HUMILIATION AND GLOBAL TERRORISM: HOW TO OVERCOME IT NONVIOLENTLY

Evelin Gerda Lindner

Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, USA

Keywords: Humiliation, Dignity, Terrorism, Globalization, Egalization, Security Dilemma, Ingathering, Social Control, Satyagraha, Nonviolence

Contents

1. Introduction
2. What Is Humiliation?
3. Past: Honor Humiliation
4. Present: Dignity Humiliation
5. Policy Challenges
6. International Action
7. Conclusions
Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

Why do young people kill innocent citizens in suicide attacks? Clearly, poverty is as insufficient an explanation as is 'pure evil.' In this chapter, the author offers humiliation as an explanation – feelings of humiliation leading to acts of humiliation and creating cycles of humiliation. Previously the author has researched the phenomenon of humiliation in the genocidal killings in Rwanda (1994) and Somalia (1988), and on the backdrop of Hitler Germany. She is currently in Japan, among other things, to study the 'kamikaze' pilots of World War II. The notion of nonviolence is at the core of her theory of humiliation. Humiliation contrasts with the term humility. We cannot achieve humbleness and humility by inflicting humiliation, particularly not in a world that is characterized by increasing interdependence and an ongoing human rights revolution. Rather than rendering peace, people who feel humiliated may set in motion new cycles of humiliation. Equal rights and dignity for all, as called for by the Human Rights Declaration, locally and globally, are only attainable by dignified nonviolent approaches.

1. Introduction

The 2005 bombings in London shook the world. They reminded everybody of the Madrid bombings of 11th March 2004, the Bali night club attacks of 12th October 2002, and what has become known as 'Nine Eleven,' to name only three of the tragedies that currently unsettle the world. Innocent civilians live in fear – not only in the West, but also in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Middle East, in African countries and other world regions.

Why do young people kill innocent citizens in suicide attacks? Not least the 2005 attacks in London show that poverty is as unsatisfactory an explanation as is 'pure evil.'

In London, young men, with a promising future ahead, perpetrated mayhem that paralyzed an entire city and cost many lives.

Many people reject the search for 'root causes' for terrorism, because they fear that such endeavors amount to nothing but the condoning of terrorism. Many equate *understanding* with *condoning*, and *de-scribing* with *pre-scribing*, and believe that we excuse terrorism when we conceptualize perpetrators as 'human beings' rather than 'mad monsters' or 'THE ENEMY.' In this chapter, it is argued that this equation must be overcome if we wish to reach for constructive solutions to the terrorist threat, not least because the nature of terrorism indicates that only inclusive change will work. What is needed is Mandela-like maturity and ability for nuanced bridge-building. Admittedly, Mandela is extraordinarily gifted and it might be impossible to attain his maturity by copying him. Still, lessons can be learned from his experience. And it amounts to nothing but cowardice to avoid a task just because it is difficult. If we are content to whine and give up, we may be sacrificing the entire future of humanity.

As we stand at the beginning of the 21st century in historical time, the world faces two strong forces that generate deep change and undermine old familiar values and structures. The first of these forces is the increasing intercultural connectedness of the world (part of what we call 'globalization,' or what anthropologists call the *ingathering* of humankind). The other significant influence is the human rights revolution. Both trends are facilitated by modern technology. Airplanes, television, and the internet – the list of modern technology that facilitates communication and mobility is long – bring the globe's inhabitants closer to each other than ever before and at the same time inform everybody that poverty and deprivation are no longer divinely ordained or part of nature's order but a human rights violation. A new world is rendered - a relational world with expectations of equal dignity for all, for which adequate cultural-social scripts are still lacking. The way emotions are processed is deeply affected and new kinds of conflicts materialize. Feelings of humiliation are prone to emerge when new closeness raises expectations only to be disappointed, and when respect for equal dignity is seen to be preached but not practiced. And feelings of humiliation have the potential to lead to rifts that hinder the cooperation essential for the successful building of peace and justice, globally and locally.

The coming-together of humankind means that no longer do a handful of diplomats attend to *international relations*. Millions of people engage now in *global relations* that make nations and borders fade in significance. No head of state, no diplomat had declared war between nations when an Egyptian national went to America, made use of his host's equipment and destroyed some of his host's most important symbols of pride, the Twin Towers. Here international relations – more precisely, internal relations in the global village – are acted out by ordinary citizens. Old solutions no longer work – no army can stem this phenomenon. Dialogue is needed. Hearts and minds have to be won. Dichotomies such as 'your terrorist is my freedom fighter' must be transcended for us to achieve world peace.

Poorly managed conflict renders pain and mayhem. Only 'waging good conflict' in a Mandela-like fashion brings productive advancement. Conflict harbors a great potential to stimulate creativity and foster growth and maturity if approached constructively.

These insights must be learned by everyone. Ervin Staub (1989) explains the significance of the role of bystanders for peace or mayhem to occur. It is not sufficient that some diplomats learn new conflict resolution techniques. Every citizen of the world, every 'bystander,' needs to contribute to this learning process and has to participate in forging a new culture – globally and at home – of a more mature and nuanced processing of emotions and conflict. Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus (2006), in their *Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, offer ample learning opportunities.

As part of this new culture, new paradigms have to be forged. In response to new circumstances, a new Realpolitik has to be envisioned. The old Realpolitik of 'black and white,' of 'evil and good,' of 'enemies and friends' was embedded into the past 10,000 years of complex agriculture, the time when land represented humankind's resources and the *security dilemma* reigned (see more details further down). In contrast, the old Realpolitik proves destructive in the new circumstances of on incipient global knowledge society.

The new Realpolitik has to be more inclusive and more preventive than the old one. Concepts such as 'enemies and friends' are not feasible for a global knowledge society. The only viable concept for a global knowledge society is a world of 'neighbors,' who, while 'good' or 'bad,' always coexist without mayhem. Couples, when they divorce, can move away from each other, yet, there is no empty continent or other planet to which communities can move when they dislike each other. Huge prisons cannot be the solution either. We are stuck together on this planet. We need to learn to be more inclusive. And we need to become aware of the significance of prevention. In medicine, there is prevention and treatment. When prevention was neglected and treatment fails, the patient might die. We do not want to risk a dead 'patient' with humankind. Therefore preventing deadly conflict must take priority over post-hoc 'treatment' of mayhem, because otherwise it might be too late. And prevention means getting out of short-term reactionism toward long-term construction of a better world.

I recently traveled in two neighboring countries. In one country, people waited outside subway train doors, stepping a bit aside, keeping the aperture unimpeded, until all those who wished to leave the train had done so. Only then the newcomers entered the subway coach. This was smooth and effective. In the neighboring country, those who wanted to get on the subway positioned themselves in front of the opening doors, throwing themselves into the aperture as soon as the doors divided. They pushed those who wanted to get out in again. Getting on or off the train resembled a fight for life. Often people were engaged in deadlocks, one pushing in direct opposition to another, both being hit by the closing doors, hanging half in and half out of the train. In both countries, everybody's aim was to get off or on the train; however, in the second country, where the subway system was a relatively new technology and cultural scripts had not yet matured, the intention to get off or on the train was translated into utterly short-sighted and ineffective strategies of sheer pushing power, everybody against everybody. This is how the world functions today. Our cultural-social scripts are not yet adapted to a new situation. We use short-sighted ways of conceptualizing problems and ineffective cultural scripts for responding to them.

2. What Is Humiliation?

Few researchers study humiliation explicitly – the phenomenon of humiliation typically figures only implicitly in literature on violence and war. And when humiliation is treated explicitly, it is often used interchangeably with shame or conceptualized as a variant of that emotion. Humiliation has been studied on its own account and in a transdisciplinary fashion, among others, since 1996 by Lindner. In other words, humiliation studies is a very new cutting-edge field of research with the potential to render new paradigms, a potential that still needs to be realized. Decades of research lie ahead before this field can be called 'established.' Humiliation studies connect to the literature in philosophy and psychology on the politics of recognition and ressentiment. This literature stipulates that basically all human beings yearn for recognition and respect. Denial or withdrawal of recognition and respect is experienced as deeply wounding. The universal desire for recognition has the immeasurably valuable potential to unite all human beings and provide a platform for contact and cooperation.

Currently, such assertions do not yet represent majority consensus. They are ridiculed as 'soft.' 'No-nonsense,' or 'hard' conceptualizations of human nature are called for instead. At the core of many current discussions of human evil are claims to a 'primordial aggressive human nature,' or an innate human 'desire to dominate,' or an 'inherent will to power,' or an '*animus dominandi*.'

Yet, if we reflect for a moment, we see that these views are far from 'hard' conceptualizations; they rather resemble the misguided cultural script of getting off or on the subway with sheer pushing power. They are myths built on the misreading of the human condition. 'Human nature' simply is not 'aggressive.' 'Human nature' does not force humans unavoidably into destructive Hobbesian competition. Such conceptualizations came about only because the relatively short historic period of complex agriculture fostered them and masked that they are not primary, but dependent on a broader environment. As William Ury (1999) explains, the past 10,000 years, roughly, from the time of the introduction of complex agriculture onwards until recently, were indeed characterized by rather malign systematic war between hierarchically organized societal units, embedded in a win-lose framework and caught in what international relations theorists call 'the security dilemma.' Human nature could easily be mistaken to be predator-like. Yet, 10,000 years are a relatively short time period compared with the 90% of human history that humans spent prior to complex agriculture in a comparably benign win-win situation of egalitarian hunting-gathering. There is no archaeological evidence for systematic war prior to 10,000 years ago. There is no proof of organized fighting among hunters and gatherers. The Hobbesian view that humans are in a constant state of 'Warre' since time immemorial cannot be underpinned by the archaeological record. And this is deeply encouraging. The 'ingathering' of humankind and its heading for a global knowledge society re-opens the door to the more benign framework of an egalitarian win-win era. Prior to complex agriculture and subsequent to it - particularly in current times of ingathering - predator-like behavior was and is not favored by the deep structures of the overall environment.

Instead of accepting 'evil' as 'unexplainable,' or short-cutting to explanations such as 'pathological narcissism,' or proposing an innate 'desire to dominate' – all rather

daunting diagnoses without much chance of healing – would it not be sensible to ask whether humans may have a 'desire to relate.' Or, to describe the current situation more precisely, more and more participants understand the global knowledge society, and have developed a desire to mutually connect and be recognized within a framework of equal dignity for all. Feelings of humiliation emerge when recognition fails, and 'evil' represents one of the possible outcomes of disappointed expectations. This conceptualization is not only more appropriate in historic times of an emerging global knowledge society but also more amenable to prevention and even to post-hoc 'treatment.'

If not pure unfathomable evil, then poverty, deprivation, or marginalization are often pinpointed as driving people into terrorist activities or other forms of violence, somehow by design. However, if this analysis were correct, we should not see well-to-do and highly educated terrorists organizing and perpetrating atrocities. And India would be in anarchy; the poor would be on the barricades. Indeed, more often than not, poverty is being tackled without violence. In essence, when there is too little to eat, we may share, or work together to increase the pie, instead of fighting. Likewise, ethnic, religious or cultural differences are not automatically divisive. On the contrary, diversity can be a source of mutual enrichment. In sum, what we can conclude is that poverty, deprivation, marginalization, ethnic incompatibilities - or even conflicts of interest and struggles over scarce resources - sometimes lead to cooperation and innovation and only sometimes to violence. So-called 'hard' explanations for violence and terrorism falter, because at times the very same conditions lead to innovative nonviolent solutions and not to violent confrontation.

The significant point is that for scarcity or difference to have fruitful outcomes, they need to be embedded within relationships of mutual respect. It is when respect and recognition are failing that those who are victimized feel frustrated and betrayed, and if they perceive this betrayal to be perpetrated by people with bad intentions, they feel humiliated. They may get depressed and apathetic; however, they may also become angry and engage in violence – at least those who follow a script of responding to humiliation with animosity and not with Mandela-like social change. If not resorting to violence, disaffected people tend to highlight differences that otherwise would be insignificant. They erect fences against those they perceive as humiliators and they cease to emphasize common ground. What we call 'ethnic differences,' for example, may in many instances be far from predicated upon primordial differences. They may, instead, represent rifts that are secondary, namely the result of humiliation dynamics.

Humiliation is the strongest force that creates rifts and breaks down relationships among people. The view that humiliation may be more than just another negative emotion, but may indeed represent a particularly forceful phenomenon, is supported by the research of a number of authors, such as Hartling & Luchetta (1999), Klein (1991), and Lindner (2000) and (2006). Volkan (2004), in his theory of collective violence in his recent book *Blind Trust*, puts forth the thesis that when a 'chosen trauma' is experienced as humiliation and is not mourned, this may lead to feelings of 'entitlement to revenge' and, under the pressure of fear/anxiety, to 'collective regression.'

Humiliation entails some aspects that are universal and others that depend on cultural-social contexts and on the intentions of the involved parties. In everyday language, the word humiliation is used in three ways. Firstly, it signifies an *act*, secondly a *feeling*, and thirdly, a *process*: 'I humiliate you, you feel humiliated, and the entire process is one of humiliation.' (In this text it is expected that the reader understands from the context which alternative is the one applied at a given point, since otherwise language would become too convoluted.) The act of humiliation involves putting down, holding down, rendering helpless and debasing. Feelings of humiliation are likely to emerge when a person is put down lower than she deems legitimate. This part of the humiliation dynamic is rather universal. However, being put down is not always hurtful; this depends on the intentions of the participants. And what counts as humiliation and also the consequences of humiliation is determined by emotional scripts that vary from one historical period to another, from one cultural sphere to another, from one person to another, and within a single person as he or she reacts at different times to the same humiliation.

The starting point of this author's research on humiliation was European history and the widely-shared hypothesis that Germany's humiliation through the Versailles Accords ('The Treaty of Shame') after World War I provided Hitler with the 'fuel' for World War II. In Lindner (2000) I set out to study the link between humiliation and violent conflict, such as war and genocide. The project was entitled *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties.* From the project evolved the theory of humiliation (see http://www.humiliationstudies.org). In my work, humiliation is distinctly addressed on its own account and differentiated from other concepts. Humiliation is, for example, not regarded only as a variant of shame.

I define humiliation as the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor or dignity. To be humiliated is to be placed - against your will and often in a deeply hurtful way - in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you feel you should expect. Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. The victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless.

Cycles of humiliation occur when feelings of humiliation are translated into acts of humiliation. In cases of collectively perpetrated mayhem, humiliation entrepreneurs 'invite' followers to pour their frustrations into a grander narrative of humiliation that uses retaliatory acts of humiliation as 'remedy.' Only the 'Mandelas,' individuals who know how to build dignified relationships, can avoid this reaction. Massacres typically are not just 'efficient' slaughter, but generally more cruel. Rape, torture, and mutilation often precede killing. Many soldiers engage in these actions, even though nothing suggests that they are rapists in civilian life or are drawn to sexual sadism or sadistic violence. The extreme cruelty is therefore hard to explain with average forensic theories. In the Rwandan genocide, for example, killing was not enough. The victims were humiliated before they died. Why else would an old woman be paraded naked through the streets before being locked up with hungry dogs to be eaten alive?

-

-

-

TO ACCESS ALL THE **22 PAGES** OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx

Bibliography

Deutsch, Morton, Coleman, Peter T., & Marcus, Eric C. (Eds.) (2006). *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. [This is one of the most renowned handbooks on conflict resolution].

Hartling,L.M. & Luchetta,T. (1999). Humiliation: Assessing the impact of derision, degradation, and debasement. Journal of Primary Prevention 19(5), 259-278. [Linda Hartling wrote her doctorate on humiliation under the academic supervision of Donald Klein and developed a quantitative questionnaire for measuring degrees of humiliation].

Klein,D.C. (1991). The humiliation dynamic: An overview. The Journal of Primary Prevention 12(2), 87-92. [Donald Klein was among the first contemporary social psychologists to focus on the notion of humiliation]

Lazare,A. (2004). On apology. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. [Aaron Lazare stipulates that humiliation is among the most significant phenomena in need of attention and describes how it can be remedied, for example, through apology].

Lindner,E.G. (2000). The psychology of humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany. Oslo: University of Oslo, Department of Psychology, Part One of Doctoral Dissertation in Psychology. [Lindner is the founder of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, http://www.humiliationstudies.org]

Lindner, E. G. (2006). Making enemies: Humiliation and international conflict. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.

Margalit,A. (1996). The decent society. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Margalit (1996) [Avishai Margalit is a philosopher who explores humiliation in a larger social philosophical framework of how societies ought to be built].

Staub,E. (1989). The roots of evil: The origins of genocide and other group violence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [In analyzing the German Holocaust, Ervin Staub highlights the role of bystanders; transposed onto current events, every world citizen is a bystander who needs to stand up instead of standing by].

Telhami,S. (2003). History and humiliation. Washington Post Friday, March 28, retrieved June 2, 2003, from http://www.bsos.umd.edu/sadat/publications/op-ed/history_and_humiliation.htm. [Shibley Telhami shows how militancy in the Middle East is fueled by a pervasive sense of humiliation and helplessness in the region.]

Ury,W. (1999). Getting to peace. Transforming conflict at home, at work, and in the world. New York, NY: Viking. [Ury's long-term anthropological account of human history allows for a new perspective on the world, a step back from which one can return with new conceptualizations, for example regarding the role and significance of the phenomenon of humiliation]

Volkan,V.D. (2004). Blind trust: Large groups and their leaders in times of crisis and terror. Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing. [In his theory of collective violence, Volkan puts forth that when a chosen trauma is experienced as humiliation and is not mourned, this may lead to feelings of entitlement to revenge and, under the pressure of fear/anxiety, to collective regression.]

Biographical Sketch

Evelin Gerda Lindner is a social scientist with an interdisciplinary and global orientation, anchored, among others, at Columbia University, New York. She holds two PhDs, one in social medicine and another in social psychology. In 1996, she began her research on the concept of humiliation and its role in genocide, war, and violent conflict. German history served as a starting point. It is often assumed that the humiliation of the Germans through the Versailles Treaties after World War I was partly responsible for the Holocaust and the Second World War. Her initial research (1997-2001) brought her to Rwanda and Somalia, where genocidal killings had taken place in 1994 and 1981. Her latest book is *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*. She is currently working on a theory of humiliation as well as developing the global network that she founded, *Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies* (www.humiliationstudies.org).