Psychology for the global village

Coming closer, joining a family, not only increases mutual understanding – the so-called "contact hypothesis" – but also mutual expectations. And, expectations can be disappointed.

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interviewed by Lars Tjelta Westlye

Being humiliated

In your doctoral dissertation, and a substantial number of related articles, you have highlighted the significant impact humiliation can have on the progression and sustainment of conflicts. How do people react to being humiliated?

In everyday language, the word humiliation is used threefold. Firstly, the word humiliation points at an act, secondly at a feeling, and thirdly, at a process: I humiliate you, you feel humiliated, and the entire process is one of humiliation.

People react in different ways when they feel that they were unduly humiliated: some just become depressed – anger turns against oneself – others get openly enraged, and yet others hide their anger and carefully plan for revenge. The person who plans for revenge may become the leader of a movement. Thus, feelings of humiliation may lead to rage, that may be turned inwards, as in the case of depression and apathy. However, this rage may also turn outwards and express itself in violence, even in mass violence, in case leaders are around who forge narratives of humiliation that feed on the feelings of humiliation among masses.

'Salami-tactics'

In his Nobel Lecture on Desember 11 2001, General Secretary Kofi Annan expressed the following: "What begins with the failure to uphold the dignity of one life, all too often ends with a calamity for entire nations." How would you elaborate on this statement in relation to your own work?

Kofi Annan's quote is very interesting. It refers to what has been called 'salami-tactics'. 'Salami-tactics' is a metaphor for consuming a large object a bit at a time so as not to provoke a reaction. Such tactics are being applied in many walks of life; however, they have been used, sadly so, also with regard to humiliation.

In November 2003, I spent a week with a Holocaust survivor, let me call him Daniel. We sat for many hours, talking. One of his major points was his struggle with feeling very hurt by the widely-known accusations against Jews – or self-accusations – that they went into the gas chambers like sheep – without staging major uprisings except a few. He described to me in detail how he was broken down slowly, step-wise, over long periods of time, and how this not only made him increasingly accept being disparaged routinely, but how it also increasingly turned his

neighbours into passive bystanders.

Among other things, he described how he at one point found himself on the infamous train that brought people to Auschwitz. When the train arrived, so he recounted, everybody was ordered to get off. However, one man in the train protested and made noises. An SS officer in charge, waiting outside, ordered one of his helpers to finish this man. And indeed, in front of the eyes of everybody, the man who had dared to raise his voice was crushed to death under the boots of the SS-helper. Daniel explained to me that this was enough to make everybody else be quiet and follow orders without further protesting. It was not necessary for the SS to beat up the whole lot.

Many years later, he told me, when he studied history books on the Holocaust, he found out that a train from Greece had arrived not long before he came to Auschwitz, with Jews from Greece who had not been accustomed to being routinely humiliated. They had staged an uprising upon arrival, and this revolt took a lot more effort from the SS forces to subdue.

Daniel himself, so he explained, had been acculturated to being systematically humiliated in Vienna for years. He had learned to not protest anymore. Equally, also his non-Jewish neighbours in Vienna, even those who initially felt uneasy, got used to accept the humiliated state of Jews as normal. This normality quietly slid into the Holocaust.

Also in Rwanda, salami-tactics were employed prior to the 1994 genocide. Radio Mille Collines broadcasted propaganda that carefully and slowly prepared people that atrocities had to be perpetrated. The threshold of possible resistance within society was slowly and meticulously lowered. At the end, almost a million people were slaughtered by their neighbours within a few weeks.

Why humiliate enemies?

Humiliating your enemies in public is not an unusual strategy used in order to emphasize your own position and powers. American soldiers dressed Iraqi prisoners naked, wrote "Ali Baba" on their chests and chased them around the streets. The american army released a recording of a captured Saddam Hussein undergoing a medical check including a louse-inspection. These are just some of the resent instances of public humiliation of "the enemy". Why do you think we have this almost urgent need to humiliate those we do not like? Why do we humiliate our enemies?

According to my analysis, humiliating enemies aims at humbling them. However, the problem, particularly since human rights ideals have gained weight, is that humiliated enemies, far from turning into humble underlings, transform into angry terrorists. I call feelings of humiliation "the nuclear bomb of the emotions" and argue that they may turn otherwise "normal" people into potential "weapons of mass destruction."

Until the advent of human rights ideals it was regarded as legitimate and "prosocial" to put people down "into their place, where they belonged." Elites typically explained the "necessity" that worthiness had to be ranked in *higher* and *lesser* beings with god's will or nature's order. Parents of *lesser* value were urged to "break the will" of their children early on, in order to form subservient underlings.

As long as societies are homogenous and everybody is adhering to the belief that the existence of hierarchically structured societies, with *higher* and *lesser* beings, are god's will or nature's order, putting down people in order to create inferiors, may represent quite an efficient approach. For many centuries, not only elites, but also underlings often believed that their respective topdog or underdog positions were "given." Underlings did not necessarily include the sufferings emanating from being lowered – being put down, even beaten and abused – into their happiness equation. Being an underling was often accepted – even if painful – like a natural disaster.

Within traditional societal structures, and they are in place in many communities around the world also nowadays, humiliation and humbling are intertwined. In power struggles, the strongest and mightiest typically wins and enforces a hierarchical order, using legitimising myths to justify it (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Thus, achieving *un-equal* dignity is the aim in power struggles in traditional hierarchical societies, not achieving *equal* dignity. I equate this "unequal dignity" with the honour that is attached to different echelons in collectivist hierarchical societies.

The advent of human rights ideals, or more precisely the fact that such ideals increasingly developed into mainstream ideals in the course of the past two hundred years, introduces a grave and confusing dilemma and a contradictory situation. The contradiction is introduced by human rights ideals "undermining" previous acceptance of lowliness. Consequently, putting people down no longer necessarily brings home the message of "prosocial" humbling. Human rights ideals turn practices that previously were legitimate into illegitimate practices. Human rights ideals call for equal dignity, and human rights no longer condone ranked worthiness

of masters and underlings.

As for the situation of Americans in Iraq, all sides are caught in this contradictory situation. Old honour codes of "unequal" rankings clash with new human rights ideals on all sides, on the American and the Iraqi side. An American soldier is caught in this transition from old honour codes to new human rights beliefs as much as his Iraqi counterparts.

For example, an American soldier might never treat a fellow American the way he treats Iraqis. And he may treat Iraqis differently because he believes that Iraqis, contrary to his neighbours back home who understand the concept of equal dignity, "only understand the language of strength." And indeed, this soldier might have a point. He might meet with Iraqi men infused with fierce notions of honour, who would not hesitate to subdue weaker foes. Not least Saddam Hussein and his helpers kept in place a brutal hierarchical system, whose core hierarchical structure may have been condoned by many Iraqi citizens, except when it went "too far." Just to give an example; not only in Iraq, but in numerous traditional societies around the world, women are still expected to "know their place," which is typically a lower and subservient position.

However, not only on the American side, but also on the Iraqi side, people are caught. Not all Iraqis condone old honour codes and are ready to subjugate anybody who shows "weakness." Many Iraqis wish to build a society that is based on human rights ideals of equal dignity. Iraqis with such views slide into opposition to their own fellow countrymen who promote ranked worthiness. However, they are equally appalled by American transgressions of the equal worthiness of all human beings.

Thus, to respond to your question, as long as societies are organised in hierarchical ways, with masters at the top and underlings at the bottom, and this structure is seen to be a divinely ordained way of keeping communities together, humiliating people in order to humble them is a core practice that is seen as necessary and indispensable. In the course of the past centuries, if masters did not protect their privileges and hold down subordinates in their *sub* position, they were called *lazy*. The "lazy kings" – les rois fainèants – of the sixth and seventh centuries in France, for example, were ridiculed because they allowed their immediate subordinates, the "maires du palais", the managers of the palace, to usurp power. One of these "maires du palais" indeed eventually took over the throne in the year 751.

Your question expresses wonderment over the "need" to humiliate enemies. This wonderment is a phenomenon, I believe, that is profoundly linked to you being steeped in human rights ideals of equal dignity, and – as a Norwegian – in addition in a particular Nordic culture of equality. You find it offensive to humiliate people, under all circumstances. However, if you had been raised several hundred years ago in a firmly hierarchical society, you would perhaps not have asked such a question?

Human rights and humiliation

In most of your work I sense a strong preoccupation with a phenomenon you somewhere call a "revolutionary new concept", namely the concept of human rights. You study these common and shared human rights in relation to what you have named "the dynamics of humiliation." How would you describe these dynamics?

All the downtrodden people around the world were once made to believe that this was their god-given fate and that they had no right to complain, let alone feel humiliated by their lowly existence. Their *identification with the oppressor* was not merely an individual process; it was also a societal process. As discussed before, many underlings turned their lowliness into "their culture," in other words the concept of *learned helplessness* was turned into long-term cultural beliefs. Johan Galtung's notion of *penetration*, or "implanting the topdog inside the underdog" (Galtung, 1996, p. 199), illustrates the fact that acceptance of subjugation may become a culture of its own. Also Ranajit Guha's understanding of the term *subaltern* points at this process.

Human rights ideals turn this state of affairs upside down. What was legitimate before is no longer legitimate. The practice of masters arrogating superiority and humiliating underlings in order to humble them, is now regarded as illicit and obscene and human rights advocates invite both,

masters and underlings, to join in shared humility and equal dignity.

Yet, historical transitions are often difficult, too slow for some, and too fast for others. Usually, the new ideas first emerge, while their implementation lags behind. And in between we often have empty rhetoric. Those who would rather maintain the old order try to slow down the transition, while those who have bought into the new ideas, try to hasten it. Both get frustrated. The potential for conflict that compounds the already difficult transition is great. Those who adhere to the old worldviews reject the new one as imperialistic imposition, humiliating as it were, while those who promote the new order feel victimised and humiliated by old style oppression.

Particularly the phase of empty rhetoric is prone to breed feelings of humiliation. Awareness of human rights rises while at the same time reality lags behind, and thus feelings of humiliation fill the gap (see also Davies famous J-Curve; Davies, 1969; Davies, 1962; Boudon, 1986).

Human rights ideals represent an invitation: The poor and downtrodden of the world are invited as members of equal dignity into the family of human-kind. This invitation is usually issued by Western countries; they are the ones to advocate human rights. However, at the same time reality flies into the face of the advocated ideals; or, more precisely, the poor get poorer. As is widely known, the gap between the haves and have-nots, both locally and globally, is growing; fair global trade rules or attention to deteriorating resources are wanting. Thus, the downtrodden of the world are first presented with ideals, by the West, that are subsequently violated – by their very preachers. Whereas in former times God or nature were held responsible for poverty and wretchedness, now the rich are seen to violate their own ideals by letting the poor linger in abject misery – worse than that, by even making the poor more miserable.

Morton Deutsch (2002) writes on this problem of rising expectations and claims that *"a very effective way of enhancing the sense of injustice of the victimized is to increase their education and little else."*

The moderates

You postulate that one of the necessary preconditions in order to break these dynamics of humiliation is to let "moderates" from the various involved parties unite. Could you explain this?

To simplify it starkly, there are three ways out of humiliation, firstly depression and apathy, secondly

the "Hitler-way", and thirdly the "Mandela-way." I define moderates as those who chose the Mandela-way. Mandela did not turn the spiral of humiliation one move further; he ended it. He did not unleash genocide on the white elite of South Africa. On the contrary, he attempted to respectfully ask those former masters to step down and share joint citizenship on an equal footing with everybody else. Instead of dehumanising the former oppressors and excluding them from the new order, he included them by respecting their equal dignity.

In Rwanda, on the other side, the "Hitler-way" was chosen. The Tutsi-elite, the former master and humiliator, was defined, by Hutu extremists, as a threat that had to be eradicated. Future humiliation was feared and "prevented" by killing the would-be humiliators. In the case of Hitler, he projected similar fears into the future that he called Germans to avert. He believed that the so-called "World-Jewry" had plans to dominate and subjugate the world and that it was foreseen by "providence" for him to prevent this.

Thus, Hitlers – or extremists – inflict humiliation to remedy humiliation, while Mandelas – or moderates – abstain from inflicting humiliation to remedy humiliation. Hitlers, in this conceptualisation, are what I call "humiliation-entrepreneurs", who defend perpetrating humiliation by pointing out their own victimhood to humiliation – imagined or real.

Human rights ideals, however, do not allow for perpetrating humiliation on anybody, not even on perpetrators of humiliating atrocities. What human rights "prescribe" when people are to be stopped from arrogating superiority, is humbling without humiliating.

Human rights promoters call tyrants to descend, to humble themselves and learn new humility, and they do this with respect, as Mandela has shown. Typically, however, tyrants cry "foul" when asked to step down; they usually claim to be victims of humiliation when asked to abandon what they believe to be their entitlement to privilege. However, within human rights worldviews, tyrants and all elites who believe they are *higher* beings are not anymore entitled to any privileged status, and they are therefore not entitled to cry "humiliation" when asked to learn humility. Moderates are those skilled in humbling arrogance by using respect; Mandela is an outstanding example.

How research can humiliate

Working on your dissertation you encountered some serious methodological challenges. During the pre-

liminary phases of your comprehensive field study in Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda you have said that asking questions to your informants, or perhaps only your mere presence, was in effect a humiliation to your informants. What kind of challenges did you meet conducting your field studies, and how did you solve them?

When I arrived in Somalia for my fieldwork in 1998, I understood that we, when we carry out research, are usually unaware that we enter into a very particular *contract* with those people we call "subjects" or "interviewees" or "interlocutors".

Imagine a scholar entering a class at university. He carries questionnaires and distributes them. He asks the students sitting in the class if they could be so kind as to fill out the questionnaire, indicating that this would contribute to what we call science. The students, happy to be at university and sharing in a joint endeavour to do science, fill out the questionnaire and return it to the researcher. The researcher transfers the data into the appropriate software and comes up with the results of various factor analyses. Then the scholar sets out to write an academic article, where he or she notes, "x females" and "y males" participated in this research project...

When I arrived in Somalia it was as if, to stay in the analogy of the class room, I came to the class room's door and, trying to enter, was hindered by an armed man guarding it. He asks me, putting his gun to my head, "What do you want!" I explain, "I want to carry out science!" He replies that he knows nothing about science; however, he would be interested, if I paid money. I reply, "No, unfortunately, the University of Oslo has no funds for that". The guard then thinks, in the back of his mind, whether it is worth kidnapping this researcher; kidnapping having been quite a frequent occurrence in Somalia since years. Reading his thoughts, I hastily explain

that I would be more of a burden then a joy for potential kidnappers. Then he asks whether the researcher could perhaps be instrumentalised in any other way.

And so on. It seems that researchers who enter a university class room have "jumped" many steps on the way to the contract between researcher and "object" and, more importantly, that this is usually not mentioned in academic papers, let alone factored in into the final results. In other words, university contexts are highly artificial worlds with people who are already informed and convinced of the merits of science, and motivated to contribute to this endeavour, even with their most private feelings and experiences. Science is understood to benefit all human-kind and many are willing to contribute pro bono.

However, coming to Somalia, meeting with people who had lived lives of a harshness that a Western visitor would hardly survive, and then treat them as "objects", felt to be most insulting and improper. I understood that I, before undertaking any other step, had to invite potential interlocutors into the notion of science as a "collaborative endeavour for the benefit of humankind" in ways that convinced them. I furthermore found out that the only way to convince them was to credibly and authentically embody this very notion of science as "collaborative endeavour for the benefit humankind." I had to give my interlocutors the very weight and respect that a person deserves who contributes to this collective endeavour; I had to invite them to become "co-researchers".

As soon as I started to collect data, I found that research on humiliation in itself might humiliate those who are the object of the research. I found that it is paramount to address the question of research methodology and how it may contribute to deepening rifts instead of healing them. In the course of my research I discovered that the methodology initially

attempted was itself humiliating to the people being questioned. This discovery gave rise to deep feelings of embarrassment and shame in me – shame about conducting unethical research. But worse, methods that have humiliating effects are bound to deeply threaten the validity of any research that involves relations between human beings. "Informants" who feel humiliated will, at best, give irrelevant answers or tell what they believe the researcher wants to hear, or they will say nothing, or react with aggression. It was deeply humiliating and humbling for me, the researcher, to discover this; I was so-to-speak "forced down" from the pretentious "heights" of "science" and my face was – metaphorically – thrown down into earth. As a consequence of these experiences and discoveries, I subsequently underwent a very rapid learning process guided by a commitment to achieving a dialogue about experiences and feelings that was as authentic and open as possible. A critical discourse analysis of the interviews led to the conclusion that the method chosen was in fact patronising and humiliating for the interview partners and that certain social psychological methods may have a humiliating effect, especially in cross-cultural contexts with a colonial backdrop and within populations that have suffered greatly from war and genocide.

How to avoid research that humiliates

In what ways do you think your experiences from Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi can help similar projects avoid humiliating their interlocutors?

I believe that overlooking the traps of humiliation in research leads to lost validity. Reliability might be saved; however, validity may be lost. This is because humiliated interlocutors may not provide valid information.

Gary Boelhower applies the notion of deep listening and transformative dialogue to the field of leadership. I found that this notion may be applied to other fields as well, as for example, to methods of research. Boelhower writes that...

'...there is a growing recognition that authentic leadership must be defined as the coordination and affirmation of partners rather than the management and persuasion of subordinates. There is a growing body of literature that reimages the posture of authentic leadership as one of attentive listening and open dialogue rather than one of proclamation and defense'.

Boelhower calls for...

'...each of us to take that posture of deep listening and transformative dialogue, to recognize again the need to expand our vision but also our reach.'

In the course of my fieldwork I attempted to put into practice, in the field of research, what Boelhower calls for in the realm of leadership. Boelhower's plea also links up to my experience with Western clinical psychology in Egypt, and my uneasiness with certain patronising traits of healing professions such as medicine and clinical psychology. During my work as a clinical psychologist I tried to develop different, more respectful ways of dealing with clients; the same learning process seemed to be necessary concerning research methodology.

The interviews were often part of a network of relationships that included me and the interlocutors, and in many cases interviews went over several sittings. Trust was built and authentic encounters were sought, inscribed in non-humiliating relationships that safeguarded everybody's dignity. Interlocutors were invited to become "co-researchers" in a reflective dialogue with me, involving not only the interviewee and myself but also various scholars – through their ideas that were introduced.

Indeed, it features an unusual specific methodology, one born in part of necessity but one that proved to have distinct advantages over more formal questionnaire or tightly controlled and impersonal interviews in which the interviewer remains aloof at a great psychological distance from those who she is interviewing. That methodology involved a kind of "reflective" conversation in which I gently confronted participants with narratives and specific questions raised by the historical records. Furthermore, I generally did so only after making an effort to win their trust and their sense that I could understand their experience – in some cases by living among them and, where appropriate and strategically or ethically necessary, by sharing something of my own background and the way it allowed me to empathize with aspects of what they were telling me.

The nature of the interlocutor's revelations obliged me, both on scientific grounds, the need to get people to tell the truth or at least their truth – and on personal or ethical grounds, to interact with them as an engaged and empathetic human being rather than as a detached and totally objective scientist.

Humiliation - only at the individual level?

Professor of ethics Jonathan Glover announced in an interview published in the Norwegian newspaper Morgenbladet (nr 4/2004) that "humiliation and neglect in childhood is the refrain I extract from my conversations with violent prisoners". He continues: "...it seems reasonable to convey this also to nations." What is your comment on this?

Clearly, feelings are felt by individuals. However, individuals are also parts of groups. Groups are groups because individuals in some ways have "grouped." And, furthermore, children are not born into empty space, but into groups. They are socialised within a group. They form identities that incorporate certain beliefs, attitudes, and scripts that are subscribed to collectively. Thus, people may be internally motivated and drawn to be and continue being members of groups. Furthermore, apart from internal motivation, people may also be externally guided, controlled, and restrained by their fellow group member.

I asked Somalis how a case of humiliation is moving from the individual to the collective level. Let us say, somebody has been murdered. The reply was that in the case of murder, relatively clear rules are in place as to go about – 100 camels compensation for a man of a noble clan, for example – and mere murder would not necessarily represent a case of humiliation. However, in case the dead body was displayed publicly, laid out on the square of the village, with ears cut off, for example, this would be understood as a "message" that the murderer indeed wishes to humiliate not only the victim but also the victim's group. In that case, elders would meet for an extraordinary meeting and discuss the matter. They would discuss if the group were indeed to "accept" the challenge of humiliation, "adopt" this challenge not only as a private matter but a collective matter, and then find out what to do about it. The family of the victim would be able to influence this process by making their case and claiming that the group should indeed "adopt" their problem as a collective one.

In Hitler Germany, after World War I, times were difficult. The economy faltered, reparations had to

be paid. People lived through innumerable frustrations. The national elite, the aristocracy, smarted from national humiliation through the Versailles Accords. However, most probably, the majority of the population struggled with daily survival and was not occupied with national honour to the same extent as the aristocracy.

What Hitler achieved, was to converge individual feelings of frustration, experienced by the "kleine Leute" or "little people", into one single grand narrative of national humiliation that, according to him, had to be redressed. Whatever "baggage" of grievances every single citizen carried, Hitler invited these grievances into his narrative. And, clearly, times were ripe. Only a few years earlier, Hitler was an isolated man; during his times as a soldier in World War I, he was viewed as a strange rambler. In other historic periods, he would have been overlooked, like those people who predict doomsday at the corner of a street and nobody listens. However, in the case of Hitler, he met historic times when people indeed volunteered to pour their individual grievances – feelings of frustration and humiliation related to their personal situation – into a larger story of national humiliation. And, more so, they also bought into Hitler's offer to remedy this situation; he proposed to inflict forceful humiliation on those humiliators – from the past and expected in the future – that he identified or imagined.

In that way, to reply to your question, a variety of individual feelings may be bundled into one single collective narrative that then in turn, reflexively, influences individual feelings. Both publicity and propaganda try to convince people to buy into collective scripts that entail emotional, cognitive and behavioral elements. And, sadly enough, in the course of history, propaganda often succeeded not only in "selling" "progress" or "decency", but also atrocities.

Humiliation as an intersubjective phenomenon in its relation to "hard facts"

Humiliation may first and foremost be understood as an intersubjective phenomenon. However, you use the concept of humiliation to explain conflicts which in many cases usually are both understood and explained as caused by "political", "economical" and/or "religious" factors. Is it possible that a psychological model like yours does not incorporate these factors and in doing so actually overlooks the "real" causes of conflicts, so to speak?

First, yes, humiliation is a deeply intersubjective phenomenon, I agree. I find your questions as to "hard" causes for conflict, in relation to psychological explanations, very important. Clearly, "hard" causes for conflict have to be looked at closely. It is almost general knowledge that win-win situations are more benign than win-lose situations. Among agriculturalist, for example, when you depend on a plot of land for your livelihood, and I come and want to live off the same plot of land, we have a problem that is more severe than, let us say, for early hunter-gatherers or modern knowledge workers. Hunters and gatherers used to wander off to find new abundance in the next valley, and nowadays, IT experts can look around and be hired by yet another software company, or they can found a new company and market ideas that never existed before.

However, let us have a closer look at scarcity of resources; let us take as example lack of food. What may be the result? The result to be expected may be quarrel and violence – or cooperation and sharing. What are the chances for either outcome? In case people feel tightly knit together, have a sense of solidarity, and feel mutual respect, they might be willing to share and find joint solutions to counter scarcity. In case people feel that they are disparaged and disrespected, they might not be willing to share. In the second case, they might even go further and justify their unwillingness to share with "cultural" or "ethnic" or "religious" differences, differences that they would not highlight otherwise. Thus, I believe, often differences, and unwillingness to cooperate in situations of crisis are not primary but secondary to the quality of the relationship. If the relationship of the involved parties is imbued with mutual respect, cooperation will be more probable; if the relationship is characterised by feelings of humiliation, either mutual or only on one side, cooperation will be much harder.

Thus, to summarise, we could claim that "hard facts" in cases of crisis call for cooperation. And, indeed, joint strategies to solve problems can always be found. Currently, the roadmaps available for solving the Middle East crisis, for example, are all well-formulated. However, what is lacking, is a sense of solidarity and we-are-together-in-this for implementation. Thus, even the best solutions fail to be implemented in the absence of carrying relationships.

To say it in other words, "hard facts" have no inherent power to guide community action in a quasi automatic way. Scarcity does not automatically equal violence. It may equal solidarity. "Hard facts" have to be translated into intersubjective and intergroup communication. And it is at this point that the quality of the relationships between the involved parties

comes to bear. In case these relationships are filled with disinterest, alienation, or even feelings of humiliation, the way to constructive cooperation in situations of crisis is long and "hard facts" will be highlighted to justify that cooperation is "impossible". If filled with mutual respect, or at least the wisdom and know-how of how to build it, like in South Africa, cooperation might come so easily that those "hard facts" play a less decisive role. As mentioned before, Mandela could have unleashed genocide on the white elite of South Africa. After all, a grave conflict lingered. Fortunately, the world does not need to worry about genocide in South Africa, at least not at present.

Psychologizing?

In discussions like this the term "psychologizing politics" sometimes comes to my mind. Explaining political structures and conflicts on a psychological level often seems to me somewhat naive and perhaps even a little arrogant. What is your comment on this?

Human rights ideals call for respect for equal dignity. When a child is abused, it is entitled to trauma counselling. In former times, "breaking the will of the child" (see, for example, Alice Miller's work), was "prescribed" and seen as "prosocial". A beaten child was no candidate for trauma counselling. On the contrary, one assumed that the child deserved no better and had to face the consequences.

Thus, I believe that human rights ideals introduce a change that leads to psychology and psychiatry playing a more significant role in areas where these disciplines previously were absent. It is not the individual psychologist or psychiatrist who is responsible for this development, but long-term historic change within which all are embedded.

In 1999, I participated in the First Regional Meeting of the World Psychiatric Association and the Kenya Psychiatric Association, in Nairobi. Among the participants were psychiatrists from the USA who had helped counsel the victims of the bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi in 1998. I spoke to a Kenyan psychiatrist, who told me, off-the-record: "Look, we do not want to be ungrateful. It was marvellous to have our American colleagues supporting us when the bombing happened. And we learned a lot from them. However, just look at all the people in Kenya, or in the whole of Africa for that matter, who struggle through traumatic life circumstances every single day. You have war fare, drought, violence, HIV/AIDS – if we were to offer trauma therapy to all these people, half the continents population would have to study psychology!"

Thus, to make the point, I welcome the shift from "you have to face the consequences of your misery on your own" to "we all are responsible for for giving everybody the opportunity to live a dignified life". I welcome the involvement of fields such as psychology or psychiatry. I believe that this shift is an outflow of a larger shift towards the implementation of human rights ideals.

Do we have a responsibility to promote awareness of humiliation dynamics?

As a scientist you are preoccupied spreading your knowledge, creating networks and calling for an awareness of the dynamics of humiliation. In this issue Impuls *focuses on "the psychology/psychologist in society" and if and how psychological knowledge may be used in order to make the "global village"a better place to live. Do you as a psychologist and physisican feel any responsibilty in this direction? That is, to spread your knowledge and thereby raising awareness?*

I do indeed view "the world" through the lens of a therapist. A therapist is interested in bettering patients or clients lives, on an individual, but also on a collective level. Vaccination programmes, for example, address whole nations, as do campaigns to raise awareness, for example, for the risks entailed in smoking or eating too much fat or sugar.

In my work, I address not only nations, but the so-called "global village" as a whole. A therapist may fail offering help to an individual and this individual might die, still the society will survive. However, the "global village" may not "survive" dynamics of humiliation which create rifts that undermine the cooperation necessary for global sustainability. Thus, no "patient" is more in need of attention than the "global village". In the case of the "patient global village", informed self-interest converges with therapeutic motivations for help. Self-interest comes to bear when we ask ourselves whether we want to live in a "global village" with obscene levels of misery, suffered by the majority of its inhabitants, and unsustainable life styles of the few "haves", or if we want to share a decent "global village".

Avishai Margalit wrote the book *The Decent Society*, in which he calls for institutions that do not anymore humiliate citizens. He states that it is not sufficient to merely aspire to building *just* societies, *decent* societies should be implemented that do not entail humiliation. Humiliating living conditions are

not only unjust; they are also *obscene*. Decency reigns when humiliation is being minimised, humiliation in relationships, but particularly humiliation inflicted by institutions. Decency rules when dignity for all is made possible. Decency does not mean that everybody should like everybody; *decency* is the minimum that is necessary to keep a neighbourhood functioning – coexisting without mayhem – even when neighbours dislike each other.

Social psychology and community psychology

As an extension of my last question; setting the agenda, taking part in the public discourse and debate and raising awareness of psychological knowledge seems to me to be something only few psychologists attend to. In respect to this; should psychologists feel a responsibility and contribute more to the public discourse, or are we best suited within the borders of our rather safe and familiar client-therapist relation?

DRIVE CAREFULLY
DONT
KILL OR MAIM
YOUR REPLACEMENT

I believe that the world would benefit from social and community psychology playing a much more visible role. We live in unique historic times. Never before have human beings gathered to form *One* single in-group, or what we call the "global village". Clearly, I do not claim that psychologists should be the ones to carry out international tarriff talks or calculate thre CO_2 load of the biosphere.

However, coming together in a new in-group requires new skills. Increasingly, people with very varied cultural backgrounds meet and communicate – a process that entails all the dangers of inter-cultural misunderstandings. In order to avoid grave consequences – mutual feelings of humiliation emanating from mutual misunderstandings, for example – people have to learn intercultural sensitivity. Here social scientists and, in particular, psychologists are called upon.

However, this is not all: The murderer often comes from within the family. Or, to formulate it differently, coming closer, joining a family, not only increases mutual understanding – the so-called "contact hypothesis" – but also mutual expectations.

And, expectations can be disappointed. Newly arriving family members typically start comparing themselves with the others in ways they did not do previously. Deprivation that previously went unrecognised suddenly turns into painful "relative deprivation" – see, for example, Festinger's work. The situation is aggravated the moment human rights teachings are seeping in. This is because human rights raise expectations even more. Suddenly, in the presence of human rights ideals, the point is not any longer to merely be a family member, but a family member of equal dignity. So-called "enabling environments" are suddenly called for so as to offer everybody the possibility of a dignified life and equal dignity. And whenever enabling environments are failing, grievances grow. So, as soon as the downtrodden identify the rich as perpetrators of such grievances – and no longer identify grievances a natural disasters – feelings of humiliation breed and fuel potential violence.

Furthermore, the transition itself, from a world characterised by the presence of ingroups and out-groups, to a world with only *One* single in-group left, is inherently difficult. Social psychology, just to take one field as an example, has a lot to offer to the world to safeguard a constructive transition, not least through its work on the very important topic of human bias. People usually judge out-groups much less leniently than their fellow in-group members. Often, quite harsh opinions are held about those deemed to belong to an out-group. And, as long as groups are reasonably isolated from each other, this phenomenon does not cause too much damage.

However, in historic times of convergence, which we currently experience, when groups grow increasingly close, these harsh opinions will become known, also to the targeted out-group. Thus, as a result, everybody feels insulted by the disparaging opinions towards "us" emanating from "them". The coming-together, instead of being joyful and peace-inducing, may thus in fact fuel the opposite. Social scientists and psychologist in particular are called upon to intervene, lest the "patient", namely the "global village", may die.

Global Network

These days you and your collaborators are in the starting hole of establishing a more formal network comprising scholars interested in the studies of the dynamics of humiliation. Could you conclusively tell someting about the visions of this network? What role do you think a network like this can play in "the global village"?

Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies are envisaged to serve as a platform for research, education, and intervention promoting equal dignity and helping to discontinue practices that entail humiliation. The institutional anchoring is Columbia University in New York; however, the aim is to build a global network of scholars, researchers, educators, and practitioners. Our efforts focus on generating research, disseminating information, applying creative educational methods, as well as devising pilot projects and policy strategies. With these initiatives we wish to promote a new level of consciousness that is characterized by caring, mutual respect and sensitivity to dignity. Thus we envisage to fertilize new and constructive community action. We believe that global sustainability, sustainability of social cohesion as well as ecological survival, requires a mindset of dignity and humility and not of humiliation.

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