

Recognition or Humiliation - The Psychology of Intercultural Communication

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2000

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Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2000). *Recognition or Humiliation - The Psychology of Intercultural Communication*. Bergen: Proceedings of the ISSEI Millennium conference 'Approaching a New Millennium: Lessons from the Past - Prospects for the Future,' the 7th conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, Bergen, Norway, from 14th - 18th August, 2000.

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Abstract

In the case of conflicts between members of different cultures: which should be respected, the other culture or the other person? The article will put forward the following answer: What I have to recognise, acknowledge and respect is the other person and not his or her membership in 'another' culture, and this is because each individual has her personal dignity. The other 'culture' may be a reason of pride, but may also be a cause or a product of humiliation. Intercultural communication must include an analysis of power relations and probe whether past incidents of humiliation may be a source of 'culture difference.' If this is so, respect and recognition entails an obligation to heal this humiliation. 'Respecting' 'culture difference' for its own sake may compound past humiliations by adding further humiliation.

Introduction

In the case of conflicts between members of different cultures: which should be respected, the other culture or the other person? This is the central question asked in this paper.

Recognising cultural rights is part of recognising human rights. Cultural Rights are articulated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR, 16th December 1966), which set out the right to participation in cultural life and the protection of minority culture.

The protection of minority culture has been a sore topic for many countries during the past decades. Much has yet to be done; many minorities around the world are still unprotected and suffer discrimination. Not everybody in power has yet understood that cultural diversity is a source of enrichment, and that respecting and recognising other cultures may be beneficial to all. Modern business, for example, depends on creativity, and creativity thrives on a flow of

new and different ideas. Cultural diversity has the potential to provide these urgently needed ideas, similar to biodiversity that provides humankind with a pool of genetic 'ideas' and inputs.

Norway, now known for the Nobel Peace Prize and its reputation of defending human rights, went through the same struggle as other states, for example with its indigenous Sami population. Today both the Sami Act (Act of 1987 No. 56) and international treaties to which Norway has acceded, including ILO Convention 169 and the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, impose obligations with regard to providing services to the Sami people in Sami language and informing society at large about Sami culture. A Sami Assembly and a Sami Rights Committee have been set up. However, relations between the majority and minority populations in Norway are still problematic today, a situation eloquently described by Ole Henrik Magga from the Sami Assembly in his speech *Indigenous Perspectives on a Culture of Peace* at the conference for Higher Education for Peace, 4th May 2000 in Tromsø, in the north of Norway.

This paper accepts the necessity to respect other cultures and recognises the benefits to be expected from it. However, since so much is being written about this, this text will choose another focus and highlight certain unexpected problems that may arise when people genuinely set out to do their best to respect other cultures.

This leads back to the question with which this paper began: in the case of conflicts between members of different cultures, which has to be given priority, the other culture, or the other person? The following 'snapshots' are intended to open up the field for this question:

A hooligan may say, 'Hooliganism is my culture! I want this culture to be recognised and not humiliated! I feel that I am 'somebody' only now that I have become a hooligan. As a hooligan I am feared and respected! Do not take this away from me!'

Similarly, a member of a violent right wing group may say, 'To admire Hitler is central to our culture! We want this culture to be recognised and not humiliated!'

Following a somewhat similar line, China opposes international criticism of human rights abuses as intrusive, humiliating, and an arrogant breach of Asian sovereignty in the name of alien Western values. 'On February 22, the Chinese ambassador to the United States, Zhu Qiz-hen, lodged a strong protest against the human rights report issued by the U.S. State Department. Zhu stated that "the Chinese government and people express their utmost indignation at this act which violates the basic norms governing international relations, grossly interferes in China's internal affairs and seriously encroaches upon its sovereignty" (Beijing Review, March 5-11, 1990, 9, quoted from Chong, 1990, 8).

What China is questioning here is the universality of human rights. International scholars such as George Kent agree to a certain extent when he urges us to be cautious and not repeat earlier mistakes: 'Does the modern human rights system really express universal understandings, or does it express only a particular bias? Is the perspective of westerners like that of Europeans before the age of exploration, when they knew nothing of the uncharted territories far beyond their shores? We know from history that arrogant Europeans may want to go out to these unknown areas not to learn but to dominate and capture. We should be very cautious about urging the universality of the western human rights system. That urging can become just another component of the overwhelming globalization process, so intolerant of diversity, that

we are now witnessing. Human rights advocates, usually defenders of minority interests, should not be so intolerant as to insist their approach must be the universal one' (Kent, 1999, 12).

Another Western voice goes even further, as illustrated in a conversation related to me on 30th June 2000: A Western scholar was challenged with the following question: 'If you were confronted with a culture where the routine killing of people were part of 'normal' culture, and you would have the means to intervene: would you then intervene, or not?' The answer was: 'I would not intervene!'¹

But, what would this scholar do about the following case: A Somali woman said to me in an interview in 1998, 'I feel that female circumcision is a humiliation carried out and justified by my culture. Please do not accept that part of my culture, - on the contrary, help me change this part of my culture! Do not cover up for the wrong-doings of my culture just for the sake of wanting to recognise and respect Somali culture!'

Likewise, 'Chai Ling, the Chinese student who fled from mainland China to France, criticized U.S.'s policy regarding China as being far behind the expectations of the Chinese students. She wishes the U.S. would take serious steps in handling China's human rights issue (World Daily, June 5, 3). Five days later, Chai Ling asked Vice-President Quale of the U.S. to urge the Chinese government to improve its human rights conditions in exchange for the most-favored nation status (Sina Pao, June 10, 1990, 1)' (Chong, 1990, 8).

Or, 'After China had released the well-known dissident Fang Lizhi and his wife Li Shuk-han, who had been protected by the U.S. Embassy in China for one year, Fang criticized in the interview with NBC News that the U.S. applied a double standard to the human rights condition in China. He also talked of the need he saw to push China into the international community (New York Time, July 7, 1990, 2)' (Chong, 1990, 8).

These Chinese voices get support from scholars such as John J. Tilley who states: 'In debates over cultural relativism and moral universalism it is commonly assumed that universalists bear the burden of proof, that cultural relativism is the default position' (Tilley, 1998, abstract). Tilley claims in his article that this assumption is mistaken. He discusses four sources of the mistake, and suggests lifting the burden of proof from universalists. In fact, he goes further and argues that the position of cultural relativism is an implausible one.

These snapshots were meant to serve as an introduction to the main topic of this paper, namely the traps that await any person or group that takes the position of trying to 'respect other cultures.'

This paper is one in a series of papers that are being written in connection with a research project at the University of Oslo (1997-2001)² that focuses on humiliation and is entitled *The*

¹ Related to me by Dennis Smith, 30th June 2000.

² See project description on www.uio.no/~evelinl. The project is supported by the Norwegian Research Council and the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am grateful for their support, and would also like to thank the Institute of Psychology at the University of Oslo for hosting it. I extend my warmest thanks to all my informants in and from Africa, many of whom survive under the most difficult life circumstances. I hope that at some point in the future I will be able to give back at least a fraction of all the support I received from them! I thank Reidar Ommundsen at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Oslo for his continuous support, together with Jan Smedslund,

*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.*³ 216 qualitative interviews were carried out, from 1998 to 1999 in Africa (in Hargeisa, capital of 'Somaliland,' in Kigali and other places in Rwanda, in Bujumbura, capital of Burundi, in Nairobi in Kenya, and in Cairo in Egypt), and from 1997 to 2000 in Europe (in Oslo in Norway, in Germany, in Geneva, and in Brussels).⁴ The topic has

Hilde Nafstad, Malvern Lumsden (Lumsden, 1997), Carl-Erik Grenness, Jon Martin Sundet, Finn Tschudi, Kjell Flekkøy, and Astrid Bastiansen. Michael Harris Bond, Chinese University of Hong Kong, helped with constant feedback and support (see Bond, 1996; Bond, 1998; Bond, 2000; Bond, Chiu, & Wan, 1984; Bond & Venus, 1991; Smith & Bond, 1999). The project would not have been possible without the help of Dennis Smith, professor of sociology at Loughborough University (UK). Without Lee D. Ross's encouragement my research would not have been possible; Lee Ross is a principal investigator and co-founder of the Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation (SCCN). I also thank Pierre Dasen, Professeur en approches interculturelles de l'éducation, Université en Genève, Département de Psychologie, for his most valuable support. The project is interdisciplinary and has benefited from the help of many colleagues at the University of Oslo and elsewhere. I would especially like to thank Jan Øberg, William Ury, Director, Project on Preventing War, Harvard University (Ury, 1999; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991), Heidi von Weltzien Hoivik and Andreas Føllesdal (Weltzien Hoivik & Føllesdal, 1995), Dagfinn Føllesdal (Føllesdal, in Robert Sokolowski, 1988), Thomas Pogge, Helge Høybråten, Thorleif Lund, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (Eriksen, 1993b), Unni Wikan (Wikan, 1984), Asbjørn Eide and Bernt Hagtvvet (Eide & Hagtvvet, 1996), Leif Ahnstrøm, and Jan Brøgger (Brøgger, 1986).

³ For article written so long, see Lindner, 1999a; Lindner, 2000a; Lindner, 2000d; Lindner, 2000g; Lindner, 2000h; Lindner, 2000f; Lindner, 2000i; Lindner, 2000c; Lindner, 1999b; Lindner, 2000b; Lindner, 2000e.

⁴ The title of the project indicates that three groups had to be interviewed, namely both conflict parties in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi, and representatives of third intervening parties. These three groups stand in a relationship that in its minimum version is triangular. In case of more than two opponents, as is the case in most conflicts, it acquires more than three corners.

Both in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi representatives of the 'opponents' and the 'third party' were interviewed. The following categories of people were included:

- Survivors of genocide were included, i.e. people belonging to the group that was targeted for genocide. In Somalia this was the Issaq tribe, in Rwanda the Tutsi, in Burundi also the Hutu. The group of survivors consists of two parts, namely those who survived because they were not in the country when the genocide happened - some of them returned after the genocide - and those who survived the ongoing onslaught inside the country.
- Freedom fighters (only men) were interviewed. In Somalia these were the SNM (Somali National Movement) fighters who fought the troops sent by the central government in Mogadishu; in Rwanda these were the former Tutsi refugees who formed an army, the RFP (Rwandese Patriotic Front), and attacked Rwanda from the north in order to oust the Hutu government which carried out the genocide in Rwanda in 1994; in Burundi these were also Hutu rebels.
- Many Somali warlords have their retreat in Kenya, and some were interviewed there.
- Politicians were included, among them people who were in power already before the genocide and whom survivors secretly suspected of having been collaborators or at least silent supporters of perpetrators.
- Somali and Rwandan/Burundian academicians were interviewed, who study the situation of their countries.
- Representatives of national non-governmental organisations who work locally with development, peace and reconciliation were included.
- Third parties were interviewed, namely representatives of United Nations organisations and international non-governmental organisations who work with emergency relief, long-term development, peace, and reconciliation.

been discussed with about 400 researchers working in related fields. The current-state-of-the-art has been mapped, showing that little has been done in this field. A Theory of Humiliation is currently being developed by the author, and a book project *The Death of the West* is in process.⁵

The starting point for the research on humiliation was the long-standing assumption that the Versailles Accords after World War I inflicted humiliation on Germany to an extent that it triggered World War II. Astonishingly, social psychology has not researched the issue of humiliation on a larger scale, although it seems to be extremely relevant, especially if it really does have the capacity to trigger world wars.

What is humiliation? A preliminary answer may be as follows: 'Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honour or dignity. To be humiliated is to be placed, against your will, or in some cases also with your consent,⁶ 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. It may involve acts of force, including violent force. At its heart is the idea of pinning down, putting down or holding to the ground. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless. However, the role of the victim is not necessarily always unambiguous, - a victim may feel humiliated in absence of any humiliating act, - as result of a misunderstanding, or as result of personal and cultural differences concerning norms of what respectful treatment ought to entail, - or the 'victim' may even invent a story of humiliation in order to manoeuvre another party into the role of a loathsome perpetrator⁷' (Lindner, 2000a).

Much of the systematic work that has been done on topics related to humiliation comes from Thomas Scheff, who, along with Suzanne Retzinger, has studied the part played by 'humiliated fury' (Scheff, 1997, 11) in escalating conflict between individuals and nations (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991; Scheff, 1990). Retzinger and Scheff show that the suffering caused by humiliation is highly significant and that the bitterest divisions have their roots in shame and humiliation. Important work has also been done by Gilligan, 1996; Rapoport, 1997; Staub, 1988; Volkan, 1997; as well as Margalit, 1996.

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- Egyptian diplomats in the foreign ministry who deal with Somalia were included; Egypt is a heavy weight in the OAU.
 - African psychiatrists in Kenya who deal with trauma, and forensic psychiatry were included. In Kenya many nationals from Somalia and also Rwanda/Burundi have sought refuge, both in refugee camps, but also on the basis of private arrangements.
 - Those who have not yet been interviewed are masterminds of genocide in Rwanda, those who have planned the genocide. Many of them are said to be in hiding in Kenya, and other parts of Africa, or in Brussels and other parts of Europe, or in the States and Canada. Some are in the prisons in Rwanda and in Arusha, Tanzania.

⁵ Both in collaboration with Dennis Smith, Loughborough University, UK. Smith is professor of sociology at Loughborough University (UK), see his publications: Smith, 2000a; Smith, 2000b; Smith, 2000c; Smith, 1999; Smith, 1997a; Smith, 1997b; Smith, 1991; Smith, 1984a; Smith, 1984b; Smith, 1983; Smith, 1981.

⁶ See Stoller's work on sado-masochism (Stoller, 1991).

⁷ Margalit defines humiliation as the 'rejection of persons of the Family of Man,' as injury of self-respect, or, more specific, as failure of respect, combined with loss of control (Margalit, 1996). His position is disputed, however, for example by Quinton, who argues that self-respect 'has nothing much to do with humiliation' (Quinton, 1997, 87).

This paper is organised in three parts. First the historic transition from honour societies to human rights societies will be mapped out. The second part will discuss how the conflict or tension between respect and recognition on the one hand and humiliation on the other is played out in honour societies and human rights societies. In the third part the psychology of intercultural communication will be addressed in more detail.

The historic transition from honour societies to human-rights societies

‘During the past two hundred years, and especially during the last half-century, the spread of the ideology of human rights has popularised the principle that all human beings should expect to receive respectful treatment solely on the grounds of their humanity, without reference to gender, ethnicity or other ‘secondary’ criteria’ (Lindner, 2000b, 2).

The principles of human rights with their strong egalitarian emphasis have become so omnipresent, especially in the West, that it is easy to overlook that they developed in reaction to a traditional honour code. Dov Cohen and Richard Nisbett examine honour-based societies (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996) in their research and writings. The honour to which Cohen and Nisbett refer is the kind that operates in the traditional branches of the Mafia or, more generally, in blood feuds.⁸

In William Ian Miller’s *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Miller, 1993), he examines honour as understood in the Iliad or Icelandic sagas. Miller explains that these concepts are still very much alive today, despite a common assumption that they are no longer relevant. Miller suggests, ‘that we are more familiar with the culture of honor than we may like to admit. This familiarity partially explains why stories of revenge play so well, whether read as the *Iliad*, an Icelandic saga, *Hamlet*, many novels, or seen as so many gangland, intergalactic, horror, or Clint Eastwood movies. Honor is not our official ideology, but its ethic survives in pockets of most all our lives. In some ethnic (sub)cultures it still is the official ideology, or at least so we are told about the cultures of some urban black males, Mafiosi, Chicano barrios, and so on. And even among the suburban middle class the honor ethic is lived in high school or in the competitive rat race of certain professional cultures’ (Miller, 1993, 9).

The present author is familiar with all shades of the traditional honour/blood feud scenario as a result of my work as a psychological counsellor in Egypt (1984-1991). It was here that I learned a lot about the role of humiliation and its significance for the key difference between the honour/blood feud scenario and the scenario associated with human rights. Within a blood feud culture it is honourable, perfectly legitimate and highly ‘obligatory’ to ‘heal’ humiliation by killing a targeted person. The opposite is true in a society where universal human rights are recognised; ‘healing’ humiliation means restoring the victim’s dignity by empathic dialogue, sincere apology, and finally reconciliation.⁹

⁸ Other evidence relating to blood feud is presented by Boehm, 1984, Malcolm, 1998, and Rodina, 1999. I owe these references to Adam Jones.

⁹ Mention should also be made of Avishai Margalit’s much-discussed argument that the distinguishing characteristic of a ‘decent society’ is that its institutions ‘do not humiliate people’ (Margalit 1996, 1). Margalit’s work sparked a debate reflected in the special issue of *Social Research* devoted to a consideration of his approach to the ‘decent society.’ See, for example, the articles by Lukes, Quinton,

The notion of humiliation links the concepts of honour and human rights in an informative and innovative way, providing a framework for both ideologies and for the transition between them, see Table 1. The idea of humiliation contains three elements, which entered the cultural repertoire of humankind in three phases. These three phases coincided, approximately, with advances in technological and organisational capacity and shifts in the balance of power between humankind and nature and between human groups. These shifts are commonly labelled as the transition from egalitarian hunter-gatherer culture to hierarchical agricultural societal structure and finally to today's egalitarian knowledge society. During the first phase, the idea of subjugating nature (or abasing, putting down, keeping down, striking down) entered the repertoire. In the next phase, the idea of subjugation was extended to human beings. During the third phase, the idea became widespread that subjugating human beings was illegitimate and morally wrong' (see Lindner, 2000c, 9).

TABLE ONE
THREE TURNING POINTS

I	II	III
THE ABASEMENT OF NATURE BY HUMANKIND	THE ABASEMENT OF SOME HUMAN BEINGS BY OTHERS	THE DIGNIFYING OF ALL HUMANKIND

Table 1: Three turning points, adapted from Lindner, 2000c, 9

Hunter-gatherers manufactured a limited number of auxiliary tools that did not, at least as far as we know, lead to the widespread exploitation of the environment. In other words, although the abasement of nature through the use of tools was being 'invented' as a possible strategy, this strategy was still in its infancy. The exploitation of nature unfolded as an 'idea' in the cultural repertoire of humankind during the early days of human history, but since this strategy was put into practice only to a limited extent, its potentially devastating effects had not yet become apparent.

The introduction of agriculture, however, and this is the second turning point depicted in Table 1, brought with it a deep change, in two ways. It firstly extended the previously existing small-scale technology and gave rise to the digging stick and the plough, thus opening up for the unlimited exploitation of natural resources that today's environmentalists deplore. However, and this is more central to this paper, it did not stop there: the surplus produced by agriculture provided the material means for subjugating not just nature but also people. The instrumentalisation of some human beings (the 'slaves') by others (the 'masters') was thus 'invented' and was added to the previous 'invention' of subjugating nature.

Ripstein and Schick, all of which take up the theme of humiliation (Lukes 1997; Quinton 1997; Ripstein 1997; Schick 1997). See also Gilbert 1997.

This paper also draws upon the conceptualisation of long-term social processes advanced by Norbert Elias in his explorations of the 'civilizing process,' especially as revised by Dennis Smith in his work on the 'humiliation process' (Elias 1994; Smith forthcoming).

A third fundamental turning point in the chain of social changes was introduced by human rights. Human rights transform 'normal' traditional practices into illegitimate abuses. They place followers of the old code into direct confrontation with followers of the new code. People from the human-rights camp in the international community are appalled by the practices of dictators who believe in honour codes. However, regimes that gain from the old code are deeply reluctant to let it go, and argue strongly in favour of keeping it. As mentioned in the introduction, international criticism of human rights abuses, for example in South East Asia, may be opposed as intrusive, humiliating, and arrogant breaches of Asian sovereignty in the name of alien western values.¹⁰

In his book *Getting to Peace. Transforming Conflict at Home, at Work, and in the World* (Ury, 1999) the anthropologist William Ury argues that the transition to hierarchy from the relatively egalitarian social structures of hunter-gatherer societies happened around ten thousand years ago, and that humankind is currently 'returning' to egalitarian nomadic structures, namely in the form of the global information society. It may be hypothesised that the egalitarian notion of human rights, with their acceptance of equal dignity for every human being, is one aspect of this last transition.

Changes in International Relations Theory also reflect the transition towards a global egalitarian knowledge society that currently is under way.¹¹ 'Classical and Structural Realism saw the world as being guided by "anarchy" - anarchy as the "state of nature" (Hobbes) - with an ensuing "Security Dilemma" within which only states are actors. Liberalism, on the other hand, considers firms, NGOs, and international organizations as also being actors and proposes that through cooperation the "Security Dilemma" may be overcome¹²' (Lindner, 2000d, 7).

The second phase depicted in Table 1, an era of human history that lasted for the past ten thousand years and still lives on in some parts of the world, saw pyramids of power evolve in many societies around the world. These hierarchies gave everybody a rank and a certain definition of honour attached to it. 'For example, in medieval and early modern Europe, armed combat among members of the most "honourable" class, the aristocracy, was a means of defending or enhancing family honour. Defeat in a duel lowered the loser's rank in the scale of honour. Small humiliations could be borne by those who had fought bravely. However, a cowardly response to a challenge could mean that all honour was lost. Furthermore, it was not possible to accept defeat by an opponent one did not respect. In extreme cases where no road back to honour existed, suicide was preferable. The main point is that within "honour societies," humiliation and violence were regarded as normal means of managing tensions. For the most part, people accepted them and got on with their lives. Violence did not have the strong connotation of "violation" it has since acquired¹³' (Lindner, 2000e, 12).

¹⁰ Mohamad Mahathir, the Malaysian Prime Minister, is one of the advocates of this view.

¹¹ See for example Woods, 1996.

¹² Beverly Crawford at the Sommerakademie für Frieden und Konfliktforschung, Loccum, Germany, 20th-25th July 1997.

¹³ To put it another way, honour-humiliation regards 'structural violence' (Galtung, 1996) as legitimate.

If humiliation is a legitimate and routine procedure in honour cultures, the mechanism of humiliation presents itself in a fundamentally different way within a human-rights context. Dennis Smith writes in *Organisations and Humiliation: Looking Beyond Elias*: ‘The human rights revolution - especially the core principle that all human beings are equally worthy of respect - has a dramatic effect upon the experience of humiliation. Once this revolution has occurred, the casual blows and insults ... that used to serve as a routine proclamation of the hierarchical status quo become transformed in the mind of the victim into an outrageous forced expulsion from the community of equals.... (“How dare you deprive me of my freedom?”, “how dare you make me less than I am?”)’ (Smith, 2000a, 8).

Smith continues: ‘In a human-rights society people still get scorned, spat upon, ignored, turned away and forced to kow-tow to authority. Humiliation is present whenever someone is made to feel fundamentally inferior and less worthy of consideration than others. Human rights do not abolish humiliation. On the contrary, they intensify the experience. In a human rights society, we do not accept humiliation as a “normal” mechanism built into the bone and muscle of society. Instead, we reject its legitimacy.’

In other words, humiliation, already hurtful in an honour society where it is used as routine means to put people down or keep them down, becomes many times more hurtful when it occurs in a human-rights society. In a human-rights context humiliation acquires an explosive potential.

Respect, honour and human rights

In a traditional hierarchical honour culture a ‘slave’ or ‘underling’ who wants to rise, does not want to topple hierarchy but simply wants to replace the master with himself or herself. The human rights revolution, on the contrary, wishes to get rid of humiliating hierarchy altogether, and aims at assigning equal dignity to all human beings; human rights advocates want to eradicate the bottom and the top line in Figure 1. (This does not mean that those who believe in human rights wish to abolish all authority. On the contrary, the professional authority of the surgeon and the airline pilot are both necessary and acceptable; they typify the form of authority that a human rights society desires: authority which enables the practitioner to use expertise on behalf of the interests of the whole group.)

Human rights activists have two goals: first, they desire to get ‘masters’ all around the world down from their position of dominance and arrogance to the level of equality, a process that may be labelled the ‘necessary humbling’ of those masters; secondly, human rights activists wish to lift up all the ‘slaves’ around the world from their lot of oppression to the line of equality, and they call this ‘liberation.’

A traditional ‘master,’ who does not believe in human rights but in honour and God-given hierarchy, will oppose being pulled down to the level of equality and will call any attempt in this direction ‘illegitimate humiliation,’ ‘ruthless lack of respect,’ or ‘infringement on sovereignty,’ as the above cited example of China shows. And all those ‘underlings’ who do *not* believe in human rights and who want to rise, will not wish to stop at the line of equality, but will continue to rise to the place of the master, in order to become as dominating and oppressing as the former oppressor. Many examples come to mind, the latest, perhaps, being the new leader Laurent Kabila in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire).

FIGURE ONE
HIERARCHY AND EQUALITY

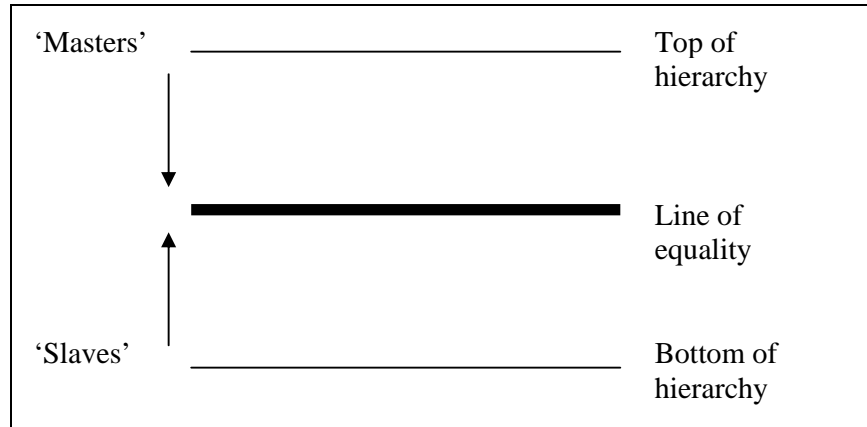


Figure 1: The transition to equal dignity for every human being

When human rights activists enter into discourse with representatives of the hierarchical order of honour, they are thus handling two meanings of the term respect and recognition, namely their own definition, ‘respect for equal dignity of all human beings’ (this is the human rights’ definition), and ‘respect for the natural order of unequal ranks of human beings’ (this is the honour definition of respect). Equally, two meanings of humiliation will be applied, see Table 2.

TABLE TWO
HUMILIATION AND RESPECT IN RELATION TO HONOUR AND HUMAN RIGHTS

	Traditional honour society	Human rights society
Humiliation	Humiliation is when the position of a ‘master’ in a hierarchy is challenged. The ‘master’ is expected to respond to such humiliation, if necessary, by violence. Any ‘slave’ or ‘underling’ who is strong enough to topple the ‘master’ may be expected to maintain the old hierarchical structure.	Humiliation is when a person’s dignity is violated and the old paradigm of hierarchy applied.
Respect and recognition	Respect and recognition must be extended to the natural order of hierarchy where some people are higher up than others.	Respect and recognition must be extended to equal dignity of all humankind.

Table 2: Humiliation and respect in relation to honour and human rights

Table 2 may now be mapped on to the history of colonisation. When colonisation started, the West was firmly rooted in the traditional honour code. ‘We’ (the ‘masters’ of the West) ‘discovered’ those ‘others’ in Africa and the Americas and perceived ‘them’ as thoroughly ‘uncivilised.’ ‘We’ saw those ‘others’ as wild animals and ‘we’ killed them or tried to ‘domesticate’ and exploit them. Those ‘others’ were thus not recognised or respected as

human beings. They were, at most, regarded as animals, in other words not judged worthy of being within the hierarchy of human beings, even at the bottom.

After some years there came a wave of people travelling to the colonies who were interested in their welfare. These included well-meaning missionaries who sacrificed their health and lives while trying to extend what they thought of as 'help' to those 'poor creatures' in 'darkest' Africa.

In this case, 'we' (the 'masters' and 'slaves' of the West) 'discovered' 'others' in Africa and the Americas, perceived them to be uncivilised, and deemed 'them' to be potential 'children' who had to be subjected to the beneficial process of 'civilisation.' In other words, those 'others' were recognised and respected as human beings but placed at the very bottom of human hierarchy, together with children, women and slaves. As a result, 'they' 'moved up' from a position 'beneath' human hierarchy, the position to which they were initially allocated, to the bottom compartment of the human hierarchy.

Still later, representative of the 'slaves' in the West (in other words, those who claimed to speak for the oppressed, for example for workers or for peasants) began to idealise the downtrodden peoples of the colonised societies. 'We' (the Western 'slaves') started venerating 'them' (the oppressed colonial subjects) as 'quasi-divine,' perhaps in order to 'prove' to 'our own masters' what kind of brutes they are. In the course of this development those 'others,' especially Native Americans, were recognised and respected as human beings. In fact, they even rose from the bottom compartment of the human hierarchy to the very top, even higher up than Western 'masters.' They acquired quasi-divinity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's noble savages became noble Gods in the eyes of some Western 'slaves' and in the eyes of many of those who identify with the oppressed.

Today, the human rights revolution asserts that the practice of categorising human beings in terms of hierarchies of 'masters' and 'slaves' should be discarded. Now, 'we' (those in the West who believe in equality) make the 'discovery' that 'they' are just like 'us.' 'They' have a history, in some cases with quite brutal practices of oppression, in other cases with more peaceful traditions. If 'we' decide that 'we' are against oppression, then we have to be against *any* oppressive culture, be it 'ours' or 'theirs.' In this context 'we' respect and recognise those 'others' like 'ourselves.'

Lastly, adhering to human rights means also to give room to 'their' voices (although colonisation in its original form has ended, the voices of what is now called the 'poor South' may be taken to stand in their place). What do 'they' say? It has to be recognised that 'they' include 'masters' who believe in the natural legitimacy of hierarchy and oppression; Africa had and has its Idi Amins. Those 'masters' will strongly defend their 'culture' as, legitimately, being brutal, and they will insist that 'they' are unduly humiliated by any criticism. In such a case, human rights criticism of oppression that has as aim to alleviate oppression will itself be interpreted as oppression and as a violation of sovereignty.

Some Western sympathisers will agree and refrain from criticism, mainly those who believe that 'they' are quasi-divine and that 'their' culture must be recognised and respected for its own sake. Those Westerners will not want to intervene if people of 'another culture' are routinely killed, they will claim that human rights are not universal.

Human rights advocates, on the other side, will protest against any killing or oppression wherever in the world, and they will want to intervene. They will only discuss the means; they may, for example, want to avoid violence and will insist that preventive mechanisms have to be improved on a global level in order to reduce the need for violent interventions. Recent discussions on the Kosovo war reflected this debate, which is similar to past community debates on the handling of criminal offenders (see Zehr, 1990).

But 'they' do not only comprise 'masters' such as Idi Amin. There are also the 'slaves' among 'them,' those who want to topple their 'masters.' 'They' may call for help from Western human rights advocates only as long as 'they' have not succeeded. As soon as their struggle has gained some impetus and 'they' see a chance to replace their 'masters' while maintaining the old hierarchy, 'they' may discard any human rights ideology and embrace their former 'masters' views, thus deeply disappointing any idealistic Western human rights activist who sacrificed a lot for supporting 'their' plight. Nicaragua may serve as an example, where reports were suppressed, - in order to 'protect' the revolution, - that 'revolutionary' 'commandantes' actually sexually abused women, including Western women who came as helpers (Der Spiegel, no. 31, 27th July 1998).

Then there are those 'slaves' among 'them' who genuinely want to attain equality, as for example the Chinese dissidents mentioned above. 'They' will call for help from Western human rights advocates and be deeply hurt and disappointed if Westerners extend 'understanding' to brutal practices under the cover of wanting to 'respect other cultures.' Such Westerners will be accused of having double standards and their reluctance to act will represent a deeply painful instantiation of humiliation to such dissidents.

Table 3 attempts to give an overview over the misunderstandings that may arise between the three players active on the global stage, namely a) 'masters' who adhere to an honour code and want to maintain a hierarchy where the worth of people is ranked into those 'up' and others 'down,' b) 'slaves' who want to replace their 'masters' and maintain the old hierarchy, and c) human rights advocates who wish to dismantle hierarchy altogether and implement a society where all human beings enjoy equal rights and are assigned equal dignity and worth.

TABLE THREE
‘MASTERS,’ ‘SLAVES,’ AND EQUALITY

	‘Other’ cultures	The ‘West’
‘Masters’ adhering to an honour code	‘Masters’ adhering to an honour code may be expected to want to stay at the top of the pyramid of power. They will call for respect of ‘their’ culture and ‘their’ sovereignty. They will reject equality. They will suspect any Western human rights advocacy as an attempt to humiliate them. They will sympathise with other ‘masters’ as being of ‘one mind’ and will interpret any uprising from ‘underlings’ as an attempt to topple them while maintaining hierarchy.	‘Masters’ adhering to an honour code may be expected to want to stay at the top of the pyramid of power. They will sympathise with other ‘masters’ around the world and think in terms of ‘up’ and ‘down.’ They may use human rights rhetoric if it helps protect their power position.
‘Slaves’ who want to become ‘masters’	‘Slaves,’ at least some of them, may be expected to want to topple their ‘masters.’ They will call for human rights support on their way ‘up,’ but will disappoint their human rights supporters and replace the ‘master’ if they can, instead of stopping at a level of equality.	‘Slaves,’ at least some of them, may be expected to want to topple their ‘masters.’ They will identify with the plight of the oppressed around the world and may idealise other cultures as quasi-divine in order to throw into stark contrast the wrongdoings of their own ‘masters.’
Human rights advocates who believe in equality	Human rights advocates aim for equality. They are well advised to differentiate which meaning of respect and recognition they are confronted with at the time: ‘respect for hierarchy,’ or ‘respect for equality.’ In case respect for hierarchy is called for, a human rights advocate may need to decline this call irrespective of its source.	Human rights advocates aim for equality. They are well advised to differentiate which meaning of respect and recognition they are confronted with at the time: ‘respect for hierarchy,’ or ‘respect for equality.’ In case respect for hierarchy is called for, a human rights advocate may need to decline this call irrespective of its source.

Table 3: ‘Masters,’ ‘slaves,’ and equality

The psychology of intercultural communication

When we speak about intercultural communication we assume that there are ‘different cultures’ or that there is ‘culture difference.’ But what is culture difference?

We are accustomed to assuming that cultural differences have a firm basis in ‘real’ differences in the shared belief systems of the cultures we look at. ‘Cultures’ are often seen as ‘containers’ with more or less opaque walls, as the result of diverse environments and diverse cultural beliefs in human groups that have developed in isolation. ‘We make a small allowance for “diffusion,” meaning that cultures usually are in contact with each other and learn from each other, but this allowance does not alter the basic concept of cultures as

isolated "containers."¹⁴ Post-modern thought turns this view into its very foundation and assumes that different cultures are fundamentally impenetrable, unknowable, and enigmatic to each other' (Lindner, 2000f, 12).

As indicated in the introduction, this paper does not dispute that cultural differences have to be respected. Ethnocentrism and lack of respect for cultural diversity have to be overcome. But the picture may be more complex than that. What if 'culture difference' is much more relational than the 'diffusion' hypothesis wants to have it? What if 'culture difference' may at times even be a 'device' brought forward when relations turn sour and one side wants to cash in respect (either in form of 'respect for hierarchy,' or in form of 'respect for equality')?

As discussed above, how are we to judge a situation where 'masters' say to the victims of their torture: "'Our" culture is to torture, and you better accept being tortured, because you are part of "our" culture!' This victim will protest against being forcefully incorporated into an abusive culture. In other words, 'masters' are to be expected to say to their 'underlings': 'You are part of "our culture" which is hierarchical and your place is within this hierarchy.' Usually masters add 'We are benevolent masters and believe that all our underlings love us and thank us for our efforts to care for them.'

Some 'underlings' may actually agree with their masters and enjoy their patronage. Others will protest vehemently: 'We do not want to be part of a culture where we are oppressed!' They may continue: "'Our culture" is in fact quite different, we are not part of our oppressors' culture!' These 'underlings' will then turn to the international community and ask for 'protection of our culture' under the banner of human rights. Their 'masters' will turn to the international community as well and also call for 'respect for our culture,' thus trying to force their underlings back under the umbrella of oppression.

This use of the term 'respect for our culture' invites further analysis: The term 'culture difference' obviously contrasts with the term 'culture similarity.' But, interestingly enough, 'culture similarity' is a non-term, nobody uses it; cultural 'homogeneity' may be the closest term that is in use. The reason why the term 'culture similarity' is not used may lie in humankind's hierarchical past. In particular, majorities who are in power perceive themselves as the 'default,' as 'normality;' their culture is so familiar to them that it does not need to be named, although its counter-term, namely 'difference' is not perceivable without 'similarity.' As discussed above, the first colonisers did not perceive black Africans or American Indians as human beings and did therefore not even accord them any particular 'culture.' It was only quite late that 'culture' was 'granted' to them, under the label of 'different culture.' The evaluation of the sentence 'We have to respect the culture of minorities' as politically correct depicts the current state of affairs where former 'slaves' have acquired the status of 'minorities' that have been awarded 'their own culture.'

This means that oppressed minorities, who are those who fight for 'their culture' typically are former 'slaves' and 'underlings.' Their 'masters' usually do not use the word 'culture,' - they do this only when they are criticised or feel threatened by third parties, for example by the international community, or the USA, that at times functions, or is perceived, as a global 'super-master,' relegating even the 'masters' of the rest to a lowly position.

¹⁴ See for *Cultural and Social Behavior* (Triandis, 1997).

It becomes clear that a process of differentiation and opening up of hierarchies alongside the growing influence of human rights ideology provides the backdrop for the transformation of 'slaves' or 'underlings' into 'minorities with their own culture.' As long as 'slaves' are utterly powerless, they are also voiceless. It requires a certain amount of resources and ideological support to become a 'minority' that calls for 'respect for its culture.' There lies the reason why many minorities welcome the European Union. They expect a certain amount of support from Brussels against the 'masters' in their own capitals.

Not surprisingly, minorities fragment into even smaller minorities as soon as they acquire some standing: Women, for example, may complain that they are dominated within their minority. Male minority leaders will bitterly oppose such attempts to 'weaken' their stance, to 'stab them into their back,' but this is what happens to any master as soon as underlings get some space for protest. The above-cited example of the Somali woman illustrates this point. She feels that her culture humiliates her by teaching her that she must be circumcised in order to be an honourable member of her society and represent her male protector's power. The same woman may, however, side with her male companions in their struggle for more recognition for other aspects of Somali culture.

Thus, intricate configurations of oppressors and victims may unfold in front of the eyes of third party observers: Women may be victims of oppression perpetrated by their families who are victims of oppression perpetrated by their national rulers who are victims of oppression perpetrated by other states. The victims will claim to have a 'different culture' as compared to the culture of their oppressors, and ask any observing third party to recognise and respect it, and also the oppressors will vehemently urge third parties (and their 'underlings') to keep quiet and not interfere in what is 'their culture.'

During my fieldwork in 1998 and 1999 in Somalia and Rwanda I came in close contact with these dynamics. When Somalia became independent in 1960 a dream existed, the dream of a united Somalia. The colonial powers had split the Somalian people five ways, although ethnic Somalis are united by language, cultural, and devotion to Islam. 'Most other African countries are colonially created states in search of a sense of nationhood. The Somali, by contrast, are a pre-colonial nation in search of a unified post-colonial state. Most other African countries are diverse peoples in search of a shared national identity. The Somali are already a people with a national identity in search of territorial unification' (Mazrui, 1986, 71).¹⁵

Today Somalia is a deeply divided country, war-torn for almost a decade, full of bitterness and suffering. 'Somaliland' in the North is self-proclaimed and not recognised by the international community or by other Somali leaders. During my fieldwork in 1998 in 'Somaliland' I was beleaguered by 'Somalilanders' who urged me to promote their dream to become an internationally recognised independent republic. They argue that they have been humiliated to such a degree by former dictator Siad Barre and his allies, Somali clans from the south, that they are no longer able to be part of a united Somalia. They insist that the 'cultural differences' between them and the other Somalis are, after all, too significant!

In Rwanda the situation presented itself to me different and similar at the same time. A Tutsi minority ruled both Rwanda and Burundi for centuries. The Hutu majority had been the

¹⁵ 'There was during the colonial period a British Somaliland, an Italian Somaliland, and a French Somaliland. A section of the Somali people was also absorbed separately into Kenya under British colonial rule. The fifth component became the Ogaden, a section of Ethiopia. The dream of independence for the Somali was in part a dream of reunification' (Mazrui, 1986, 71).

humiliated victim as long as they could think, incorporated into an intricate hierarchical culture under Tutsi kings who perceived themselves not as dominating, but as caring patrons of their Hutu underlings. The Hutu majority started moving towards power in 1959, still under Belgian colonial rule. After independence the Hutu majority dominated Rwanda (contrary to the neighbour Burundi, where Tutsi rule stayed on after independence). Under Hutu rule the Tutsi minority in Rwanda, the former ruling elite, suffered constant humiliation, and those who had fled the country and lived as refugees in neighbouring states were not much better off.

When I arrived in Rwanda early 1999 it soon became clear that the country has no history that is accepted by everyone. People with strong Tutsi background will maintain that their minority rule was very beneficial to the country and still is: after all, they say, the Hutu perpetrated the genocide and tried to eradicate the Tutsi, an atrocity unheard of under centuries of Tutsi rule. People with strong Hutu background will maintain that Tutsi rule never was that benevolent as Tutsi want to have it today, but that the Tutsi elite tries to imagine that they were good patrons in order to justify their current undemocratic minority rule.

This indicates that the 'different culture' to which 'underlings' refer to may have its roots in primary differences, but it may also be constructed as a response to oppression and humiliation. Often it may be a mixture. In other words, oppressed minorities will always have members who fight for the preservation of their language and traditions, they may even 'fabricate' traditions, while others will want to become members of the majority culture. In Norway the phenomenon of 'skap same' illustrates this, it is a label for those Sami who have hidden away their Sami identity in the 'cupboard.' The Sami minority in Norway, however, is not the only group that struggles in this way. Their 'master,' the Norwegian nation itself has only recently 'liberated' itself from Danish and Swedish domination (1905), and underwent a painful German occupation during World War II. Thomas Hylland Eriksen discusses critically how Norway recently started 'constructing' markers of Norwegian cultural identity which do not have that much basis in historic reality (Eriksen, 1993a).

Norway is a benign example of a process that has turned malignant in other cases. Hitler constructed a superior Aryan cultural identity for Germans as response to national humiliation after World War I and taught them that providence had decided that they were to conquer 'Lebensraum' and eradicate any Jewish competitor for world dominance. Should the international community have 'respected' Aryan culture?

Conclusion

This paper started out with the question: in the case of conflicts between members of different cultures: which has to be recognised and respected, the other culture, or the other person?

The answer may go be as follows: What I have to recognise, acknowledge and respect is the other person and not his or her membership in 'another' culture, and this is because each individual has her personal dignity. The other 'culture' may be a reason of pride, but may also be a cause or a product of humiliation. Intercultural communication must include an analysis of power relations and probe whether past incidents of humiliation may be a source of 'culture difference.' If this is so, respect and recognition entails an obligation to heal this

humiliation. 'Respecting' 'culture difference' for its own sake may compound past humiliations by adding further humiliation.

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