

HUMILIATION AND HOW TO RESPOND TO IT: SPATIAL METAPHOR IN ACTION

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Dr. psychol., Dr. med. Evelin Gerda Lindner
University of Oslo, Department of Psychology
Norway

<http://folk.uio.no/evelin/>

ABSTRACT

This paper plays out the dynamics of humiliation within the framework of Lakoff's and Johnson's work on metaphor, combined with a Grounded Theory and a Psycho-Logic rationale. Humiliation may be responded to within four categories of reactions: i) Humiliation may be accepted, ii) it may be responded to with depression, iii) it may be countered with aggression, or iv) it may be reacted to with the elimination of the humiliators, either by annihilating their significance, or their physical existence, or by an unexpected method, namely by gaining their respect. The last method is the only one that yields lasting peace. A Nelson Mandela and a Mahatma Gandhi stand for this alternative. Instead of killing and annihilating his humiliators, Mandela succeeded in convincing them that they ought to discontinue their humiliation, thus 'undermining' the gruesome paradigm of humiliation. This extraordinary psychological innovation needs to be better understood so that it can be applied in other parts of the world where similar situations search for solutions. By presenting the possible responses to humiliation in their spatial metaphorical form as they occur in common-sense psychology, this paper hopes to contribute to the urgent learning process concerning humiliation, in order to prepare for its future prevention and healing.

INTRODUCTION

'The Humiliation Dynamic is a powerful factor in human affairs that has, for a variety of reasons, been overlooked by students of individual and collective behaviour. It is a pervasive and all too often destructive influence in the behavior of individuals, groups, organizations, and nations' (Klein, 1991).

'A good society is a *decent* society, and a society that is decent is one whose institutions don't humiliate people... Many people must have thought it, but no philosopher ever proposed it.

Philosophers speak of justice instead, a very different ideal' (Schick, 1997, 131, italics in original, about *The Decent Society*, Margalit, 1996).

How relevant is humiliation? If we believe the widely applied allegation that Germany welcomed Hitler because Germany felt humiliated after World War I,¹ then it must be accepted that humiliation can lead to war and massacres.² And it must be our objective to study humiliation extremely carefully, in order to improve our chances of preventing the ensuing cruelties in the future.

Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group.³ It is a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honour or dignity. Those who are humiliated are placed, against their will (anti-social) or with their consent (pro-social), and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is much worse than they should expect. To put it another way, humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It often involves acts of force, frequently violent force. At the heart of humiliation is the idea of pinning down, putting down or holding to the ground. It is one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process that the victim is made helpless, acted upon, forced into passivity.⁴

Currently a social-psychological research project is being carried out at the University of Oslo with the aim to better understand the notion of humiliation.⁵ Questions that inspire this

¹ by the Treaty of Versailles (28th June 1919), see Sebastian Haffner and Bateson, 1978, and Norbert Elias, 1996.

² I follow Robert B. Zajonc's use of the word 'massacre' to subsume for example Holocaust, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, see Robert B. Zajonc's forthcoming book (Zajonc, 1999).

³ 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. His position is disputed, however, for example by Quinton, who argues that self-respect 'has nothing much to do with humiliation' (Quinton, 1997, 87).

⁴ The word humiliation has its roots in the Latin word humus, earth. This entails a spatial orientation, a downward orientation, literally a 'de-gradation.' 'Ned-verdigelse' (Norwegian), 'Er-niedrig-ung' (German), 'a-baisse-ment' (French), all mean 'de-gradation.' All these words are built on the same spatial, *orientational* metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe orientational metaphors as up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. Humiliation clearly is 'down.' 'These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment. Orientational metaphors give a concept a spatial environment: for example, HAPPY IS UP' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 14, capitalisation in original). If 'up' is happy, then 'down' must be 'unhappy': 'being put down' makes unhappy.

⁵ Its title is *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties*. See project description on www.uio.no/~evelin/. 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, 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, 2000; Bond and Venus, 1991; Smith and Bond, 1999; Bond, 1998; Bond, Chiu, and Wan, 1984). The project would not have been possible without the help of Dennis Smith, professor of sociology at

research are: Can humiliation lead to war, to Holocaust, genocide and ethnic cleansing? Can humiliation lead to international terrorism? And, even more basic questions such as: What is humiliation? What happens when people feel humiliated? What is it that they experience as humiliating? Under what conditions are those particular experiences defined as humiliating? What does humiliation lead to? Which particular perceptions of justice, honour, dignity, respect and self-respect are connected with the feeling of being humiliated? How is humiliation perceived and responded to in different cultures? What role does humiliation play in aggression? What can be done to overcome the violent consequences of humiliation?

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).⁶ The topic has been discussed with about

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 Johan Galtung (Galtung, 1996; Galtung and Tschudi, 1999), Jan Øberg, William Ury, Director, Project on Preventing War, Harvard University (Ury, 1999; Fisher, Ury, and Patton, 1991), Heidi von Weltzien Hoivik and Andreas Føllesdal (Weltzien Hoivik and Føllesdal, 1995), Dagfinn Føllesdal (Føllesdal, in Robert Sokolowski, 1988), Thomas Pogge, Helge Høybråten, Thorleif Lund, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (Eriksen, 1993), Unni Wikan (Wikan, 1984), Asbjørn Eide and Bernt Hagtvet (Eide and Hagtvet, 1996), Leif Ahnstrøm, and Jan Brøgger (Brøgger, 1986).

⁶ 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 have been interviewed:

Survivors of genocide were interviewed, i.e. people belonging to the group, which was targeted for genocide. In Somalia this was the Isaaq tribe, in Rwanda the Tutsis, in Burundi also the Hutus. 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.

Freedomfighters (only men) were interviewed. In Somalia these were the SNM (Somali National Movement) fighters who liberated the North of Somalia from the troops sent by the central government in Mogadishu; in Rwanda these were the former Tutsi refugees who formed an army and attacked Rwanda from Uganda in order to oust the Hutu government which carried out the genocide in Rwanda in 1994; in Burundi these were also Hutus.

Many Somali warlords have their retreat in Kenya; the candidate got in touch with some of them there. Politicians, among them people who were in power already before the genocide and whom the survivors secretly suspected of having been collaborators or at least silent supporters of the perpetrators.

Somali and Rwandese/Burundese academicians, who study the situation of their countries.

Representatives of national non-governmental organisations who work locally with development, peace and reconciliation.

Third parties, namely representatives of United Nations organisations and international non-governmental organisations who work with emergency relief, long-term development, peace, and reconciliation.

Egyptian diplomats in the foreign ministry who deal with Somalia (Egypt is a heavy weight in the OAU).

400 researchers working in related fields. The results of this research are presented in this and in several forthcoming articles.⁷

This paper, which addresses the core notion of humiliation,⁸ explores the dynamics of humiliation within the framework of Lakoff's and Johnson's work on metaphor. It combines this with a Grounded Theory approach as developed by Glaser and Strauss, 1967, interwoven with the Psycho-Logic rationale employed by Smedslund (Smedslund, 1988; Smedslund, 1997).

As the elements of humiliation were differentiated, following the Grounded Theory approach, it became clear that they embody common sense categories that in turn entail spatial metaphors. Common-sense psychology as it is embedded in everyday language and taken for granted by its users has been developed by Smedslund into Psycho-Logic.⁹ As Lakoff writes about common sense folk theories, 'The term "folk theory" should not be thought of as having negative connotations. Our folk theories are imaginative products of the human mind that we absolutely could not do without' (Lakoff, 1987, 300, 301).¹⁰

The paper is organised in four main parts, following an introduction into the complexity of humiliation and the current state-of-the-art in literature and research. The four main parts play out four possible reactions to humiliation as spatial metaphors: i) Humiliation may be accepted, ii) it may be responded to with depression, iii) it may be countered with aggression, or iv) it may be reacted to with the elimination of the humiliators, either by annihilating their significance, or their physical existence, or by an unexpected method, namely by gaining their respect.

African psychiatrists in Kenya who deal with trauma, and forensic psychiatry. In Kenya many nationals from Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi sought refuge, both in refugee camps, but also privately. Those who have not yet been interviewed are masterminds of genocide in Rwanda, those who have planned the genocide. Many of them are 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. They still have to be visited. Many efforts were made to find perpetrators in hiding, without success yet.

⁷ See Lindner, 1999; Lindner, 2000a; Lindner, 2000b; Lindner, 2000c; Lindner, 2000d.

⁸ The theory of the humiliation process will be developed further in a book I am currently writing in collaboration with Dennis Smith. 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.

⁹ 'The key concepts in this system are given definitions, and the basic assumptions are presented in the form of axioms. A number of corollaries and theorems are formally proved. The text also contains numerous notes in which the formal propositions and their broader implications are discussed. It is assumed that the relationship between psycho-logic and empirical psychology is analogous to that existing between geometry and geography. Psycho-logic and geometry both provide a formal system in terms of which one may describe and analyze respectively psychological phenomena and geographical terrains' (Book-cover text of *Psycho-logic*, Smedslund, 1988).

¹⁰ See also Norbert Elias work: 'Thus, one of the functions of the term "thinking" is that of referring to the human capacity for putting through their paces symbols anticipating a sequence of possible future actions without performing any action' (Elias, 1991, 69).

THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMILIATION AND THE CURRENT STATE-OF-THE-ART

Humiliation has rarely been studied in a systematic way. The few publications that exist are spread across very disparate thematic fields.¹¹ The *Journal of Primary Prevention* pioneered this work in 1991 (Klein, 1991), and 1992 (Barrett and Brooks, 1992; Smith, 1992). In 1997 the journal *Social Research* devoted a special issue to the topic of humiliation, stimulated by Margalit's *Decent Society* (Margalit, 1996).

Cohen and Nisbett examine an honour-based notion of humiliation (Nisbett and Cohen, 1996). William Ian Miller wrote a book entitled *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*,¹² where he links humiliation to 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. The honour to which Cohen and Nisbett refer is the kind that operates in the more traditional branches of the Mafia or, more generally, in blood feuds. The present author is familiar with this scenario as a result of working for seven years as a psychological counsellor in Egypt. Within a blood feud culture it is honourable and perfectly legitimate 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.

There is a significant literature in philosophy on 'the politics of recognition,' claiming that people who are not recognized suffer humiliation and that this leads to violence (see also Honneth, 1997 on related themes). Max Scheler set out these issues in a masterly way in his classic book *Ressentiment* (Scheler, 1961). Humiliation has also been addressed in such fields as international relations,¹³ love, sex and social attractiveness,¹⁴ depression,¹⁵ society and

¹¹ Some authors do not differentiate between humiliation and shame and use it exchangeably, for example Silvan S. Tomkins (1962–1992) whose work is carried further by Donald L. Nathanson who describes humiliation as a combination of three innate affects out of nine, namely as a combination of shame, disgust and dissmell (Nathanson told me that in a personal conversation, 1.10.1999. See Nathanson, 1992; Nathanson, 1987).

¹² The theme of this book is '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).

¹³ see for example Cviic 1993, Luo 1993, Midiohouan 1991, Steinberg 1991, 1996, Urban et al. (Eds.)1990.

¹⁴ see for example Baumeister et al. 1993, Baumeister 1997, Brossat 1995, Gilbert 1997, Proulx et al. 1994, Vogel et al. 1990.

¹⁵ see for example Brown et al. 1995, Miller 1988.

identity formation,¹⁶ sports,¹⁷ serial murder,¹⁸ war and violence.¹⁹ A few examples from history, literature and film illustrate humiliation.²⁰

Klein suggests that there is a 'Triangle of Humiliation.' This included the humiliator, the victim and the witness (who observes what happens and recognise the process as humiliation) (Klein, 1991, 101). However, that understates the degree of complexity in the situation. For example, the humiliator may not 'succeed' in his intentions. The targeted person may not feel humiliated but just laugh, turning the humiliator into a ridiculous fool. At the other extreme, somebody may want to be helpful but find, unexpectedly, that this help is interpreted as being humiliating: is this person a philanthropist or a humiliator? To take a third case, a husband may continually treat his submissive wife in such a way that a witnessing third-party may think that she must surely feel humiliated and rebel, and yet she does not. She may accept the relationship and find compensations within it that are not visible to the third party looking on. More generally, some people in fact enjoy being humiliated and seek out the experience, for example, in sado-masochism or religious self-humiliation.²¹

The following main part of this paper will play out the possible responses to humiliation in the framework of spatial metaphor.

HUMILIATION AND ITS METAPHORICAL SPACE

I would like to introduce this section by looking at an example coming from Mexico: It happened around 1950. A Belgian national, let us call him Robert, owns a big farm in Mexico. He is proud of having a good relation with the workers who all are Mexicans, all of them proud people. One day the foreman of the workers, let us call him Manuel, approaches him and asks him for a loan. The Belgian feels honoured by this otherwise unusual trust and grants the loan. The Mexican foreman promises to pay back after three months. Several months pass and the Belgian is approached by another Mexican who warns him: 'Be careful, the foreman will kill you!' The Belgian is extremely astonished and asks: 'Why that!' He receives the explanation: 'The foreman cannot pay back the loan in time to you. He cannot bear to appear untrustworthy in your eyes. He cannot bear you looking down on him. This would be too humiliating to him. Therefore he has to kill you.'

This story was related to me by a friend of the Belgian farm owner. It unfolds in three phases: The perceiver of humiliation, the Mexican foreman, knows that he will provoke being

¹⁶ see for example Ignatieff 1997, Markus et al. 1996, Silver 1986, Wood et al. 1994.

¹⁷ see for example Hardman et al. 1996.

¹⁸ see for example Hale 1994, Lehmann 1995, Schlesinger 1998.

¹⁹ see for example Masson 1996, Vachon 1993, Znakov 1989, 1990.

²⁰ see for example Peters 1993, Stadtwald 1992, Toles 1995, Zender 1994.

²¹ All these examples suggest that a perpetrator may want to commit humiliation but not succeed, that some people may wish to be humiliated rather than wish to avoid it, that a 'do-gooder' may cause humiliation while trying to do good, and that a third party may identify 'victims' who do not see themselves as such - or fail to see victims in those cases where they do exist. A further complication is introduced by the question: Can a country, a clan or an ethnic group 'feel humiliated'? What about the case of humiliated leaders like a Hitler who incite their followers to believe in some more or less fabricated version of history that contains supposed humiliations that must be avenged with the leader's help?

humiliated by not being able to pay back in time. The actor, the Belgian, does not even know that he is perceived as a yet-to-come actor. If killed, he would not even know that he is killed because he is perceived as the actor in a case of humiliation.

A similar case might be the following: A man who committed an atrocious crime is killing his wife and his children before committing suicide. He kills them, because he cannot bear the thought that his wife is confronted with the knowledge of his crime, he cannot bear the humiliation of her looking down on him.

Humiliation and respect are intimately connected. Respect and self-respect are fundamental for every person. Respect is the other side of humiliation. Diagram 1 and 2 try to illustrate that. Person A and B are depicted as being at first in a relationship of respect, and then in a relationship of humiliation. Both relationships are not only played out between person A and person B, but are also represented in the mental apparatus inside of person A and B. What can be observed as action coming from A and B is the effect of the inner dialogue that plays on this inner scene.

In the following this inner scene as well as the observable action will be depicted graphically, building on Engstrom's confirmation of the strong connection between conceptual metaphor and linguistic metaphor (Engstrom, 1999).

Two persons who respect each other:

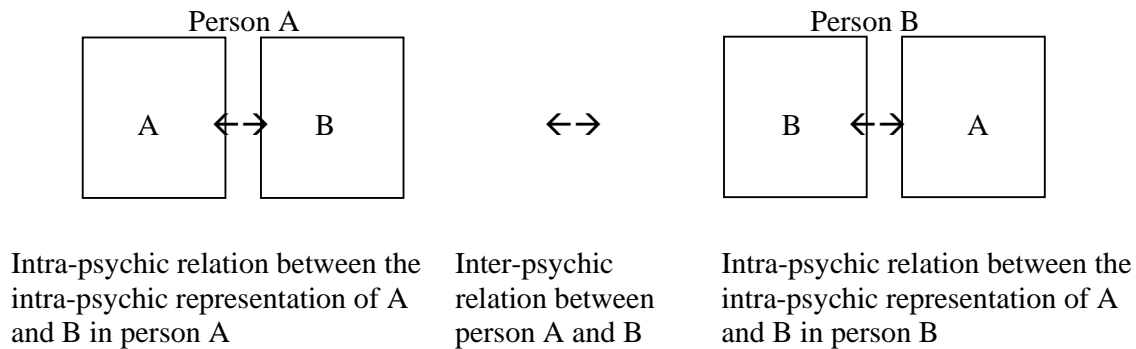


Diagram 1: Respect

Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:

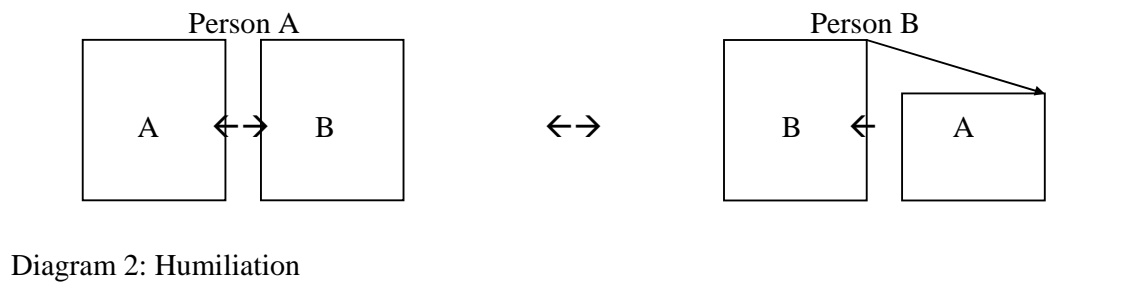


Diagram 2: Humiliation

The Mexican foreman Manuel may serve as an example for person A. Manuel has an image of himself, represented by the square labelled with an A. This is Manuel's self-image. It is a sturdy self-image, Manuel is proud of himself. Manuel has also an image of Robert,

represented by the square labelled with B. Manuel's image of Robert is similar in size to Manuel's self-image. Manuel respects Robert, like he respects himself.

Robert is person B. Robert respects himself in the same way as he respects Manuel; therefore both squares are of equal size.

Diagram 2 shows Manuel, person A, how he respects himself and Robert equally. But when we look at person B, at Robert, then we see that he looks down on Manuel. Robert's image of Manuel has decreased in size.

In the above quoted story this is exactly what Manuel fears. Manuel cannot pay back the loan to Robert and he fears that Robert will look down on him, when he finds out about that. Manuel wishes to be respected by Robert. He does not wish to be looked down upon. To be looked down upon by Robert would humiliate Manuel to an unbearable degree. What can Manuel do? In order to avoid the humiliation of being looked down upon by Robert, he must pay back the loan, which he cannot; therefore he must kill Robert, the source of the feared humiliation.

Diagram 1 and 2 can be used to describe numerous stories of humiliation and also non-humiliation. A story of humiliation always starts with a relationship between two or more persons, where both sides respect each other, see diagram 1. Then something happens which makes one person (or group of persons) look down upon the other person (or group of persons). If the person who is looked down upon perceives that she is looked down upon, she has several choices:

- i. acceptance of being inferior (prosocial humiliation)
- ii. depression as reaction to humiliation
- iii. hidden aggression as reaction to humiliation
- iv. open aggression from a victim in a weak position
- v. open aggression from a victim who is equally strong as the perpetrator
- vi. open aggression from a victim who is stronger than the perpetrator
- vii. elimination of the humiliator by not taking him/her seriously anymore
- viii. elimination of the humiliator through killing
- ix. elimination of the humiliator through gaining his/her respect

ACCEPTANCE OF BEING INFERIOR: PROSOCIAL HUMILIATION

A person who is looked down upon might accept being defined as inferior, she might have committed a crime, or a sin, which makes her feel that it is justified to be looked down upon. In this case the person who is looked down upon feels rightly inferior. This is not a story of anti-social humiliation, but of pro-social humiliation. See diagram 3.

Examples at the individual level: A religious person might accept to be inferior after being converted to a creed. She might accept punishment by humiliation. Flagellants at medieval times whipped themselves until the flesh was raw, as proof of faith to God.

Examples at the inter-group level: Germany may serve as an example on the inter-group level. Many self-critical Germans feel responsible for the atrocities Germany committed against its

neighbours during World War II, even if they are born long after World War II. They therefore tend to show understanding if they find themselves in a situation where they are being humiliated by people from European neighbours who suffered under German occupation during World War II.

In many societies, offenders against social norms are publicly shamed and humiliated. Many feel that their wrongdoing requires this punishment. Nowadays lists of performance indices, for example of employees in a company, or universities in a country, may have a similar effect, intended or not.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person B looks down on person A, and person A accepts this as being just:

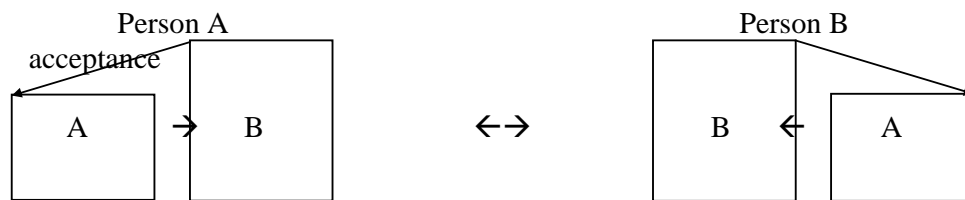


Diagram 3: Prosocial humiliation

DEPRESSION AS REACTION TO HUMILIATION

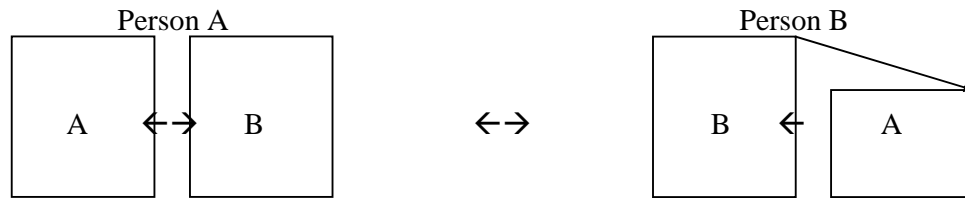
A person, who is looked down upon and considers this as being unjust, feels that she should stand up and defend herself. This person feels humiliated. If she neither has the force nor the resources to do so, she might become depressed. This is a story of ongoing humiliation that weakens the self-respect of the humiliated person. If the humiliation story continues long enough, for example a lifetime, the next generation might find the strength to fight it. Or other people might identify with the humiliated person and try to encourage her to stand up. See diagram 4.

Example at the individual level: Abused women often react with depression to their humiliation (Brown, Harris, and Hepworth, 1995; Craig, 1996).

Example at the inter-group level: In the years after 1959 thousands of Rwandan Tutsi fled into neighbouring countries where they lived as refugees for decades. ‘To be unwanted in one’s own country is a humiliation to someone who is well respected, but by other people, strange people’ (May 1998, email from a Rwandan refugee child). The second generation

formed the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), attacked Rwanda from outside, and ended the genocide perpetrated on their brothers and sisters in Rwanda in 1994.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person B looks down on person A, while person A finds this unjust, but does not manage to resist, and slowly loses self-respect:



Diagram 4: Depression as reaction to humiliation

AGGRESSION AS REACTION TO HUMILIATION

A person who is looked down upon, may react with aggression, either hidden or open.

HIDDEN AGGRESSION AS REACTION TO HUMILIATION

A person, who is looked down upon, may react with hidden aggression. She may, like the person who gets depressed, feel that she is unjustly looked down upon, and also have insufficient resources to stand up against the humiliator. But she may at least plan on standing up, she may struggle to do some sabotaging acts against the humiliator, she may teach her children to fight the humiliator or his people. This is a story of ongoing humiliation, but the victim may protect herself against depression. See diagram 5.

Example on the individual level: Charlie Chaplin's films are incarnations of archetypical sabotage of oppression. The Czech 'good soldier Schweik' (a figure created by Jaroslav Hasek, 1883-1923) is an example of a person who resists oppression in very subtle ways, he resists with humour, with appearing stupid, with well-hidden sabotage, and with especially clever argumentation.

Example on the inter-group level: The Czech population as a whole is said to have the abilities of the 'good soldier Schweik.' Egypt, having been occupied for more than 2000 years, is called 'the Czechia of the Arab World.' It may be that oppressed populations develop

special abilities in the field of communication, abilities that cover a whole range of subtle manipulation methods.

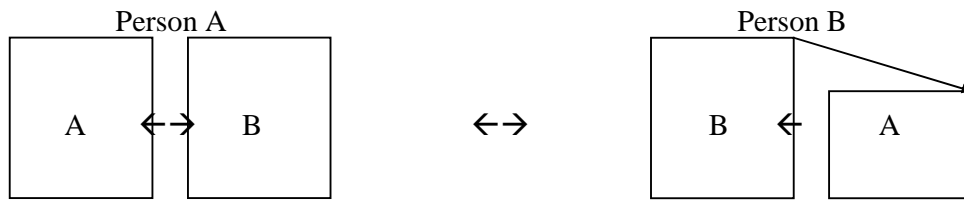
Oppressors have a difficult existence under such conditions. They never know whether a 'yes' from their subordinates really means 'yes,' or whether 'yes' just covers up for an attempt to divert attention, and whether the underling will subsequently perhaps do the opposite of what was ordered. And oppressors furthermore never know to which extent the oppressed secretly may build up forces to rebel. Oppressors are leading a difficult and sometimes even dangerous life. They are well advised to learn to read subtle signs of protest coming from their dependants.²² If they are really wise, they try to balance the situation in a way that the oppressed at least think they are less oppressed.

This case is especially relevant, since third parties going into conflict regions with the aim to further peace, may actually provoke feelings of humiliation among the people they want to pacify, - cross-cultural misunderstandings may easily happen. When peacemakers face open opposition they know where they stand, but subtle sabotage of their peace plans, especially if they find themselves in a culture that has developed subtle ways of protesting, is much more difficult to tackle.

During my fieldwork in Africa in 1998 and 1999 I met many humanitarian aid workers who had worked both in Somalia and Rwanda. The prevailing view among them was that Somalia is the most difficult place in the world to work in 'because Somalis are aggressively honest and tell you right in your face if they don't like you.' However, they added, 'but at least you know where you stand.' By contrast, in Rwanda, 'people are much more polite, but you never know where you stand. People in Rwanda and Burundi are masters in manipulating information.'

²² During my seven years of psychological work in Egypt, I was counselling numerous western managers leading branches of western companies with Egyptian employees. Several reached the point of nervous breakdown because they did not understand that their authoritarian management style that lacked the elements of care typical for Egyptian communication modes would not yield effective obedience, but quiet sabotage.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A keeps resisting:

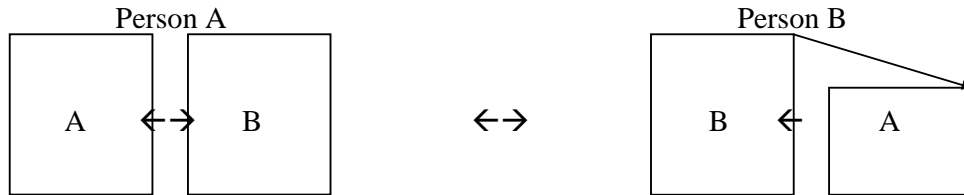


Diagram 5: Hidden aggression as reaction to humiliation

OPEN AGGRESSION AS REACTION TO HUMILIATION

An open fight might lead to different results depending on the balance of material and immaterial resources between both parties.

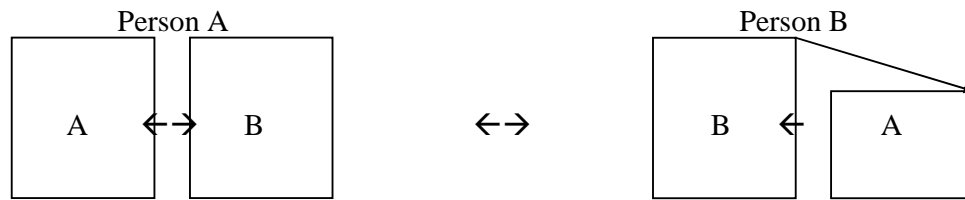
OPEN AGGRESSION FROM A WEAK POSITION

If the person who feels humiliated, has insufficient resources compared with the resources of the humiliator, she will be destroyed in the fight, possibly even lose her life. The story of humiliation will end here, if not children or other people identify with the plight of the humiliated person and continue the fight later on. See diagram 6.

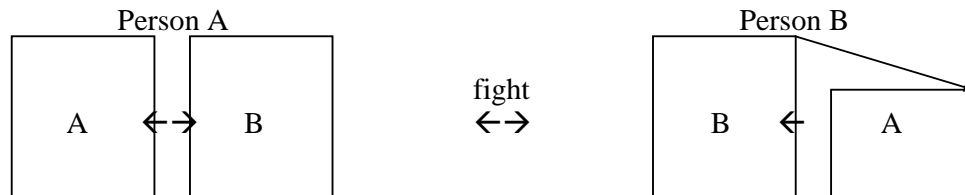
Examples on the individual level: Prisoners in concentration camps, prisoners under torture, may despair and stand up against their oppressors, even though they know that they will be killed.

Examples on the inter-Group level: History tells numerous stories of groups of people who stood up against oppression without having any chance to win.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A revolts with open aggression:



Stage 3: Person B looks down upon person A and destroys person A:



Diagram 6: Open aggression from a weak position

OPEN AGGRESSION FROM A BALANCED POSITION

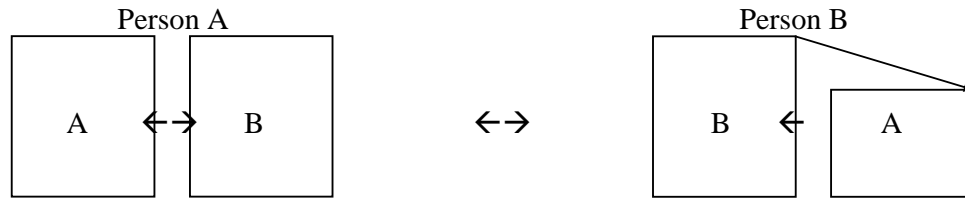
A person who feels humiliated and is strong enough to take to acts of sabotage and terrorism, may gain a kind of balance of forces. In this case the story of humiliation will be ongoing, even perpetuating itself. See diagram 7.

Examples on the individual level: In many families where the father humiliates his wife and his children, a violent war is going on, especially as the children grow up and learn how to defend themselves.

Examples on the inter-group level: Terrorism is a known phenomenon in many parts of the world and follows similar mechanisms. Northern Ireland, the Kurdish people, and the Basques provide examples. International terrorism is even more dangerous. It threatens to hit anywhere at any time, it is impossible to absolutely guard against it; the only solution is to remove the need for it. This requires a careful handling of feelings in international relations, especially feelings of humiliation.²³

²³ During my stay in Egypt I learned to comprehend the feelings of humiliation in citizens of a former high culture that descended to the state of a needy and poor member of the world community. Books like *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction From the Bottom Up* (Brecher and Costello, 1994) give a glimpse of the humiliation and bitterness caused by the vast and increasing

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A keeps revolting with open aggression:

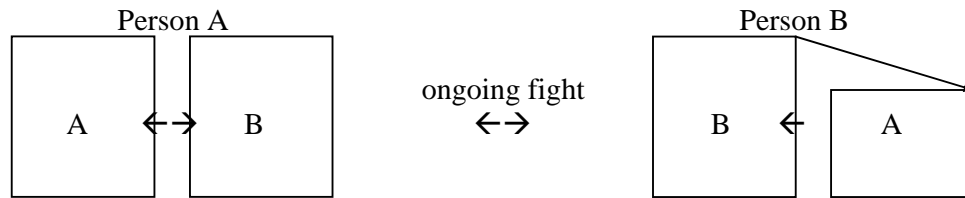


Diagram 7: Open aggression from a balanced position

OPEN AGGRESSION FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH

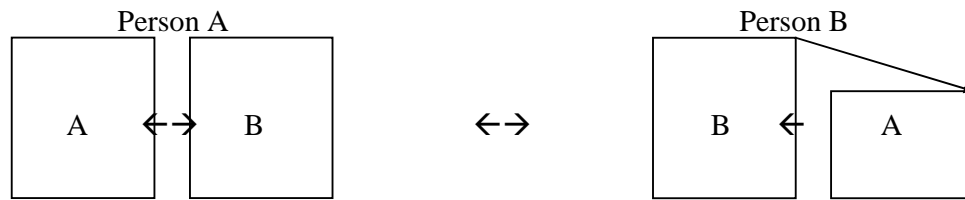
If the person who feels humiliated is stronger than the humiliator, she will end the story of humiliation by winning the fight and putting the humiliator down, in extreme cases the humiliator will be killed. This case is also presented further down under point 1.3.5.2. See therefore diagram 8, 9 and 10.

Examples on the individual level: Children who are humiliated by their parents may try to fight them for many years in vain, but as soon as they grow up and gather sufficient strength, they may go as far as to kill the abusive parent.

Examples on the inter-group level: The French aristocracy lost their lives to the guillotine during the French Revolution.

inequality between the rich and the poor in the global village. This inequality may trigger feelings of humiliation and anger that may increasingly lead to violence.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A keeps revolting with open aggression, possibly ending up with killing person B:

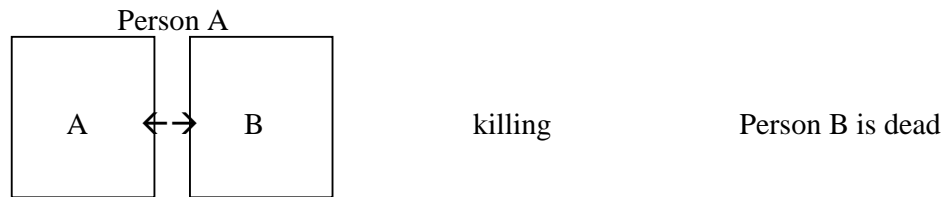


Diagram 8: Open aggression from a position of strength

ELIMINATION OF THE HUMILIATOR

The following cases are related to the above-enumerated ones, but it is not the aggression which is prominent, but the elimination of the humiliator.

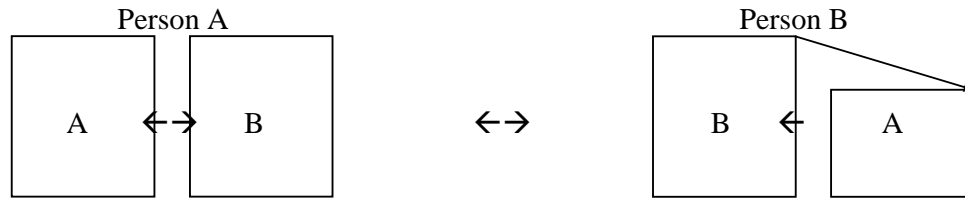
ELIMINATION OF THE HUMILIATORS BY REMOVING THEIR REPRESENTATION

A humiliated person has the option to respond to humiliation with the same attitude, namely to look down upon the humiliator. She can look down to such a degree upon the humiliator that the humiliator becomes irrelevant, - as if the humiliator does not exist anymore. The humiliated person thus 'kills' the humiliator, not in reality, but she removes the representation of the humiliator from her inner world, from her mind, from her psyche, from her feelings. This elimination process is an intra-psychoic process. The extreme form of annihilation makes revenge superfluous, because there is no target person anymore. Both, perpetrator and victim look down upon each other, both do not regard it as important any more to be respected by the other. At this final stage the story is not a story of humiliation anymore. See diagram 9 for illustration.

Examples on the individual level: Battered wives, who try to get away from their humiliator, may achieve this by erasing his representation from their minds. Employees, who are humiliated by their boss, may tackle this situation by eliminating the boss from their inner world as a human being; they just stop considering the actions of the boss as being relevant to them. People under torture may use this method in order to stay sane.

Examples on the inter-group level: Occupied and colonised people may as well take to such measures, in order to be able to survive humiliation.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person A looks down upon person B as well, even eliminates the representation of person B:

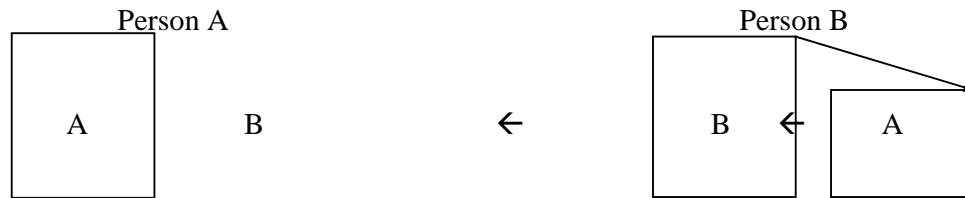


Diagram 9: Elimination of the humiliators by removing their representation

ELIMINATION OF THE HUMILIATORS THROUGH KILLING THEM

The elimination process may also be an extra-psychic process: The humiliated person may kill the humiliator. If killing is involved in a humiliation story, then the story ends with the killing, if not the children of the killed person stand up and take up fighting later on, or other persons who identify with the killed person take to acts of revenge.

The killers may remove the representations of the killed persons from their minds or not. If the representations of the killed persons stay in the mind of the killers they may haunt the killers, they may give them feelings of guilt, or the killers may stay in a constant inner 'dialogue' with the killed persons, the killers may also repeatedly re-live the satisfaction of having won over their humiliators (see diagram 10).

Examples on the individual level: The story of the Mexican foreman has its place here, though it is further complicated by the fact that the humiliator is killed in advance, before even having had the chance to be the humiliator, because the humiliated person expects him to become the humiliator.

In many traditional honour-societies a girl's virginity represents the honour of the family. If she has sex with a man before being married, it may lead to so-called honour-killing, meaning that her family's perceives it as her duty to kill the girl. In this case the killer, for example her brother, may kill her and later erase her from his memories: She brought shame upon the family and would have humiliated the family totally, if the family had not killed her; she does not deserve to be remembered.²⁴

²⁴ See Wiseberg (Human Rights Internet, HRI, www.hri.ca) for the currently increasing attention to 'honour-killings' as violation of human rights, as opposed to just being treated as private affair (Laurie

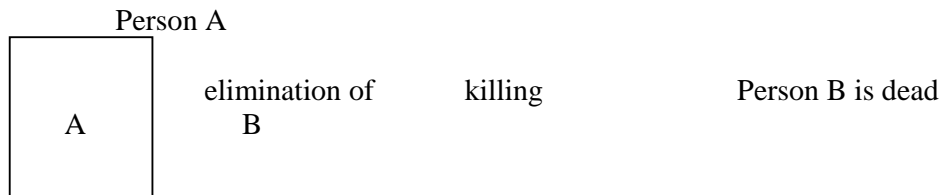
Also in a human rights based society a humiliator may be killed. For example, a son may kill his father after having suffered a decade of physical and psychological torture at his hands. The son may not be able to erase the image of his father from his memories after the killing, he may be haunted by it, or he may be able to erase his father's image from his mind.

Examples on the inter-group level: Hitler and his followers fabricated the gruesome story that Jews were planning to exploit and humiliate the German 'Volk,' and the world community. Eliminating them was therefore seen as a duty. Some SS-men in concentration camps, and bureaucrats planning the Holocaust, are told to have done their duty with cold hearts, others were later haunted.²⁵

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person A kills person B, and removes the representation of person B from her inner world:



Or: Person A kills person B, but does not remove the representation of person B from her inner world, she might keep the representation of person B, person B might even haunt person A after the killing.

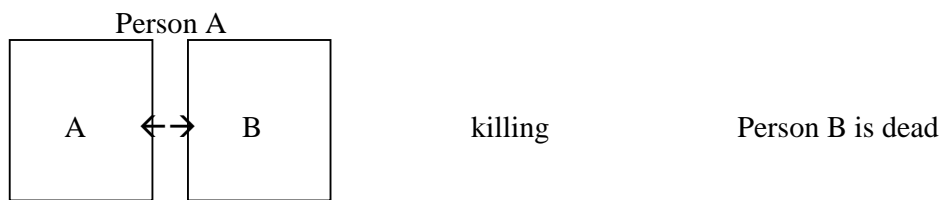


Diagram 10: Elimination of the humiliators through killing them

S. Wiseberg at the 'Seminar om Sosial Utvikling og Menneskerettigheter,' 10th February 2000, Diakonhjemmets Internasjonale Senter, Oslo).

²⁵ See also Eichmann and the description of his court case in Arendt, 1964.

GAINING THE HUMILIATOR'S RESPECT

Instead of fighting the humiliators, instead of eliminating them, the humiliated party could also try to convince the humiliators that they are wrong in looking down on the humiliated party. See diagram 11.

Examples on the individual level: Children seem to be prone to try this strategy even under very adverse circumstances. They have a tendency to hold on to their parents, even if the parents are abusive and routinely and cruelly humiliate their children. Children seem to be willing to go very far to make their parents happy, hoping to finally gain their parents acceptance.

Examples on the inter-group level: People in former colonies often seem to develop what is called an 'inferiority-complex.' They oppose their colonisers on one side, but there seems often to be another side, where they try to imitate their colonisers as if they want to finally impress them enough in order to be respected as equals. Fanon describes eloquently how he tried hard and failed (Fanon, 1986). In Rwanda Hutu are said to have an 'inferiority complex' in relation to the Tutsi, who traditionally ruled.²⁶

Nelson Mandela managed to keep his self-esteem so strong in the face of humiliation and prevented humiliation from spoiling his dignity that he at the end managed to.

Stage 1: Person B looks down upon person A, while person A respects person B:



Stage 2: Person A tries to convince person B to reinstate her respect to person A:

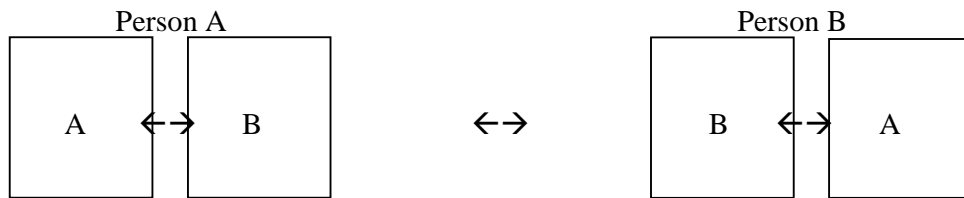


Diagram 11: Gaining the humiliator's respect

²⁶ 'A Tutsi learned that he could kill a Hutu at any time. When Hutu got power they had no experience of ruling, which means that Hutu were the same as the Tutsi before. Hutu have an inferiority complex' (letter from a Rwandan interview partner, 1999).

OUTLOOK

This paper plays out the dynamics of humiliation within the framework of Lakoff's and Johnson's work on metaphor, combined with a Grounded Theory and a 'Psycho-Logic' rationale.

Humiliation may be responded to within four categories of reactions: i) Humiliation may be accepted, ii) it may be responded to with depression, iii) it may be countered with aggression, or iv) it may be reacted to with the elimination of the humiliators, either by annihilating their significance, or their physical existence, or by an unexpected method, namely by gaining their respect.

The last method is the only one that yields lasting peace. A Nelson Mandela and a Mahatma Gandhi stand for this alternative. For thirty years most people expected a bloodbath in South Africa. Why did it not happen? Mainly because Nelson Mandela taught his followers how to overcome the pain and anger caused by humiliation under the system of apartheid.²⁷ In South Africa the humiliators and the humiliated sat down together and planned for a society in which 'both black and white' could be 'assured of their inalienable right to human dignity.'²⁸

Instead of killing and annihilating his humiliators, Mandela succeeded in convincing them that they ought to discontinue their humiliation. He impressed the white elite. He stepped out of the 'humiliator'/'humiliated' dyad, he stepped out of the role of the re-actor, and became an actor. He rejected the definition of the situation given by the humiliator, and with it the 'normal' response to humiliation, namely the upholding of an unbridgeable gap towards the humiliator. Mandela, as well as Gandhi, 'undermined' the gruesome paradigm of humiliation, and invented a peaceful response to humiliation, namely the denial to accept the role of the victim.

This extraordinary psychological innovation needs to be better understood so that it can be applied in other parts of the world where similar situations search for solutions. A '*decent society*' (Margalit, 1996) is in need of Mandelas and Gandhis, but also in need of more thorough knowledge concerning the psychological mechanisms lying behind their success.

To build a '*decent society*' is not only a national and local task, but also an international, global challenge. The global community, including its social researchers, carries the responsibility to study and understand the phenomenon of humiliation and its responses more thoroughly, in order to be better prepared for preventing and healing it. The global village should be a '*decent global village*.' And a '*decent global village*' ought not to entail circles of humiliation leading to war and destruction.

²⁷ It is equally important to recognise Mandela's prior role as one who engaged in violent resistance to apartheid. Reconciliation was only possible once apartheid had been abolished.

²⁸ The quotation is taken from President Mandela's inaugural address, May 10, 1994.

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