Women and Terrorism: The Lessons of Humiliation

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Abstract

This paper addresses the dynamics of humiliation in their interplay with terrorism. It searches for the 'why' behind terrorism and highlights the role of women in this context. It is built on four years of research on the phenomenon of humiliation, as well as more than twenty years of practical experience as a psychologist in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Alternative ways of responding to humiliation are suggested and third parties are called upon to increase their engagement.

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The horrific events on the 11th September 2001 in the United States shook the world. News programmes around the world have incessantly covered the events and their aftermath ever since. The name Osama bin Laden has dominated the news, ways of retaliation or reactions are being discussed.

This paper is not a classical empirical paper. It is a paper that attempts to convey conclusions drawn from four years of social psychological research, combined with more than twenty years of therapeutic experience that relates to the tragic events of the 11th September. It entails a personal account of the author's biographical background insofar as it helps to make clear that her conclusions are built on the firm ground of decades of international psychological experience. This approach is an attempt to promote the art of empathy, and explain how it may be possible to take the perspective of people who become perpetrators, both to themselves and to others. Women have traditionally been given the role of maintainers of social cohesion, and this article is written in this spirit. It is the article of a woman who is concerned with social cohesion within the global community in a situation that is characterised by a 'war against terror.' In the following a personal style will be used for the presentation of biographical details.

When I first came to Egypt in 1984, I heard quite a lot about the bin Laden family. They were a fact of Egyptian life, part and parcel of it, especially within the Egyptian business community that has many connections with the rest of the Arab world. A poor man from Yemen, so I learned, the father of Osama bin Laden, had migrated to Saudi Arabia and had, through his diligence and talent, acquired wealth and respect. I do not recall any allusions to leanings towards terrorism on the part of the Laden family or Osama bin Laden; terrorism, or even Islam for that matter, were not themes associated with the name 'bin Laden,' business was the only context in which they were discussed. Apart from hearing about the bin Laden family – within a business context far away from any terrorism – I had Palestinian clients who made me understand how distressed they where concerning the fate of Palestine – and it was their plight that brought me closer to understand leanings towards violence.

This is the backdrop for the tragic events of September 2001 with regard to the author's own life. I would like to share the lessons I have learned since then, as a psychologist, a physician, and a woman, one whose German family has been deeply traumatised by the two world wars and who is trying to contribute to peace studies with her perspective. I believe that the 11th September highlights to what extent old paradigms of war are no longer suitable, how new methods of safeguarding global peace are still only rudimentary, and in what way they dangerously lack psychological dimensions and insights.

From 1984-1987 I was a psychological counsellor at the American University in Cairo, and from 1987-1991 I had my own private practice. I offered counselling in English, French, German, Norwegian, and, after some years, also in Egyptian-Arabic. My clients came from diverse cultural backgrounds, many from the expatriate community in Cairo, such as Americans, Europeans, Scandinavians, Palestinians, and citizens of other African countries, as well as from the local community, both western-oriented, and traditionally-oriented Egyptians. Part of my work was 'culture-counselling,' meaning that foreign companies working in Egypt asked me for my support in understanding Egyptian culture, Arab culture, and Islam.

Before coming to Egypt, from 1974-1984, I studied and worked in New Zealand, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Israel, West Africa, USA, Germany, and Norway, as a student of both psychology and of medicine (I graduated in psychology in 1978, and in medicine in 1984, both from Hamburg University in Germany, I gained my doctorate in medicine in 1994

from Hamburg University, and my doctorate in psychology from Oslo University, Norway, in 2001).

Already as a schoolgirl I was interested in the world's cultures and languages and I eventually learned to handle around 12 languages, among them the key languages of the world. My aim was to become part of other cultures, not 'visit' 'them.' I wanted to develop a gut feeling about how people in different cultures define life and death, conflict and peace, love and hate, and how they look at 'others.' My doctoral thesis in medicine systematised this quest and addressed the topic of quality of life in a comparative manner: I asked how the notion of a 'good life' is being defined in Egypt and in Germany. In 1991 I found myself back in Europe and, perplexed by the lack of a sense of global responsibility in Germany I founded the NGO 'Better Global Understanding' in 1993 in Hamburg, Germany, and organised a festival with 20 000 participants under the motto 'Global Responsibility.' In 1994 I stood as candidate for the European Parliament, again with the wish to further global understanding.

More than 25 years of learning how to be a global citizen have taught me that human beings are less divided and different than all those are inclined to believe who are residents in one country and 'visit' 'others' as tourists, for business, diplomacy, or fieldwork. As long as you 'visit' 'others,' or live in expatriate ghettos, you stay 'outside.' Yet, there is a growing number of people, who, like me, are currently developing a global or at least multi-local identity and become citizens of the world. For me it was often a painful process. Renouncing old yearnings and beliefs, and building a global identity not only theoretically, but also in practice, this is hard. It is like building a ship while at sea.

I was aided, however, by my growing intuition that basically all human beings yearn for recognition and respect, and that the withdrawal or denial of recognition and respect, experienced as humiliation, is the strongest force that creates rifts between people and breaks down relationships. Thus, I believe that the desire for recognition unites us human beings, that it is universal and can serve as a platform for contact and cooperation. I suggest that many of the rifts that we can observe stem from a universal phenomenon, namely the humiliation that is felt when recognition and respect is lacking. I do not believe that ethnic, religious, or cultural differences create rifts by themselves; on the contrary, diversity can be a source of mutual enrichment – however, diversity is enriching only as long as it is embedded within relationships that are characterised by respect. It is when respect and recognition are failing, that those who feel victimised are prone to highlight differences in order to 'justify' rifts that were caused, not by these differences, but by something else, namely by humiliation.

I began developing this intuition already when I started working as a clinical psychologist in Germany (1980-1984) with individuals and families. My experience indicated that humiliation is of crucial importance in human relations, both as act and experience, and that cycles of humiliation may permeate people's lives with an all-consuming intensity. Vogel & Lazare (1990) illustrate this point in 'The Unforgivable Humiliation – a Dilemma in Couples Treatment.' Later, particularly during my time in Egypt, I understood how relevant these dynamics are also at the group level, or even at the macro-level, between nations or whole world regions. The example of the Treaties of Versailles is but one example, perhaps among the most known ones.[1]

During the years I increasingly felt that the severity of rifts caused by humiliation called for research. I therefore devoted four years of research, 1997-2001, to studying the phenomenon of humiliation. The two starting points were, as explained above, a) my insights as a clinical psychologist with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds that humiliation causes the severest of rifts in relationships, and b) the understanding that Germany's historic experience of humiliation led up to World War II.

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[1] See Haffner & Bateson (1978), and Elias (1989/1996).

The initial research questions were: What is experienced as humiliation? What happens when people feel humiliated? When is humiliation established as a feeling? What does humiliation lead to? Which experiences 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 effects of humiliation? Where can I observe cases of humiliation? If humiliation played a role after World War I for Germany, is humiliation just as relevant in more recent cases of war and genocide, such as Rwanda, Somalia, Cambodia, and so on? Is humiliation also relevant for relationships at even higher macro-levels, for example between 'civilisations' or cultural regions such as was described by Samuel P. Huntington (1996)?

I started designing the research project on humiliation in 1995, and conducted it at the University of Oslo, beginning in 1997, and concluding in 2001 with a doctoral dissertation in social psychology. The research project was entitled *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties*.[2]

During the first two years of the research project I carried out a pilot study in order to arrive at a preliminary mapping of the field. The results of the pilot study presented humiliation as an intricately complex concept that required much more research for better understanding and differentiation. 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 and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you feel you should expect. Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. 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 the absence of any deliberately humiliating act – as a result of misunderstandings, or as a result of personal and cultural differences concerning norms about 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 perpetrator. People react in different ways to being treated in humiliating ways: some just become depressed, some get openly angry, and others hide their anger and plan revenge. The person who plans for revenge may become the leader of a movement. Furthermore, a perpetrator might want to commit humiliation but not succeed, a 'benefactor' might humiliate while trying to do good, a third party might observe 'victims' who do not see themselves as such (or fail to see victims in cases where they do exist), or humiliation may be sought instead of despised.

In the main phase of the four years of research I carried out 216 qualitative interviews, addressing Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi and their history of genocidal killings. From 1998 to 1999 the interviews were carried out 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 2001 also in Europe (in Norway, Germany, Switzerland, France, and in Belgium). The interviews were often part of a network of relationships that included me – the researcher – and my interlocutors, and in many cases interviews went over

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[2] Within this project many articles and two monographs were written, see here a selection of them: Lindner (1999); Lindner (2000a); Lindner (2000b); Lindner (2000c); Lindner (2000d); Lindner (2000e); Lindner (2000f); Lindner (2000g); Lindner (2000h); Lindner (2000i); Lindner (2000j); Lindner (2000k); Lindner (2001b); Lindner (2001c); Lindner (2001d); Lindner (2001e); Lindner (2001f); Lindner (2001g); Lindner (2001h).

several sittings. Trust was built and authentic encounters were sought, inscribed in non-humiliating relationships that safeguarded everybody's dignity. Interlocutors were invited to become 'co-researchers' in a reflective dialogue with the researcher, involving not only the interviewee and the researcher but also various scholars whose ideas were introduced into the dialogue.

The terror attacks of the 11th September 2001 in the United States, that shocked the world, show – at least to my understanding – that the entire world community is caught in a cycle of humiliation. Men such as Osama bin Laden would never have any followers, if there were not a pool of feelings of humiliation in large parts of the world, feelings that are so intense that young intelligent men, who could found families and have satisfying careers, are willing to lose their lives in suicide attacks. The rich and powerful West has long been blind to the fact that its superiority may have humiliating effects on those who are less privileged, especially during times when the West simultaneously teaches the world the ideals of human rights, ideals that heighten feelings of humiliation. In 1991, when I came back to Europe after having worked as a psychological counsellor in Egypt for seven years, I was alarmed by the blindness and egocentric illusion of security among the rich. As mentioned above, in 1993 I organised a festival under the motto 'better global understanding' and 'global responsibility,' where I asked a whole city, the German city of Hamburg, with 1,5 million inhabitants, to reflect upon the contributions every individual could provide to build a 'global village' that really deserves this name.

Upon returning to Europe after many years of experience in Asia and the Middle East, European attitudes reminded me of Marie Antoinette, a member of the French aristocracy at the outset of the French revolution, who displayed heartless naivety when she chose to stay uninformed about the poverty of her underlings; she is reported to have asked why the poor did not eat cake when they ran out of bread. She had to pay with her life for her naivety: the guillotine cut off her head. The problem was that the French aristocracy was used to underlings who accepted humiliation, and these aristocrats were therefore unprepared, when their underlings 'woke up.' The English aristocracy, in comparison, did not face the guillotine, a fact that shows that an elite indeed can contribute to constructive change, and that feelings of humiliation among downtrodden underlings do not necessarily lead to either apathetic submission or violent uprising, but may lead instead to benign and creative measures of reconciliation, such as those the name of Nelson Mandela stands for.

This paper is divided in three parts. In the first part, entitled 'the feelings of women who wish to bear sons,' case studies from my psychological practice are presented. In the following section, 'the significance of humiliation,' these cases are related to the notion of humiliation. The paper ends with some concluding remarks that discuss the reflections so far presented and ask what lessons can be learned for the future.

The Feelings of Women Who Wish To Bear Sons

In Egypt, where I worked as a psychological counsellor from 1984-1991, I had Palestinian clients, who came to me with depression because they felt they should help their suffering families in Palestine, instead of studying in Cairo and preparing for a happy life. In the wake of the 11th September I try to recall some of the cases (I do not reveal names and will protect individuals by making their biographies indiscernible).

A young woman, not yet 20 years old, came to me, let me call her Farida. I try to capture the essence of her message, and will use, as much as possible, her way of speaking English: 'My father wants me to study, get married, and have a life. But I cannot smile and laugh and think of a happy life, when at the same time my aunts and uncles, my nieces and other family members face suffering in Palestine. This suffering is like a heavy burden on me.

I cannot smile and laugh. I feel their suffering in my body. Sometimes I cannot sleep. I know some Palestinians of my age who do not care. They go to the discotheque and dance and do all kinds of wrong things; they even drink alcohol. I think this is disgusting. Our people are suffering and we should stand by them. If we cannot help them directly, we should at least not make fun of them by living immoral lives, or be heartless and forget them altogether. I feel that I do not have any right to enjoy life as long as my people suffer. All right, I obey my father and try to concentrate on my studies. But I do this only because I respect my father. If he were not there, I would go to my homeland, get married and have as many sons as I could have, and educate them in the right spirit. I would be overjoyed to have a martyr as a son, a son who sacrifices his life for his people. I feel that suicide bombers are heroes, because it is hard to give your life. I want to give my life. I want to do something. I cannot just sit here in Cairo and watch my people suffer. Their suffering eats me up. I feel so powerless, so heavy; sometimes I can hardly walk. The burden crushes me. What shall I do?'

What would you, the reader, advise this young woman to do? I tried to give her strength and discussed with her how she could contribute to a more just world after her studies, in a peaceful way, and how this would be more beneficial to her people and the entire world than giving birth to suicide bombers.

Her involvement and sincerity were intense, pure, deep and selfless. I was reminded of the sincere young students who had been my clients in Germany. I remember a young German woman – she was 19 years old and had bulimia, let me call her Rita. Her words were the following, I try to translate from German: 'I am appalled by the violence in the world, the destruction of the environment, and the lack of sincerity around me. I am a good student, a very good one. And I cannot live in a world where men play around with the world, with women, and nature, and bring suffering about all of us. Men want to show off their muscles and virility, that is all they want, and the rest of the world is their victim. This world makes me choke. I am so nauseated that I do not want to eat. And sometimes I do not eat for a long time. As long as I manage to refrain from eating, I feel pure, ascetic, as if I can escape the pollution around me by saying 'no.' But then I get very hungry, and I start eating, and because I eat too much, I have to force myself to vomit. This in turn makes me feel extremely guilty, because I waste valuable resources. Here I am, I say to myself, eating too much and vomiting, while millions of people do not have enough to eat. I am caught in this cycle. What can I do? I want to do something, but I don't know what! I feel so powerless and heavy!'

These two young women resembled each other. Both were highly intelligent, with an IQ considerably above average, with a bright future ahead, and they did not know how to digest the violence, neglect, and thoughtlessness they perceived around them. They were strong women, with an acute awareness of justice, whose strength was wasted because they saw no constructive way out. They felt caught in a hopeless situation, where they were straight jacketed. The Palestinian woman found solace in dreaming about sacrificing her life, as the mother of sons who would give their lives to defend their people. The German woman did not have any such vision, however, she thought that asceticism was a solution, an asceticism that went too far for her own abilities. (Other young women, like Rita intelligent and promising young pupils and students, manage to kill themselves by not eating – we call that anorexia nervosa – while others, those who do not induce vomiting, oscillate between asceticism and obesity. My field of psychological counselling from 1980-1984 was 'eating disorders,' and I led therapeutic groups with women with such disorders.)

The Significance of Humiliation

I had some male Palestinian students as clients in Egypt as well, and they dreamt of giving their lives in Palestine in violent resistance and condemned, as Farida did, some of their male

friends who chose to 'forget' their people's suffering and instead went about their own business, even enjoying life by feasting and drinking. None of these young clients was driven by any 'will to power' or inherent 'hatred.' They were driven by despair about the sufferings they perceived around them. They suffered from empathy, so to speak; perhaps to be called a 'noble' suffering. However, they suffered also from short-sighted, impatient and counterproductive strategies to provide their empathy with relief, similar to the alcoholic who believes that alcohol solves problems. In other words, the starting point, empathy for others' sufferings – a 'noble,' 'sincere,' and 'valuable' suffering – contrasted starkly with 'destructive' strategies for action, destructive for the bearers of these strategies as well as for the social fabric of a world which currently tries to build a global community that is based on justice that is brought about by non-violence. Whenever I counselled these young and bright people I was aware that they were vulnerable to being recruited by leaders who could instrumentalise their ability for empathy and use them for acts of destruction.

The core of their problem is – this is my evaluation after more than 20 years of work – the phenomenon of humiliation.[3] Many scholars and experts identify deprivation as the main culprit of problems such as 'grievances,' 'resentment,' 'embitterment,' or 'backlash'; however, I believe that this is too superficial an analysis. Victims of deprivation do not automatically perceive it as a form of suffering that calls for action. It is only deprivation that is perceived as an illegitimate violation of ideals of equality and dignity that is perceived as a humiliation that has to be responded to with profound sincerity.

Deprivation may have many faces: poverty, low status, or marginalisation – there is a host of words describing it. However, poverty, low status and marginalisation do not automatically elicit feelings of suffering or even despair. A religious person may join a monastery and be proud of poverty, low status may be explained as God's will or a just punishment for sins perpetrated in an earlier life, and also marginalisation may be the fundament for pride; not all minorities feel oppressed. Furthermore, poverty may motivate a person to work hard in order to get out of it, parents may sacrifice to enable their children to have an education and a better life, and every small incremental steps towards a better quality

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[3] The phenomenon of humiliation has hardly been studied explicitly so far; it is, however, part and parcel of research on trauma, shame, abuse, or violence. Scheff and Retzinger, see Scheff (1990), extended their work on violence and Holocaust and studied the part played by 'humiliated fury' (Scheff 1997, 11) in escalating conflict between individuals and nations. Also psychiatrist Gilligan (1996) focuses on humiliation as a cause for violence, in his book *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and How to Treat It.* Volkan (1997) and Montville (1990) carry out important work on psycho-political analysis of intergroup conflict and its traumatic effects. Furthermore, Staub's work is highly significant; he is a great name in peace psychology; see Staub (1989); Staub (1990); Staub (1993); Staub (1996). Miller (1993) is the only author known to the present researcher, who used the word humiliation in the title of a book, and there are two special editions of academic journals who carry the word humiliation, namely the *Journal of Primary Prevention* 1991, 1992, and 1999, and the journal *Social Research* in 1997, stimulated by *The Decent Society* by Margalit (1996). Zehr (1990) covers related ground in his book *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Nisbett & Cohen (1996) describe humiliation as part of honour societies, such as illustrated in *The Iliad*, or to be observed nowadays in some urban black males, Mafiosi, Chicano barrios, or the South of the United States. The research question that imposed itself was whether humiliation is a notion that is restricted to honour cultures. Hartling started to develop a Humiliation Inventory (published 1999) where a rating from 1 to 5 is employed for questions measuring 'being teased,' 'bullied,' 'scorned,' 'excluded,' 'laughed at,' 'put down,' 'ridiculed,' 'harassed,' 'discounted,' 'embarrassed,' 'cruelly criticized,' 'treated as invisible,' 'discounted as a person,' 'made to feel small or insignificant,' 'unfairly denied access to some activity, opportunity, or service,' 'called names or referred to in derogatory terms,' or viewed by others as 'inadequate,' or 'incompetent.'

of life may be celebrated. The question must be: what is it that transforms deprivation into unbearable suffering of a kind that triggers severe depression or the urge to retaliate with violence?

Feelings of humiliation is the answer. Feelings of humiliation may lead to acts of humiliation perpetrated on the perceived humiliator, setting off cycles of humiliation in which everybody who is involved feels humiliated, and is convinced that humiliating the humiliator is a just and holy duty.

How do feelings of humiliation come about? Based on many years of research on this phenomenon I would suggest the following explanation: Feelings of humiliation come about when deprivation is perceived as an illegitimate imposition of lowering or degradation, one that cannot be explained in constructive terms.

This elicits yet another question: Do we – members of communities around the world today – live in contexts that make us accept explanations for deprivation such as those mentioned above, explanations alluding to God's will, or to nature's order, or to punishment for past failings? The answer is: No. We live in a world that is listening to the message of human rights that indicates that every human being has a right to live in enabling circumstances, that equality is the ruling idea and not hierarchy, that every person has an inner core of dignity that ought not be lowered. My extensive international experience indicates that this message is heard. However, it has not, at least not in the short term, had the effect that many human rights advocates hope for, namely to decrease suffering around the world. On the contrary, in the first instance, it strengthened feelings of humiliation, because inequalities and deprivation that were accepted before turn into unacceptable acts of humiliation perpetrated by the powerful on the less powerful. And acts of humiliation create feelings of humiliation that in turn have a potential to lead to retaliating acts of humiliation.

When I came to Africa in 1998, to study the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the 1988 quasi-genocide in Somalia, the message initially given to me was: 'You from the West, you come here to get a kick out of our problems. You pretend to want to help or do science, but you just want to have some fun. You have everything back home, you live in luxury, and you are blind to that. You arrogantly and stupidly believe that you suffer when you cannot take a shower or have to wait for the bus for more than two hours! Look how you cover our people with dust when bumping childishly and arrogantly around in your four-wheel drive cars! Look how you enjoy being a king in our country, while you would be no more than average in your country! All what you want is to have fun, get a good salary, write empty reports to your organisation back home or publish some articles, in order to be able to continue this fraud. You pay lip service to human rights and empowerment! You are a hypocrite! And you know that we need help - how glad would we be if we did not need it! And how good would it be if you were really to listen to us for once, not only to the greedy ones among us who exploit your arrogant stupidity for their own good! We feel deeply humiliated by your arrogant and self-congratulating help!'

In short, this message went as follows:
'First you colonise us.
Then you leave us with a so-called democratic state that is alien to us.
After that you watch us getting dictatorial leaders.
Then you give them weapons to kill half of us.
Finally you come along to 'measure' our suffering!?'

The buzzword that dominated my research in Africa, as well as the years of working as a psychological counsellor in Egypt, was 'double standards,' or 'lack of even-handedness.' The teachings of human rights are heard everywhere, this is my experience, and they are surprisingly close to local norms about the cohesion of the social fabric. To mention just one example, a study was sponsored by the Red Cross, a study about ethical norms in the war in

Somalia (*Spared from the Spear*, International Committee of the Red Cross Somalia Delegation (1997)). Somali scholars collected ethical norms laid down in their traditional teachings. They discovered that their local Somali rules were virtually identical with the Geneva Convention. In other words, human rights are, according to my international experience, universal insofar as they mirror, within a small range of variation, the ethical codifications of social cohesion within all human societies. They reflect what I call 'inside'-ethics, ethics that highlight the long term maintenance of social relationships that are perceived as taking place in a context that carries the label 'us,' while a host of different, 'outside'-ethical rules reigns as soon as relations to 'them' are codified. Human rights represent nothing but 'inside'-ethics, however, on a global scale, this is my claim. They are an expression, a wish, or a vision, that 'inside'-ethics may reign inside the global village, inside the global community of human beings, a community that does not use the word 'them' anymore, but conceives itself as 'us.' To my judgement, the advent of human rights is an indication of the advent of the concept of one single global community of 'us.'

Feelings of humiliation are triggered when those – often referred to as the West – who preach human rights and the inclusion of every human being within a global 'us,' are at the same time perceived as violating their very own preaching. This is called 'double standards.' In this context, anybody who wishes to believe in human rights will no longer accept deprivation, but will feel humiliated by it. Thus, teachings of human rights increase feelings of humiliation in the short term, particularly when deprivation and inequality are prevailing, or even increasing, instead of decreasing. Currently the gap between rich and poor is increasing, both globally and locally, and this is a visible and palpable breach of human rights for all those who learn about them, and not to be accepted anymore as part of a divine order. Double standards, when related to human rights, deepen feelings of humiliation.

Women in many societies traditionally are given the task of carers, while men are educated to fight. Because of this caring role, women tend to react with depression when they feel helpless, oppressed or humiliated. When I worked as a medical student at a psychiatric hospital, in 1983, I was amazed, how clear this tendency was. Women are not supposed to fight and tend to turn the expression of their feelings inwards. Farida did not want to take up weapons herself, however, she wanted to give birth to sons who could fight. Rita did not know against what to fight; she retreated to mere asceticism. My male Palestinian clients, however, thought of taking up weapons. Rita's male friends with similar sets of problems as hers were drawn to alcohol or other, more exteriorised, ways of expressing their problems as opposed to Rita's inwards orientation.

Concluding Remarks

The question that forces itself into the discourse is: What can be done? What are the lessons?

In my work on the phenomenon of humiliation I describe how the meaning of the word humiliation has changed during the past centuries. The pre-human-rights-world accepted hierarchical societal structures as legitimate ones within which acts of humiliation – beatings, torture, subjugation – were regarded as legitimate means employed by masters to keep down underlings. This pre-human-rights-world of hierarchy was characterised by male honour. Males were responsible for defending the honour of their families, and this honour was attached to their status within the hierarchy. Still today we see this in so-called 'Southern Cultures' of honour, as described by Nisbett & Cohen (1996) and also Miller (1993). However, the old connotation of acts of humiliation as 'defending honour,' 'keeping order,' or 'teaching lessons to underlings,' transforms into a new meaning of the word humiliation as soon as human rights brand it as immoral to keep down people as second class beings.

Today we live in a world that contains remnants of the old male honour order, alongside the advent of a new order, namely the ideals of equality and human rights. Humiliation carries different meaning in these two sets of societal structures and norms, and acts of humiliation may be responded to either within the traditional male honour code, or within the modern human rights code. However, in both contexts humiliation is a violation, be it of honour, or of personal dignity as defined by human rights, and in both contexts it is likely to trigger responses.

Even more, and this is the profound message that I draw from my work on humiliation, human rights ideals intensify feelings of humiliation as compared to pre-human-rights-eras, because any deprivation or inequality that was legitimate before, is now illegitimate. It is important to realise that these heightened feelings of humiliation have profound effects on people, as I was able to observe in my clients. Many of my female clients in Europe, for example those with eating disorders, could be said to suffer from a diffuse perception of the fact that gender equality is preached, but not reached, and that ideals call for the protection of ecological and social sustainability and peace around the world, while reality suggests that these very ideals are violated. My Palestinian clients perceived similar gaps of justice, between ideals on one side and reality on the other, in their lives and their community.

Those who preach human rights had better become more aware than they are now that they intensify feelings of humiliation – what I would call the 'nuclear bomb of feelings' – when they overlook the fact that reality does not follow ideals. Feelings of humiliation emerging around the world can therefore, ironical as it may sound, be interpreted as a success of human rights teachings, because feelings of humiliation are sharpened particularly in contexts where ideals are created that do not correspond to reality. In short, when ideals arrive and reality does not follow, there is a problem.

Furthermore, and this is another effect of human rights teachings, it is no longer just male honour that is involved in feelings and acts of humiliation. Women have also arrived on the stage of the world, when they feel that their own lives and their own dignity, allegedly protected by human rights, are violated.

Farida, my Palestinian client who wanted to give birth to suicide bombers, still formed her response to feelings of humiliation within the old male honour order, as did those of her male colleagues who wanted to take up arms. My female German clients, on the other side, who felt depressed about the state of the world and responded with eating disorders, would perhaps have developed into devout wives and happy mothers in former times. However, now, they had no way to go but into self-destruction, since they were caught between new ideals and old realities. As I emphasised above, these clients were the hope of the future, intelligent, bright and hard-working students.

What alternative way out could those who feel humiliated take?

The world does have role models for alternative ways of social change, apart from self-destructive depression or other-destroying violence. One example is Nelson Mandela. He succeeded in transforming his feelings of humiliation after 27 years of prison, into a constructive contribution to social and societal change. He distanced himself from his own urge for revenge. He did not become a Hitler.

This inner distancing from the urge for revenge is a sign of personal strength and great maturity. It is this very maturation that the world has to bring about in all people who are caught up in feelings of humiliation and drawn towards violent retaliating acts, if it wants to become a global village with an intact social fabric. Third parties are needed to bring about this distancing step. Third parties, or bystanders, as described by Staub (1989), in fact all mature and moderate forces in the global community of human beings, should emerge from any passivity and facilitate constructive social change towards a global village that deserves the name. Extremists are those who are caught in humiliation, both as feelings and retaliating

acts, and they deepen the rifts of hatred instead of healing humiliation. Moderates are those who have to curb extremism and invite their representatives back into the camp of moderation, of patient change, and long-term solutions. Mature, moderate, responsible people are called upon to invite young, intelligent people to follow the example of a Nelson Mandela, and not follow promoters of terror who at some point have translated empathy with suffering into an urge to retaliate with violence.

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