliative care physician.

*Would you say that a certain preoccupation with death is important in order to live a better life?*

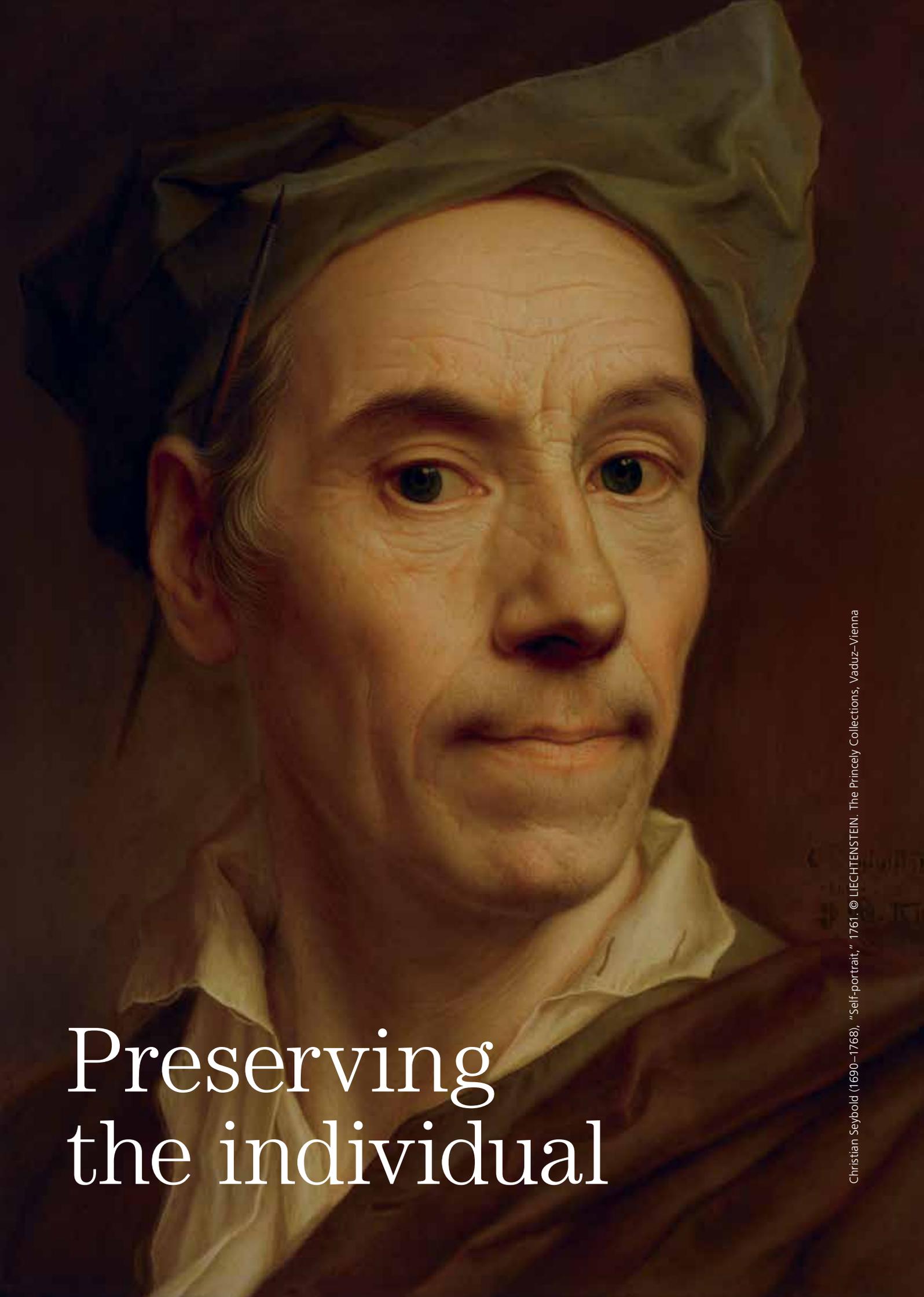
I think so, yes. It used to be easier because there were more culturally embedded moments when people consciously dealt with dying, such as Good Friday and Easter. If Easter becomes just a bunny-related event, something important gets lost. I also think it's important to talk to children about death in an appropriate way – even if it's just when a pet has died. Children should also be allowed to go to a funeral and touch a coffin in order to get an understanding of death. I love to sing and like old church songs, which often address death. All of these moments give us assurance about what is in store for us.

*An end about which we know little.*

I detect a certain curiosity about this in myself, but also serenity. After all, millions of people have died before me and millions will die after me. It also scares me a bit, of course, because we humans always fear, and are to a certain extent in awe of, the unknown. But honestly, I also think it's great that we don't know exactly how our death will be. It's the last big adventure that lies ahead of us. ♦

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# Preserving the individual

The term dignity is incredibly comprehensive. Festivities are celebrated with dignity; to have aged with dignity is probably not the worst compliment one can receive; and there is perhaps nothing more important than a dignified death, no matter what a person achieved during their lifetime.

From very early on, one of the key elements of portrait painting has been to capture and portray someone in all their dignity, to highlight their attributes or to create a record of them, so that they will always be remembered, and their character preserved.

The Princely Collections contain a rich selection of such portraits, which span a broad range of periods, schools and subjects. If a person wants to dive into this selection, they will probably first turn their attention to the great painters who devoted themselves to this genre and are represented in abundance in the Collections across a period that spans over six centuries. For example: Raphael and his “Portrait of a Man”, 1502/1504; or Francesco Salviati and his “Portrait of a Young Man”, 1548, in which the artist conveys tenderness, serenity and dignity through the deer and the hands of the sitter that caress the animal. Peter Paul Rubens’ and Anthonis van Dyck’s portraits immediately come to mind on the subject of dignity; van Dyck’s “Portrait of Maria de Tassis”, c. 1629/1630, captures the essence of the standing, wealth but also dignity of this family, which was very important throughout Europe at the time, ensuring that these attributes can be witnessed through the ages. And then there is Frans Hals’s “Portrait of a Man”, 1650/1652, which leaves the viewer curious to know more about this unknown person who has such a mild countenance.

While perusing the seemingly endless history of the Princely Collections and the wealth of paintings it contains, my attention was caught by a much more recent portrait: the “Self-portrait”. It was painted by Christian Seybold in 1761. This small cabinet piece is evidence that the painter, who at that time was already 71 years old, was still at the peak of his abilities. Its counterpart in the Princely Collections is the portrait of his young daughter, and both paintings were acquired by Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein from the artist himself. The pieces are painted on copper, which is one of the reasons he was able to render the sitters so realistically. In his own portrait, he depicts every little wrinkle, every little vein, the lips, the nose and the eyes, with a level of detail that could only be achieved today in the form of a photograph, and only with the greatest of efforts.

This person, this painter, is visibly proud of his skill – it is no coincidence that the thin brush, with whose fine tip he has described and captured every last detail, is stuck behind his right ear, where it is held in place by a downward sweep of hair. He shows us his timeworn face, apparently seeing no reason to beautify his appearance in any way.

How rarely one sees such faces today, faces that do not seek to hide the aging process and are prepared to reveal a life often hidden behind a facade. In this face, one recognizes the fire of youth burned down to the embers of old age. The curiosity that drives this man, his openness to a world that he absorbs and depicts through his eyes, jump out at us. We see a man who appears to be at one with himself, to have aged with dignity, but who also displays this dignity quite invitingly and self-confidently.

We know little about Seybold as a painter. Born in 1690 in the Taunus region of Hesse, he went to Vienna in 1715 and became court painter to August III in Dresden in 1742. In 1749, he returned to Vienna, where he was painter to the court of Maria Theresa. His small cabinet pieces were incredibly popular with his contemporaries; his portraits were featured in the imperial collection as well as in many private collections. His unrestrained realism was clearly already highly valued at that time: one could, and wanted, to look the unvarnished truth in the eye. And this not only in the depictions of the simple country peasants, which often plunged into the burlesque and had been among the favorites in the galleries of rulers and the high aristocracy since the 17th century.

In contrast to early genre painting, Seybold’s work does not distort people’s image; it does not seek to amuse, but to capture the character of the sitter. In an almost matter-of-fact, encyclopedic way, it brought the reality of these people into the galleries of the ruling classes while preserving all their dignity. Seybold saw through the lens of the Enlightenment, which advocated respect for the dignity of every human being, whether rich or poor, young or old. ♦

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Four strong women who want to change Bougainville: 1) Marcelline Kokiai, former Minister of Community Development, 2) Theonila Roka Matbob, a teacher and the recently appointed Minister of Education, 3) Ruby Mirinka, a health activist and leader of Bougainville's most successful NGO, 4) Lorraine Garasu (left), a Catholic nun who cares for traumatized victims of the civil war.

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# A time for women

Text: **Christina Schott** | Photos: **Eduardo Soteras Jalil**

Although the island in the Pacific Ocean is organized along matrilineal lines, men have always had the say in local politics. But the fact that Bougainville could soon become the youngest nation on earth and that the needs of its inhabitants are being recognized is largely thanks to the commitment of courageous – and angry – female activists.



The bridge is breathtaking, literally. Five former construction crane arms are balanced on towers up to ten meters high made of gigantic tires from old mining excavators. A family of five slowly makes its way along a distance of more than 100 meters to cross the wobbly iron struts and reach the other side. Below, the brown waters of the Kawerong River flow through a moonscape of sand and rubble piles. In many places, turquoise or reddish-brown stains have formed, a sign of heavy metals. Scattered far and wide, people are crouched down, handling plastic bowls, sieves and mercury in the hopes of wringing out a few grams of gold from the already contaminated riverbed. Buried 40 meters below them is the village from which their families once came – and with it their land, their ancestors, their pride and their dignity. A post-apocalyptic nightmare in the central highlands of the Pacific island of Bougainville, a former German colony that has been part of Papua New Guinea since 1975.

The cause of this real-life apocalypse in the middle of the South Seas lies a few kilometers further upstream: Panguna, once the largest open pit copper and gold mine in the world. The mine, operated by the British-Australian mining company Rio

Tinto, generated more than 40 percent of Papua New Guinea's total exports in the 1980s. It brought a modern infrastructure and political influence to Bougainville, but also great social injustice and almost unimaginable environmental destruction. When traditional landowners and local miners rebelled against the exploitation, a civil war broke out in 1989 that raged for nearly a decade and claimed some 20 000 lives.

### **A lengthy reconciliation process**

Initially, the rebellion was directed against the Australian mine operators and the government of Papua New Guinea, which gave the locals only a fraction of the profits from Panguna. During the course of a total naval blockade by the military – food and medicine could only be smuggled in at the risk of one's life – the guerrilla fighters on the island soon splintered into ethnic factions that plundered, raped and murdered each other. It was not until 1998 that a tentative peace agreement was reached, mediated by the United Nations. The ensuing reconciliation process took another 20 years, culminating in a referendum in December 2019 in which nearly 98 percent of the population voted for independence from Papua New Guinea. If the central



An apocalypse in the South Sea paradise: A bridge made of old construction crane arms leads across the Kawerong River, which snakes its way around the waste materials from the Panguna mine.

government agrees, Bougainville could become the youngest nation on the planet.

“Papua New Guinea and Australia have dominated us for too long. They have taken away all our resources, and our dignity,” says Marcelline Kokiai. It’s Friday morning, and rush hour prevails at the port of Kokopau. Bougainville’s former Minister of Community Development is standing in the midst of the hustle and bustle, instructing some burly young men to unload her car. She also uses the time to make a phone call, because in her hometown – which is a three bumpy hours’ drive south of here – she has no mobile network reception. Longboats with rattling outboard motors dock and cast off incessantly. They take market vendors, schoolchildren and office workers along with bags, bundles of wood and chickens across the 400-meter-wide sea passage to the neighboring island of Buka, which has been the seat of the government of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville since the civil war. There, a freighter is currently delivering hundreds of rusty tons of diesel. In recent days, fuel has been so scarce that the generators have only been running for a limited number of hours.

## The keys to independence

“We have to learn to take care of ourselves again,” says Marcelline Kokiai. Unlike many other politicians, she does not support the idea of reopening the Panguna mine to finance independence. Like many islanders of her generation, the 62-year-old has pursued higher education and speaks very good English. But her hands also speak of hard work. She is convinced that the key to Bougainville’s autonomy lies in the organic cultivation of cocoa and coconuts, and later perhaps in ecotourism – but certainly not in mining, which has already destroyed so many lives. “We love our land. Digging it up is good therapy: if the earth absorbs all our anger and fear, that energy will make the plants grow. This would keep people busy and at the same time give them back their self-esteem.”

Kokiai knows what she is talking about. When the civil war began, the former pharmacy assistant had to flee. Even today, the small, strong woman’s eyes fill with tears when she recounts the misery and violence that she and her family experienced. “I had to leave everything behind, my house, my land, the spirits of my ancestors. I had to raise nine children in the jungle,” she



Overcoming the past: At a reconciliation meeting, former members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and resistance fighters line up together for lunch.



says. “But one thing I never lost was my faith in our strength.” Marcelline Kokiai was one of the first activists to initially organize a few women’s groups and then entire communities to start a peace process. In 1994, she wrote a letter describing the crimes against humanity that were taking place in Bougainville. With the help of an Australian reporter, the letter made it through the blockade and all the way to the Australian Parliament in Canberra, from where its contents went on to be heard internationally.

### Limits to female power

It was women like Marcelline Kokiai who brought peace to their homeland. Women like health activist Ruby Mirinka, who risked her life to smuggle medicine through the blockade and established contact with the United Nations. Or like Catholic Sister Lorraine Garasu, who built a communication system that crossed the lines drawn by the hostile clans, and continues to care for traumatized people to this day. They are strong, energetic women who, thanks to matrilineal inheritance rights, also enjoy great social influence as landowners. The highest rank in the communities is held by the oldest women in the village. However, their place in the strictly Christian society remains mostly the home – almost all important political positions are occupied by men. Even in the presidential election last September, only two of the 25 candidates were women. When the ballots were counted, they lagged far behind, taking 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> place.

“We need to change the way people think. We are a matrilineal society, but men still make the decisions and speak for us,” says Ruby Mirinka, one of the two presidential hopefuls. “We were once a proud people. But for 20 years nothing has changed here. Men are always talking and waving their guns around. It’s now time for us women to take care of rebuilding this country,” says the 70-year-old, who, with her smooth skin and dark hair, looks much younger.

She is sitting in her office in Arawa. Thick clouds of fog hang over the densely overgrown mountains behind the former capital of Bougainville; somewhere up there is Panguna. The manicured gardens in front of every house, no matter how simple, stand in stark contrast to the broken remains of the former government buildings and factories. At the main intersection, an oversized screen shows a never-ending loop of clips warning against alcoholism and violence against women – as well as coronavirus, of which there were two confirmed cases by November 2020. The streets are deserted: it’s Sunday morning, and most residents are on their way to church. Since Mirinka is a member of the Pentecostal church, she attended service on Saturday.

## Potential for a women's movement

Designated as the head instructor of all nurses in Papua New Guinea before the war, she now heads what is probably the most successful non-governmental organization in the region: with the help of thousands of volunteers, Bougainville Healthy Communities provides basic health care in 98 percent of all villages on the islands. According to Mirinka, the fact that even the most remote mountain village has well-tended front gardens with vegetable patches is attributable to their educational campaigns promoting healthy nutrition and a clean environment. The organization has also developed a training program that teaches village communities to be financially self-sustaining – and specifically supports women. “There is potential for a strong, united women's movement,” says Ruby Mirinka. But she says September's election results have diminished her hopes: just four women were able to take one of the 40 seats in parliament, three of those were reserved quota seats. Only one woman won a seat in parliament through direct election – against 15 male candidates – and that in the constituency to which the Panguna mine belongs.

The village of Makosi is situated on a steep slope above a rushing river. A dozen simple wooden houses hide behind lush palms, banana trees and flowering bushes. Theonila Roka Matbob has just harvested sweet potatoes and water spinach for lunch. Sweat trickles down her forehead as she approaches her visitor, surrounded by a crowd of children. The newly elected member of parliament walks barefoot and wears a brightly patterned loose blouse with puffed sleeves – a typical item of clothing worn by women on Bougainville. Her eyes flash with energy when she talks, and the 30-year-old radiates an impressive amount of authority for her age. Yes, Makosi is a pretty village, she says, but the idyllic impression is deceptive. She points to the river rushing by, with turquoise spots flashing on its banks: “The water is contaminated, our children get sick when they bathe in it,” she says. “We live with the consequences of Panguna every day.”

## Hope for better education

For 31 years, the two-kilometer-wide and 700-meter-deep pit hole has been deserted. Half a dozen villages and a number of sacred sites of the clans settled here had to relocate because of it. Within eyeshot of the mine, the hollowed out, concrete ruins of Panguna Town, where many former mine workers lived, rise from the hills. The overgrown remains of industrial vehicles and a dilapidated swimming pool reveal some of the former prosperity of the town, where around 15 000 people once lived and worked. Only at second glance does it become clear that people still live here – former civil war fighters who are now trying their luck at digging for gold. To this day, every rainfall





Two kilometers wide and 700 meters deep: The Panguna mine, once the largest open-pit copper and gold mine in the world, triggered civil war and unimaginable environmental destruction.

## Bougainville

Located 750 kilometers east of Papua New Guinea in the Pacific Ocean, the island is similar in size to Cyprus. It consists of volcanoes that reach up to 2700 meters, some of which are still active and covered by tropical rainforest. One thereof is home to one of the largest copper deposits in the world. Together with the neighboring island of Buka and about three dozen smaller atolls, Bougainville belongs to the northern part of the Solomon Islands, which today constitutes the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB).

Bougainville was inhabited as early as 28 000 years ago. The first European to set foot on the island was the Spaniard Alvara de Mendana in 1568. 200 years later, the French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville reached the island. He enthusiastically described the beauty of its nature and the inhabitants and named the island after himself. In 1886, the Northern Solomon Islands were annexed to the colony of German New Guinea, while the main part of the archipelago in the south came under British rule.

The Germans brought their administrative structures, missionaries and also mining to Bougainville. After World War I, contrary to the wishes of the tribal leaders, the Solomon Islands were not unified. Instead, the northern part was placed under the Australian protectorate of Papua New Guinea, while the south remained British. In 1942, Japanese troops captured the islands, which were then bombed by the Allies and became a strategic location during World War II. The Japanese did not surrender until September 1945.

When the Australians granted Papua New Guinea independence in 1975, Bougainville again demanded in vain to become an independent nation. However, a serious dispute did not arise until the landowners around the Panguna mine demanded compensation for environmental damage and expropriation, as well as better working conditions for the locals. When these were rejected, a group led by Francis Ona paralyzed the mine in 1988 by blowing up power lines. Because the army failed to get the situation under control, the mine, which had previously generated more than 40 percent of Papua New Guinea's total exports, was shut down in 1989.



The civil war in Bougainville was one of the worst conflicts in the Pacific since World War II – and went almost entirely unnoticed by the rest of the world. A complete naval blockade forced the inhabitants to become self-sufficient by growing their own vegetables and medicinal plants and producing fuel from coconut oil. An estimated 20 000 people died during the “crisis”, as the inhabitants of Bougainville refer to this period. A ceasefire was not reached until 1997, followed a year later by a peace agreement negotiated with the help of the United Nations. The rebel leader Francis Ona never agreed to this treaty; he died of malaria in 2005. It was his former deputy, Joseph Kabui, who advocated a political solution and was elected that same year as the first president of the region, which has since had special autonomous status.

Today, the Bougainville region is home to just under 300 000 inhabitants who live primarily from agriculture and fishing. The main exports are cocoa and copra (dried coconut meat). The inhabitants of Bougainville are ethnically distinct from the peoples of Papua New Guinea. They speak

30 local languages, the lingua franca being the national language Tok Pisin. About 70 percent of the population is Catholic, and there are also numerous free churches. The social system is matrilineal, which means that women inherit land and property. Nevertheless, politics are dominated by men, who also usually make decisions at the village level.

In November and December 2019, a very well-organized referendum was held, with 97.7 percent of the population voting in favor of independence from Papua New Guinea. For the central government in Port Moresby, the referendum is not binding under international law. However, due to the overwhelmingly clear outcome, the central government is now under international pressure to vote on further steps as soon as possible. In September 2020, former rebel commander Ishmael Toroama was elected president of the autonomous region. He announced that his government would “fight hard for independence”.





Reminder of a dark past: Open-pit gold and copper mining led to environmental destruction and conflict.

washes the tailings contaminated with heavy metals from the unsecured mine into the rivers and then for many kilometers to the coast. Entire villages have been buried as a result – including the one under the ominously fascinating bridge made of old cranes and tires from mine excavators that is located just a few kilometers away from Makosi.

Theonila Roka Matbob was born a year after the closure of the mine that would nevertheless define her entire life. She grew up during the ensuing war, which cost her father John his life, and spent years in a refugee camp. Matbob, who has a son, says she can hardly remember a happy moment in her childhood, only fear. She wants to spare her own children that, she says. “My biggest hope for Bougainville is to change the education system,” explains the autonomous government’s newly appointed education minister. Since 2014, the teacher, who studied at Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea’s capital Port Moresby, has been running the John Roka Memorial School & Child Counseling Centre she founded with her family. It consists of a few simple, neat wooden houses and is where children, especially girls, who otherwise tend to fall through the cracks, are given a chance to receive an education. “The fact that most children in the area are dropping out of school is a worrying trend,” Matbob says. It’s not for lack of money, as parents often

claim. Instead, the children, many of whom are still young, have to help their families look for gold. In the process, they handle dangerous chemicals and not only put their health at risk, but cause even more environmental damage. “If we are not careful, we are on a path to a catastrophic period,” warns the member of parliament – one of the main reasons she was elected was her social commitment.

### Basic right to water

When she visits people in her constituency, Theonila Roka Matbob often spends days traveling. When it rains, many of the unpaved mountain roads become filled with mud or simply come to a halt at a gushing river. But difficult roads do not deter the determined local politician. At the end of September – just a few days after her election – she and 155 other landowners filed a complaint with the help of the Human Rights Law Centre in Melbourne. Much preparation went into drafting the complaint that was lodged with the Australian government against the mining company. The latter had abandoned its stake in the mine in 2016 without accepting responsibility for the damage caused. “It’s time for Rio Tinto to do what is necessary to deal with this catastrophe,” Matbob says. Among other things, the residents’ complaint references a United Nations convention that states that the fundamental right to water is “indispensable for leading

Hope for a better future: Educational reform, organic agriculture and ecotourism are a way of supporting sustainable reconstruction.



a life in human dignity” – and a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights.

The company, which is also under international pressure for human rights violations in other locations, responded directly to the complaint. “We are aware of the deterioration of mining infrastructure at the site and surrounding areas, and claims of resulting adverse environmental and social, including human rights, impacts,” was Rio Tinto’s official statement. “We are ready to enter into discussions with the communities that have filed the complaint.”

### Independence as the main goal

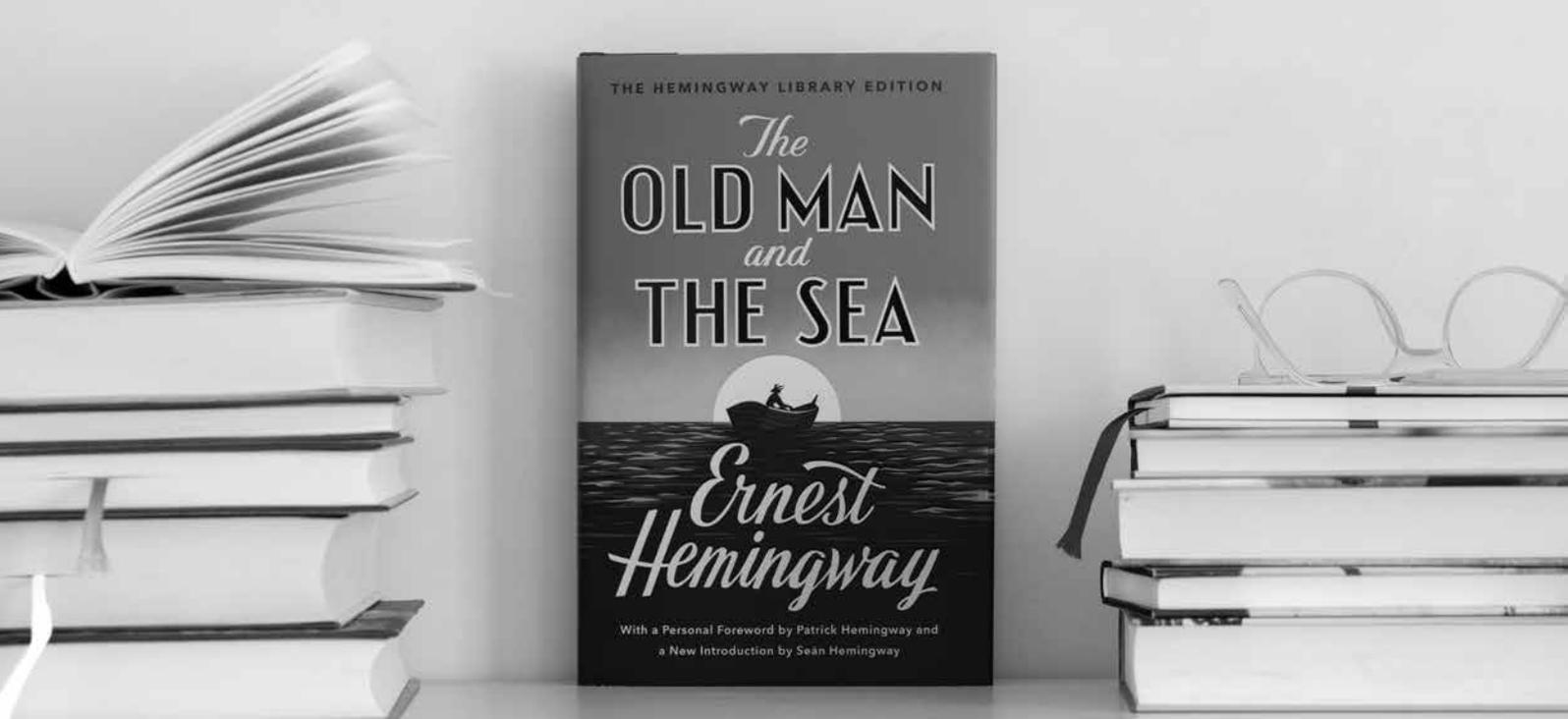
In a best-case outcome, the complainants are now hoping for an independently administered rehabilitation fund that will amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. With this money for the rehabilitation of the Panguna area behind it, the newly elected government led by President Ishmael Toroama would be able to focus on its main goal: negotiating Bougainville’s independence. The central government of Papua New Guinea still has to approve the referendum, which is not legally binding. But in view of the overwhelming majority, there is great pressure at home and abroad to give in to the will of the people and avoid further conflict.

Inseparable from the question of independence is the question of Bougainville’s economic survival as a nation – which most politicians link to a reopening of the copper mine. Dozens of international companies are already waiting in the wings. President Toroama, however, has made it clear that this decision will rest with local landowners. As their elected representative, Theonila Roka Matbob says: “Even if there could be a future for Panguna – this question must be put on hold until the needs of the people here are met. We first have to fight for the basic human rights of the residents so they can live in dignity and develop in a safe environment.” ♦

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Christina Schott has been living and working as a freelance journalist, analyst and cultural project manager in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries since 2002. With a focus on society, art and culture as well as the environment, energy and climate change, she reports from this region for German and international print and online media.

▶ You can find a video about this Report at [lgt.com/credo](https://lgt.com/credo)



# Living up to one's destiny

As prominent as the term dignity is in Article 1 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, it is rather difficult to qualify more specifically. Today, when we refer to something as being undignified for humans, we often mean conditions that are considered materially unacceptable, that violate our sense of justice or that trample on the idea of the equality of all people. The state is then called upon to remedy the grievance. This socio-political dimension is important and pivotal.

Probably even more often, however, we use the word dignity to try to describe a personality trait that is difficult to describe otherwise. "That person is aging with dignity," we say. Or, "You have to be able to lose with dignity." In these cases, what is being referred to is a personal ethos, a form of self-respect that a person is able to uphold regardless of the political perils in which they might find themselves. This form of dignity is a peculiarly paradoxical mix of detachment from oneself and pride. Accordingly, a person who loudly laments their fate or all too uninhibitedly pursues their own benefit is perceived as undignified. Dignity is something one owes oneself. It does not seek an audience – and can therefore not be quantified by Facebook or Twitter algorithms.

## A parable about life

Hemingway's famous short novel "The Old Man and the Sea", published in 1952, can be read as a parable, as a concrete story about a universal aspect of life. In this Pulitzer-Prize-winning and last work published during Hemingway's lifetime, the reader

accompanies the old Cuban fisherman Santiago out to sea. And although Hemingway, who always had a weakness for intense action – whether boxing or bullfighting – greatly enjoys describing the fisherman's craft as concretely as possible and with the correct technical vocabulary, we sense that he is interested in something else, something more fundamental. He explores the meaning of life, or more precisely: how not to give up despite its obvious futility, and instead preserve our dignity. And this is precisely what life is all about: preserving one's dignity, even when all hopes have been dashed.

For 84 days, old Santiago has not caught a single fish. He is a very good, experienced fisherman. But luck, which is always an essential factor in life, has abandoned him. The other fishermen feel that his luck has run out. A boy, whom the old man taught to fish from an early age, has been forbidden by his parents to go fishing with Santiago, saying that he should instead stick to fishermen who make big catches. But the boy loves the old man; he knows to appreciate what he has been taught, and so he takes care of Santiago, encourages him, brings him warm coffee and offers to accompany him the next day. The old man refuses the offer, however, as he does not want the boy to get into trouble with his parents on his account.

## A tough struggle for victory

So the next day, the old man ventures especially far out into the Gulf Stream, intent on giving it another try. He is alone on the high seas in his modest fishing boat, the place where he belongs.

This is his element – even if he is having a run of bad luck at the moment, it does not change the fact that he and the sea belong together.

Eventually, a huge marlin bites. Judging by the pressure on the fishing line, it is clearly a massive creature. Now it is up to old Santiago: will he stand his ground, or will he lose the fish? He gives more and more line as the fish pulls him further and further out into the Gulf Stream. The fishing line cuts deep into the flesh of the old man's hands. There is no doubt that this duel will come down to all or nothing for him.

“‘Fish,’ he said softly, aloud, ‘I’ll stay with you until I’m dead.’”

The old man knows the situation requires perseverance; whoever tires first will lose.

“‘Fish,’ he said, ‘I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends.’”

On the third day, the exhausted fish changes its strategy. It begins to circle and, rearing up, jumps out of the water in a last hope of being able to tear itself off the hook. It is in this moment that the old man kills it with a harpoon. But the fish is too heavy to bring on board alone. He therefore ties it to the side of his boat before sailing the long distance back to the port.

## The value of a fish

The old man has once again proven himself and defended his dignity.

It is as if the fish he is towing alongside the boat is part of his own life, as if the laws of nature had chosen for their destinies to be intertwined.

“How many people will he feed, he thought. But are they worthy to eat him? No, of course not. There is no one worthy of eating him from the manner of his behavior and his great dignity.”

While the old man ponders, a first shark appears. With his last bit of strength, the old man kills it with his harpoon, which he loses in the process. But no sooner has he done so, than more sharks surround the boat and the precious cargo, attracted by the trail of blood.

“‘But man is not made for defeat,’ he said. ‘A man can be destroyed but not defeated.’”

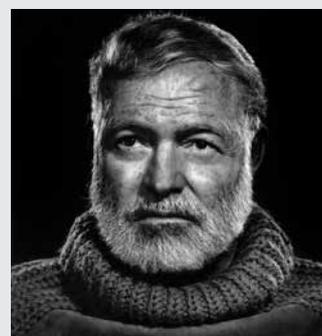
When the old man finally reaches land, all that remains of the fish is a massive skeleton.

Is Santiago desperate and inconsolable? It is hard to say. He has, one would say, fulfilled his law, and lived up to his destiny. One cannot ask for more than that. In his 1942 essay “The Myth of Sisyphus”, Albert Camus wrote that Sisyphus must be imagined as being a happy man. Hemingway's old man is somewhat reminiscent of Camus' Sisyphus. But whether or not the old man is happy in the end is probably the wrong question. First and foremost, he is exhausted. His life will certainly not have seemed pointless to him, for he fought. As befits a fisherman. And as a result, he has preserved his dignity. ♦

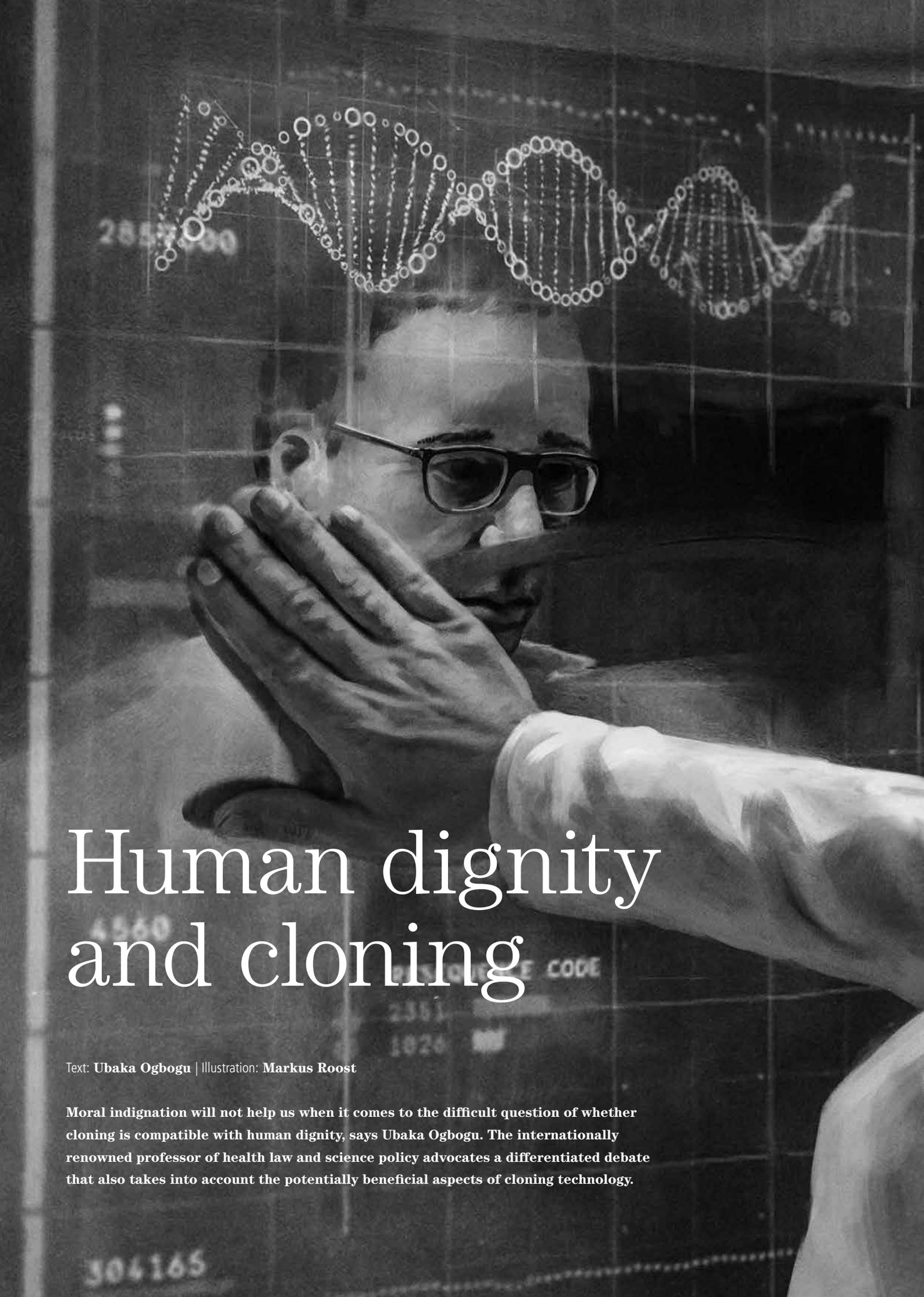
Ijoma Mangold is a cultural policy correspondent for the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*. He is a recipient of the Berlin Prize for Literary Criticism and is a member of the quartet of literary critics featured in the TV program “lesenswert quartett” aired on SWR. Following his literary debut with the publication of his autobiography “Das deutsche Krokodil. Meine Geschichte” (2017), his second book, a political diary entitled “Der innere Stammtisch. Ein politisches Tagebuch”, was published in 2020.

## Ernest Hemingway

The writer, born in Illinois in 1899, is considered the inventor of the modern short story. Ernest Hemingway became famous early on for his laconic prose. Main clause follows main clause, and all superfluous adjectives are



eliminated. Interestingly, the effect this creates is not a barren or ascetic one, but instead a very distinct heroic pathos. This is fitting, because the favorite topics of Hemingway, who won the 1954 Nobel Prize for literature, all have highly masculine connotations: war, boxing, bullfighting and drinking. He was always fascinated by rituals that test a person's character as a way of countering the futility of life with something important. Hemingway was a lifelong traveler, whether – at the young age of 18 – as a volunteer driver for the Red Cross in World War I, as a tireless party animal in the company of Scott Fitzgerald in Paris during the 1920s, as a World War II correspondent or as a big-game hunter in Africa. But his real love was Cuba, where he spent most of his time from 1939 onwards. In 1961, the writer, who suffered from severe depression, shot himself with a shotgun. For him, this choice of weapon may also have come down to a question of dignity.



# Human dignity and cloning

Text: Ubaka Ogbogu | Illustration: Markus Roost

Moral indignation will not help us when it comes to the difficult question of whether cloning is compatible with human dignity, says Ubaka Ogbogu. The internationally renowned professor of health law and science policy advocates a differentiated debate that also takes into account the potentially beneficial aspects of cloning technology.



Does human cloning offend human dignity? Although there is no shortage of debate on this question, many strongly believe that it does. Some countries have justified a ban on all forms of human cloning by referencing the need to preserve and protect human dignity. However, when pushed to explain how and why human cloning or similar technologies endanger human dignity, proponents often fail to produce a clear response or to offer a coherent definition of the principle. What the debate seems to produce is a feeling that human dignity means different things to different people and that it is often cited as a proxy for fears and concerns about scientific boundary-pushing technologies that challenge human imagination and values.

Human dignity is notoriously difficult to define. The meanings attributed to it vary across time, peoples and places. In ancient Rome, it was used to refer to an attribute inherent in persons of high social standing. To theologians, it captured the unique or sacred value of human life resulting from a special relationship between humans and a supreme deity. In contemporary usage, the term has been used as a philosophical foundation for human rights and *ordre public* (public order). In this version of dignity, humans, as dignified beings, have inherent rights that are worthy of protection and deserve to live in ordered, safe and secure public spaces that conform to their values.

Another fairly well known usage comes from moral philosophy, especially interpretations of the works of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. These interpretations hold that dignity is the essence of human persons and, therefore, the basis to both accord them moral standing and to recognize that they each have the capacity to think and act. The common thread to all these different understandings and expressions of dignity is that humans are, at the core, unique, rights-bearing creatures who should exist in communities that reflect their values while assiduously protecting what makes us special and unique.

### **Approval and condemnation**

The malleability of human dignity is both its greatest appeal and greatest source of criticism. As a principle that carries significant moral weight and authority, it can serve as a convenient yet vague placeholder for diverse moral viewpoints and values. It can also be used to signal moral approval or condemnation. Often, simply stating that an action promotes or offends human dignity is all that is needed to support the claim that the action is good or bad. For proponents, it can function as a powerful rhetorical tool for expressing concerns that they cannot articulate clearly, or to magnify fears and concerns by lending them a moral gloss that they otherwise lack. Critics contend that the

concept of human dignity is too imprecise to be useful and that it can be used to shield trivial, irrelevant or even inappropriate viewpoints from scrutiny and debate.

### Science fiction becomes reality

The divergence of viewpoints on what human dignity means and why or whether it matters have played out in societal debates regarding human cloning. Following the announcement in 1996 of the birth of the first cloned mammal, a sheep named Dolly, cloning, once relegated to science fiction movies, became a reality. Although the same feat is yet to be achieved in humans, largely because of a near global ban on the technique, the possibility of creating human clones has become a subject of much controversy and debate.

The term “cloning” refers to the creation of a genetically identical copy of a living organism. While cloning can occur naturally – many organisms produce clones through asexual reproduction – the term, in popular usage, is mostly used to refer to the artificial process of creating embryos that are genetically identical to a single parent. This is achieved by inserting the nucleus of an adult human cell (e.g. a skin cell) into an egg cell (i.e. ovum, or the female reproductive cell) that has had its nucleus removed. This combination develops to produce an embryo that is virtually genetically identical to the donor of the adult cell.

In theory, implanting the embryo in the female womb may lead to the birth of a genetic human copy of the adult cell donor. However, this has never been tried in humans. Still, cloned embryos made from human cells have been produced in labs for research purposes. One such purpose is to derive stem cells (a type of human cell that can form virtually all cells and tissues in the human body) for use in therapies designed to regenerate or replace damaged or diseased human cells and tissues.

### A god-like intervention in nature?

The cloning of human cells, whether for research, therapeutic or reproductive purposes, is deeply controversial. Reproductive use of cloned embryos is almost universally condemned and prohibited throughout the world. Many countries have enacted

legislation to limit, regulate or ban research applications also. Concerns cited for these bans and restrictions include exploitation of women for eggs and their wombs, treating human clones as means to ends for existing humans (whether created for research or reproductive purposes) and the possibility that children born through cloning may suffer from issues, such as health problems and discrimination.

Further reasons include a lack of scientific evidence to support the safety and efficacy of the technique and preventing sci-

entists from tinkering with nature or “playing God”. Some proponents of a ban have also argued that the idea of creating human clones is intuitively disgusting, and that allowing some forms of cloning that seem potentially beneficial, such as cloning to develop therapies, will inevitably facilitate a “slippery slope” that leads to more abhorrent ap-

plications, such as reproductive cloning. For example, in his article, *The Wisdom of Repugnance*, Leon Kass, former chair of a US Presidential Council on Bioethics, compared cloning to incest and cannibalism, stating: “[w]e are repelled by the prospect of cloning ... because we intuit and feel, immediately and without argument, the violation of things that we rightfully hold dear.”

### The aspect of morality

Supporters and critics of human cloning alike have invoked appeals to human dignity. For supporters, cloning technology, when used strictly for research and to develop therapies, does not violate human dignity because the cloned embryo does not have moral status or human rights worthy of protection. Critics contend that human cloning technology offends human dignity because the cloned embryo has moral status and thus deserves protection much like humans.

Since both sides appear to be arguing about whether or not the embryo has moral status, it is not clear what the appeals to human dignity add to the debate. At best, it seems that both sides simply use it as a device to strengthen their arguments and claims regarding the moral status of the embryo. Invoking human dignity also appears to serve as a proxy for views regarding moral or legal rights vested in the embryo.

“The principle of human dignity risks becoming nothing more than a straw argument in social and scientific debates.”

Despite this lack of clarity regarding what it contributes to the cloning debate, the principle of human dignity has been cited as a reason for proscribing human cloning in a variety of legal and policy instruments. Canada, for example, references the “promotion of human dignity” in legislation that bans all forms of human cloning. The 2005 United Nations Declaration on Human Cloning calls for prohibition of “all forms of human cloning” as they are “incompatible with human dignity,” while the Council of Europe condemns “instrumentalization of human beings through the deliberate creation of genetically identical human beings [that] is contrary to human dignity.”

### Different interpretations

Likewise, UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights recommends a ban on “practices which are contrary to human dignity, such as reproductive cloning” and the World Health Organization deems “cloning for the replication of human individuals” to be “ethically unacceptable and contrary to human dignity and integrity.” Perhaps, not surprisingly, these law and policy instruments do not elaborate on how or why cloning offends human dignity. Rather, references to human dignity are treated as a truism. Given that the meaning and relevance of the principle is contested, both generally and in the cloning debate, treating human dignity as an axiom appears odd, but also serves to highlight the moral force and authority that it commands.

How can human dignity be positioned to make it more relevant and useful in social and governance debates and decisions regarding human cloning technologies? A solution might be to demand that those who invoke the principle, especially policymakers, explain what it means to them and how it applies to their stated position. This will not only help citizens to understand the ways in which cutting-edge scientific technologies enhance or compromise important human values, but will also ensure that human dignity is not used to shield from scrutiny the actual reasons behind support or opposition to such technologies. An example worth emulating is Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This usage expresses and enshrines the notion that dignity is something all humans are born with rather than something acquired, and that it functions to grant all humans an equality of status.

### Weighing risk versus benefit

The near universal condemnation of human cloning suggests that it is an activity that provokes a strong reaction akin to

repugnance or moral angst. However, in situations where the technology might benefit the human race, such as research and therapeutic applications, it seems proper to demand reasons other than moral disgust, for proscribing the technology. The balance of risk and benefit that is foundational to how we assess scientific developments is not served by appeals to vague concepts like human dignity. Rather, policymakers and the public should demand reasons for allowing or stopping a technology that is grounded in clear rationales that can be understood, debated and applied.

### Risk of a straw argument

So, does human cloning offend human dignity? While there are legitimate concerns regarding reproductive cloning and the procurement and use of human reproductive materials for cloning procedures, I do not think that human cloning engages the dignity, however conceived, of existing humans. It is simply not clear how it engages or offends human rights or commonly held values in the largely pluralistic societies we live in today. Some may find the idea of cloning revolting or repugnant, but this does not mean that their rights have been interfered with, or that the revulsion they feel is representative of societal values as a whole.

Human dignity embodies moral certainty about what makes humans special, unique and deserving of respect, rights and protection. However, in order to be useful as a means of assessing human activities, it must also embody clarity of meaning and purpose, as well as compromise. Those who invoke it ought to have a shared understanding of what it means and why it matters. This allows them to engage usefully with the principle and with one another in seeking solutions to moral and ethical questions relating to emerging scientific technologies like human cloning. Absent this, the principle of human dignity risks becoming nothing more than a straw argument in social and scientific debates, and eventually, an important-sounding but largely irrelevant policy norm. ♦



Ubaka Ogbogu is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law and Pharmacy at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, where he teaches and researches, among others, in the areas of science policy studies, law and bioethics.



# “Respect and remorse”

Recorded by: **Stephan Lehmann-Maldonado**

**Whether robbery, murder or rape: criminologist Claudia Christen-Schneider advocates for giving the victims of a crime the opportunity to talk to convicted offenders. She became familiar with restorative justice in Chile, but this approach is also proving successful in Switzerland.**

“I feel more comfortable talking to convicts than making small talk at parties.

Before I first went to visit felons in the maximum-security wing of a men’s prison in Chile, friends warned me: ‘It’s much too dangerous.’ Chilean prisons have up to 7000 inmates. And there are hardly any single cells. Disputes are almost inevitable, and it’s not unusual for them to end in deaths. Even prisoners warned me against crossing from one wing to another: ‘Señorita, you are taking too much of a risk. We will accompany you.’ The convicts appreciated that I treated them with respect despite their past.

It’s important to me to enter a prison without any sense of superiority. I try not to treat inmates condescendingly, but on equal terms. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to dignity. Respect and dignity also play an important role in criminology and criminal law. For example, studies in the UK show that prisons are safer when management and staff are mindful of ensuring that prisoners are treated in a dignified manner.

Many crimes happen because people feel – usually unconsciously – that their dignity has been violated. For example, I have met many prisoners who suffered violence or abuse during their childhood, which later gave rise to aggression. Their crimes ultimately also represent an act of revenge against society, something along the lines of: ‘They mistreated me. Now I’m fighting back.’

Respecting offenders as human beings does not mean that I am justifying their actions. On the contrary, I expect them to face up to their responsibilities. When I meet with people who have committed multiple murders or who are sex offenders, I sometimes have to put on a poker face – because I can feel my emotions bubble up inside me. But it’s worth it: criminals who don’t feel their dignity is under attack are more willing to acknowledge the ugly aspects of their lives and answer for their crimes.

Restorative justice, which I am promoting in Switzerland, is based on this insight. In 2017, I launched the Swiss RJ Forum. The philosophy behind restorative justice centers around initiating a dialogue between victims and perpetrators. In practice, victims don’t always meet the actual person who caused their suffering. Instead, they sometimes talk to prisoners who have committed a similar offense. Focus is placed on the needs of the victims. I myself have suffered an act of violence and can under-

## Claudia Christen-Schneider

She is petite and slender, but fearlessly faces even hardened criminals: after doing development work in poor neighborhoods and prisons for eleven years in Chile, Claudia Christen-Schneider (43) is now committed to helping establish the concept of restorative justice in Switzerland. Before Christen-Schneider founded the Swiss Restorative Justice Forum (Swiss RJ Forum) in 2017, the concept was still relatively unknown in the country – even though it is applied around the world and has been proven to produce positive results. Christen-Schneider studied criminology and criminal law at the University of Portsmouth in England (master's program) and completed continuing studies in restorative justice at Simon Fraser University in Canada, as well as in conflict counseling, mediation and arbitration in the US. Today, she offers a variety of restorative processes that can be tailored to meet the needs of those concerned. These often take place within the context of the criminal justice system, but can also be helpful in other conflict situations.

stand how they feel. No matter how severe the sentence, you are left with the question: 'Why did it happen to me of all people?' Only the perpetrators can answer that question.

Every crime, not only acts of violence or sexual crimes, leaves deep scars – even a break-in can cause trauma. It's no wonder that some of the aggrieved tremble when they engage in restorative conversations with criminals. But afterwards, they usually confirm that the supervised dialogue has helped them to come to terms with what they experienced.

'I decided to forgive the people who murdered my parents because I didn't want to allow that bitterness to keep eating away at me. That step set me free,' said a woman who participated in one of our projects. Such accounts touch even hardened criminals. When they listen to victims, the magnitude of what they have done often suddenly becomes clear to them. 'It hurt to realize how my crime left an innocent person reeling,' a prisoner once stammered in tears. He had previously repressed any reflection on his behavior.

According to international studies, victims who have participated in a restorative process are better able to cope with their lives. At the same time, the new sense of guilt experienced by offenders leads to fewer re-offences. Overall, the costs for the criminal justice system decrease and security increases.

How did I get into restorative justice? Growing up, it was never my dream to work in prisons. But I knew early on that I wanted to help the disadvantaged and dedicate time to them. That's why I thought about studying law or medicine, or becoming a healthcare professional. I ultimately chose the quickest option and studied to become a registered nurse. I married young. My husband and I left Switzerland and moved to Sweden and England, where I received a degree in criminology and criminal law. After that, we decided to follow a calling that we both shared and focused on development work for children.

In 2003, we moved to Santiago de Chile, where we worked in 'tomas', which literally translated means 'taken areas'. In these settlements, the poorest of the poor build huts out of wood and cardboard, without permits. Among other things, we helped found a day-care center for the socially disadvantaged.

Because there was a high level of sexual abuse among children, I studied domestic and sexual violence prevention, conflict resolution and mediation. This also resulted in doing mediation for families, which caught the attention of the Department of Justice's national prison chaplain. In 2009, I received a request asking if I would be willing to set up conflict resolution services in prisons. The scope of the work grew and one day, the chaplain asked me to introduce restorative justice processes. I didn't know the first thing about restorative justice. So I read all the available literature on the subject and did long-distance learning through a university in Canada, where the idea of restorative justice originated.

I had just launched restorative justice in Chile when we had to return to Switzerland in 2014 for family reasons. I quickly realized that restorative justice was still uncharted territory there. So I adapted an internationally proven restorative dialogue framework to the Swiss reality and presented it to prisons. Marcel Ruf, the director of Lenzburg prison, which is considered an especially progressive Swiss correctional facility, showed interest in the concept. And that is how Lenzburg became the Swiss pioneer for restorative justice. The documentary film 'Je ne te voyais pas', which was released in Swiss movie theaters at the end of November 2020, gives intimate insights into our work behind bars, but also into the fate of victims and offenders. It dispenses with commentary, and instead lets the people concerned speak for themselves.

That is a movie I would love to talk about at parties." ♦

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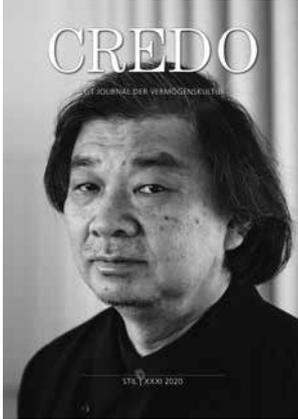
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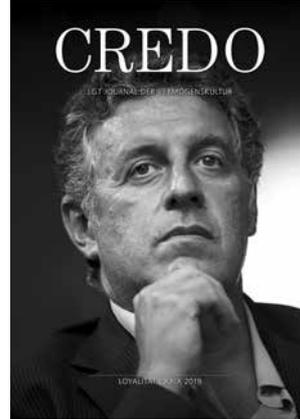
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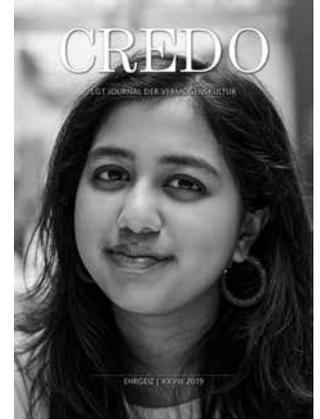
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