The Concept of Humiliation:

Its Universal Core and Culture-Dependent Periphery

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Abstract

This article argues that the concept of humiliation may be deconstructed into seven layers, including a) a core that expresses the universal idea of 'putting down,' b) a middle layer that contains two opposed orientations towards 'putting down,' treating it as, respectively, legitimate and routine, or illegitimate and traumatising, and c) a periphery whose distinctive layers include one pertaining to cultural differences between groups and another four peripheral layers that relate to differences in individual personalities and variations in patterns of individual experience of humiliation.

The Concept of Humiliation:

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There is a long-standing assumption that the Versailles Accords after World War I (28th June 1919) inflicted humiliation ('Schmach,' 'Schande') on Germany to an extent that it triggered World War II.[1] Astonishingly, social psychology has not researched the issue of humiliation on a larger scale. However, it is important to research a process or mechanism that is assumed to have the capacity to trigger world wars. This paper is part of a series of texts[2] written within a social-psychological research project on humiliation being carried out at the University of Oslo.[3] The research presented here asks, 'is it accurate to regard humiliation as force with such potency that it can lead to world wars?

The question was refined as follows: 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, for example, Somalian, Rwandan and Burundian culture? What role does humiliation play for aggression? What can be done to overcome violent effects of humiliation? What about practices such as rape in war – is war-rape humiliation turned into a weapon? And, at last, what about the link between micro- and macro-level,

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[1] This treaty included the now infamous war-guilt clause imposing complete responsibility for the war on the Germans and demanding that they 'make complete reparation for all… loss and damage' caused: 'The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies' (Versailles Treaty 1919, part VIII, section I, article 231). See also Sebastian Haffner & Bateson, 1978, and Norbert Elias, 1996.

[2] Lindner, 1999a; Lindner, 1999b; Lindner, 2000b, Lindner, 2000c; Lindner, 2000a; Lindner, 2000d; Lindner, 2000e; Lindner, 2000f; Lindner, 2000g; Lindner, 2000h; Lindner, 2000i; Lindner, 2000j; Lindner, 2000k; Lindner, 2000l; Lindner, 2000m; Lindner, 2000n; Lindner, 2000o; Lindner, 2000p; Lindner, 2000q; Lindner, 2000r; Lindner, 2001. A theory of humiliation is currently being built that draws together several academic fields. Loughborough based sociologist Dennis Smith is collaborating on this task, see for some of his publications, Smith, 1991; Smith, 1997; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2000a; Smith, 2000b; Smith, 2000c.

namely destructive effects of humiliation and its consequences for peace and cooperation in two kinds of relationships, the relations between nations and ethnic groups in the global arena, and the relations between people in the many contexts of everyday life?

The four-year research project that addressed these questions and that currently is being carried out at the University of Oslo entailed fieldwork within which 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 been discussed with about 400 researchers working in related fields.[5]

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[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 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 Issaq 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 who 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 Rwandan/Burundian 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).
- 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 said to be in hiding in Kenya or 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] The qualitative interviews that were carried out in the course of the fieldwork by the present author started out in Somalia in November 1998 with the application of a structured interview guideline. However, the author quickly found that any attempt to administer the questions in a formal and systematic way reinforced conditions of mistrust that the researcher was trying to overcome. In fact, there was a great danger that the process of research, if carried out in that way, would humiliate the respondents. The author shifted to a methodology of asking fewer questions, allowing the interlocutors

The following preliminary working definition of humiliation has been developed in the course of the research: 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 (although in some cases with your consent[6]) in a situation that is much worse, or much 'lower,' than 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 against the ground. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim[7] is forced into passivity, acted upon, and made helpless.[8]

Humiliation has not been studied as widely and explicitly as, for example, such topics as 'shame,' 'trauma,' or 'stress,' which are covered by a large number of publications. Humiliation and shame, for example, are often confounded rather than differentiated; the present author often met the assumption, for example in discussions with colleagues, that humiliation is just a more intense reaction than shame.[9] However, the point of the research project that is the larger framework for this article is precisely that humiliation, though in many respects related to shame, deserves to be treated separately, and requires future research and theoretical conceptualisation that differentiates it from other notions.

Humiliation has not been studied in a systematic and coherent way in the academic community; the list of publications is comparatively short and spread over very disparate thematic fields including international relations,[10] love, sex and social attractiveness,[11]

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to take the lead to a great extent, and framing the encounter between the researcher and the respondent as a shared search for understanding. This produced a great deal of important information and insights that would otherwise have been hidden from the researcher. The process of changing the methodological approach during the course of the fieldwork is described in the article 'How Research Can Humiliate: Critical Reflections on Method' (Lindner, 2001).

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

[7] 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 'loathsome perpetrator.'

[8] 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). See also Lindner, 2000l.

[9] Among others, Silvan S. Tomkins (1962-1992), treats shame and humiliation interchangeably. Tomkins' work is carried further by Donald L. Nathanson, and Nathanson describes humiliation as a combination of three innate affects out of altogether nine affects, namely as a combination of shame, disgust and dissmell (Nathanson in a personal conversation, 1st October1999; see also Nathanson, 1992; Nathanson, 1987) Also Thomas J. Scheff started out with studying shame (Scheff, 1988; Scheff, in Kemper, 1990; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991; Scheff, Retzinger, & Gordon, 1992). Tangney & Fischer, 1995, address *The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*; see also Miller & Tangney, 1994 and Tangney, 1990, as well as Gilbert, 1997. See for further literature, Ahmed, in Ahmed, 1990; Allan & Goss, 1994; Braithwaite, 1989; Braithwaite, 1993; Campbell, 1994; Fischer, Manstead, & Mosquera, 1999; Heimannsberg & Schmidt, 1993; Miller, 1988; Mindell, 1994; Moore, 1993; Moses, in Volkan, Demetrios, & Montville, 1999; Nathanson, 1987; Nathanson, 1992; Peristiany, 1965; Retzinger, 1991; Rosaldo, 1983; Rybak & Brown, 1996; Scheff, 1988; Scheff, in Kemper, 1990; Scheff, Retzinger, & Gordon, 1992; Schenk et al., 1995; Steinberg, 1991a; Steinberg, 1991b; Steinberg, 1996; Swartz, 1988; Tangney, 1990; Wikan, 1984; Wong & Cook, 1992.

[10] See, for example, Cviic, 1993; Luo, 1993; Midiohouan, 1991; Steinberg, 1991b; Steinberg, 1991a; Steinberg, 1996; Urban, in Prins, 1990.

depression,[12] society and identity formation,[13] sports,[14] serial murder,[15] war and violence.[16] A few examples from writings of history, literature and film also take humiliation as their theme.[17]

This paper addresses the concept of humiliation and its components. Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess[18] has developed the notion of the 'depth of intention,' or the 'depth of questioning,' or 'deepness of answers.' Naess writes, 'our depth of intention improves only slowly over years of study. There is an abyss of depth in everything fundamental' (Naess, in Wetlesen, 1978, 143). Warwick Fox, in his paper 'Intellectual Origins of the "Depth" Theme in the Philosophy of Arne Naess' explains, 'The extent to which a person discriminates along a chain of precizations (and, therefore, in a particular direction of interpretation) is a measure of their depth of intention, that is, the depth to which that person can claim to have understood the intended meaning of the expression' (Fox, 1992, 5). In his book *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (chapters 4 and 5, Fox, 1990) Fox discusses how important the concept of depth was for Naess, and that greater depth means asking why and how to a point where others stop asking.

How may the concept of depth be linked to the concept of humiliation? The research that forms the basis of this article started in 1996 with the following text (Lindner, 1996, 1): 'I hypothesise that humiliation, better the subjective feeling of being humiliated, plays a central role in starting, maintaining, or stopping armed conflicts in most cultures. This is not to claim that objective factors as, for example, competition for scarce resources do not play a role in violent conflicts, it is also not to claim that conflict in itself is negative, since, for example, power imbalances might need conflict to be adjusted. But it is to claim that struggles around objective factors or power imbalances do not generate violent responses alone; conflicts around objective factors and power imbalances can also lead to non-violent confrontations, or even to compromise and cooperation. It is to claim that it might often even be the other way round, namely that feelings of humiliation feed on objective factors and then create a violent conflict (Hitler's Germany being a horrible example: economic hardship and unemployment combined with feelings of humiliation after the First World War made the German population susceptible to Hitler's demagogy).'

The original project description from 1996 included a number of hypotheses, such as follows: 'I hypothesise that the significance of feelings of humiliation is universal or culture-independent, and that these feelings carry the potential to hamper conflict solutions described by rational choice theory. What is rather culture-dependent is according to my experience the way humiliation is perceived and responded to. If this double-layer hypothesis is correct then third parties intervening in a violent conflict could develop and use a two-mode strategy which contains one basic module which deals with universally present fundamental questions of humiliation, and one rather culture-dependent module which addresses the specific ways of dealing with humiliation in the cultural domain in which the third party is operating at present (note: culture or cultural domain is here not understood as closed, self-contained entity).'

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[11] See, for example, Baumeister, 1986; Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Brossat, 1995; Gilbert, 1997; Proulx et al., 1994.

[12] See, for example, Brown, Harris, & Hepworth, 1995; Miller, 1988.

[13] See, for example, Ignatieff, 1997; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Markus, Kitayama, & Heimann, in Higgins & Kruglanski, 1996; Silver et al., 1986; Wood et al., 1994.

[14] See, for example, Hardman et al., 1996.

[15] See, for example, Hale, 1994; Lehmann, 1995; Schlesinger, 1998.

[16] See, for example, Masson, 1996; Vachon, 1993; Znakov, 1989; Znakov, 1990.

[17] See, for example, Peters, 1993; Stadtwald, 1992; Toles, 1995; Zender, 1994.

[18] See, for example, Naess, in Linsky, 1952; Naess, 1953; Naess, 1958; Naess, in Wetlesen, 1978.

The text continued, 'I hypothesise that it could be in many cases more effective to address and attend to feelings of humiliation, than neglecting these feelings and facing their violent effects. This requires a widening of the time perspective, placing an acute conflict into a discourse before and also after the acute conflict phase.'

The following hypotheses were formulated:
Hypothesis Ia:
In most cultures feelings of humiliation are a central determinant of violent conflicts, hampering the achievement of conflict solutions described by rational choice theory.
Hypothesis Ib:
What is perceived as humiliation and how it is responded to, varies across cultures.
Hypothesis II:
Feelings of humiliation can be attended to and its violent effects can be defused.

This paper discusses the multi-layered hypothesis here presented, asking whether it represents different degrees of depth and whether this hypothesis was confirmed in the fieldwork carried out after this text had been written. The paper is organised in two parts. The first part presents the historic unfolding of the dynamics of humiliation in terms of the conceptualisation developed in the course of the fieldwork. In the second part, the concept of humiliation is dissected and categorised in terms of seven degrees of depth. The presentation of the current state-of-the-art concerning research on humiliation is also included in the second section.

From Honour to Human Rights

How do people understand humiliation? Many readers will answer – together with the 52 people that were interviewed in the pilot study for the project here presented[19] – that humiliation is the *subjugation of human beings (and of nature), and that it is illegitimate*. This sentence, if carefully dissected, can be deconstructed in three parts, namely (a) putting down (subjugation, abasement, degradation), (b) human beings (as well as material objects), and (c) lack of legitimacy (or violation of human dignity and violation of environmental sustainability). Further analysis exposes that these three elements developed historically in relation to the particular historic context within which each of them was inscribed. Table 1[20] shows the three elements of humiliation that entered the cultural repertoire of human kind in three phases that coincided, approximately, with advances in technological and organisational capacity and shifts in the balance of power between humankind and nature and between human groups.[21]

During the first phase, in hunter and gatherer societies, the first seeds of the idea of subjugation entered the repertoire through small-scale tool making. In other words, the idea of subjugation was introduced or 'invented' (or 'putting/keeping/striking down,' debasing, abasing, lowering, degrading), and material objects (things, nature, the abiotic world) were subjugated. This subjugation was still mild in its practical application and did not yet reach the extent that we observe today, and also human beings were not yet abased (hunter and gatherer societies were rather egalitarian), however, the idea was born. In the next phase, that started with the advent of agriculture around 10 000 years ago,[22] the resulting surplus enabled coercive hierarchies to develop. In other words, the idea of subjugation was extended from nature to human beings, meaning that also human beings were used as tools. Masters as well as underlings regarded this order as highly legitimate, because they perceived it as ordained by divine authorities. Sometimes underlings rebelled, however, not to dismantle hierarchy, but to replace the master. Thus the question whether hierarchy was legitimate or not, was not part of the cultural repertoire of this period (thus no cross has been introduced in Table 1 at this point). During the third phase, characterised by the current global information society and the advent of human rights, the idea became widespread that subjugating human beings (and, with certain limits, also the subjugation of nature) is illegitimate and morally wrong.

THE THREE ELEMENTS OF HUMILIATION

	Subjugation of nature (many thousands of years ago)	and of human beings (about ten thousand years ago)	is illegitimate (very recently)
Phase 1.	X		
Phase 2.	X	X	
Phase 3.	X	X	X

[19] In an initial pilot study from 1997 to 1998 52 texts were collected from people chosen by chance from colleagues. Everybody was asked about his/her understanding of the term humiliation. Some interviews were taped, some lasted for 10 minutes, others for two hours, some text fragments stem from letters or e-mails which I received long time after having opened the subject with a person, indicating that people were thinking about it for a long time, keeping the subject back in their heads and wrestling with it (see also Lindner, 1998, 3).

[20] Adapted from my manuscript 'Humiliation and the Human Condition: Mapping a Minefield' (Lindner, 2000d).

[21] See also (Lindner, 2000b). This analysis is based on William Ury's anthropological work (Ury, 1999).

[22] Ury, 1999.

Table 1: The three elements of humiliation

Honour Humiliation

I choose to call the subjugation introduced during the second phase 'Honour humiliation.' Honour humiliation is a core characteristic of hierarchical 'civilizations' as they were erected on the basis of the surplus created by agriculture. It means that the subjugation of nature through small-scale tool making was augmented by another kind of subjugation, unfamiliar to former egalitarian hunter and gatherer societies, namely the subjugation of people through people: some human beings (the 'slaves') were instrumentalised by others (the 'masters'). In a hierarchy everybody acquires a rank associated with the person's or group's 'honour.' This honour is usually defended against humiliation, in other words against Honour humiliation.

Honour humiliation entails roughly four variants.[23] A 'master' uses Conquest humiliation for subjugating formerly equal neighbours into inferiors. As soon as the hierarchy is in place, the 'master' uses Reinforcement humiliation to keep it in place. The latter may range from seating orders according to honour and rank, to bowing rules for inferiors in front of their superiors, but may also include brutal measures such as customary beatings or even killings to 'remind underlings of their place.' Relegation humiliation is used to push an already low-ranking 'underling' even further down, and Exclusion humiliation means excluding parties from the hierarchy altogether, in other words exiling or killing them. The Holocaust and all genocides around the world are gruesome examples of the latter form of humiliation.

The fieldwork in Rwanda 1999 brought the author in contact with the long-standing hierarchical system in this region, a system that reminded me of pre-World War Germany. Both, Germany and Rwanda were also scenes of brutal Holocausts. In Rwanda Tutsi and moderate Hutu were the object of an orchestrated campaign of genocide at the hands of extremist Hutu in 1994,[24] in Germany the Holocaust victims were Jews and other 'unwanted people.' The backdrop for such atrocities was in both cases a hierarchy thoroughly embedded in cultural and personal structures. To quote the words of a Hutu from the North of Burundi, now an international intellectual,[25] 'A son of a Tutsi got the conviction that he is born to rule, that he was above the servants, while a son of a Hutu learned to be convinced that he was a servant, therefore he learned to be polite and humble, while a Tutsi was proud. A Tutsi learned that he could kill a Hutu at any time.' He adds, 'The concept of humiliation is related to tradition and culture: Tutsi are convinced that they are "born to rule," they cannot imagine how they can survive without being in power.'

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[23] See also Smith, 2000c.

[24] See Des Forges & Human Rights Watch, 1999 (also on http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/); Destexhe, 1995; Gourevitch, 1998; Guichaoua, 1994; Kamuka, 1995; de Lame, 1997; Ngakoutou, 1994; O'Halloran, 1995; Prunier, 1995; Reyntjens, 1994; Scherrer, 1996; Rakiya, De Waal, & African Rights, 1995.

[25] He wishes to stay anonymous. The interview was carried out in December 1998.

Human-Rights Humiliation

Today's knowledge revolution (Ury, 1999[26]) marks a deep change. It makes servility dysfunctional, since knowledge, particularly if linked to motivation and creativity,[27] thrives on the opposite of subdued mental forces – namely on people who have an alert sense of competence and self-possession.[28] Motivation and creativity are preconditions for the creation of innovative new products, services and strategies in a globally competitive market place. Patronage from a 'master,' even if yearned for by a 'slave,' is outdated. Even people who would like to keep enjoying the 'protection' entailed in 'slavery' are no longer encouraged, as bitter nostalgia among in the former DDR population shows, 'we were prisoners in the DDR, yes, we did not have much, yes, but we had a securely planned life, we did not have to worry! Now risk awaits us everywhere and we have to make decisions all the time!'[29]

Aside from being dysfunctional, wherever creativity is sought as a resource, humiliation has also become immoral. Honour humiliation is opposed in any human rights context on the grounds that it undermines human rights. It is no longer regarded as 'normal' that some people are 'sub-human' (at the bottom of social hierarchies) and others 'super-human' (at the top). The notion of universal human rights spreads the revolutionary idea that the powerful should respect the weak. It dignifies everybody's hopes, wishes and personal sensitivities.[30] Table 2 summarises this transformation of attitudes.

This human rights movement has gained confidence since the collapse of the Soviet empire. It may be hypothesised that it would probably have died out long time ago, if it were not for today's technology of mass communications.[31] Satellite television and the Internet mean that local evidence of conflict, cruelty and abuse have better chances to become visible to a global audience than ever before. Oppression is more difficult to perpetrate for long periods without being observed by third parties.[32] Arjun Appadurai explains in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* how the global movement of media technologies into every aspect of individual lives and the unprecedented mass migration of peoples across the world together define 'the core of the link between globalization and the modern' (Appadurai, 1996, 4).

The human rights movement may be described as a continuous revolution that cannot be 'finished off' by 'masters' as easily as revolutions in former times. On the contrary, it is

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[26] See also the work on the information age by Manuel Castells, 1996; Castells, 1997a; Castells, 1997b.

[27] 'We must stimulate creativity within our organization and in external research institutions, across traditional organisational barriers and traditional scientific disciplines, to enhance both conceptual and technological innovation.' These are the words of Egil Myklebust, leading Norsk Hydro, one of the largest Norwegian corporations (Myklebust, 1999, 6). See for the *Social Psychology of Creativity* Teresa Amabile, 1983 and Amabile, 1996.

[28] 'Social structures in the past have developed along lines of control of material or human resources, since in order to belong to the Jet Set one needed to be able to afford first-class airfare to far-off locations. But in cyberspace, the ends of the earth are only milliseconds away: social status depends on one's ability to outshine the information flood generated by competition among millions of websites. Never in history has the value of creativity and intelligence been so great (McKee, 1997, 2).

[29] Personal account from a DDR citizen to the author, 1995. See also the wide attention that the term 'risk society' attracts (Beck, 1987; Beck, 1992; Beck, 2000).

[30] See for example Bauman, 1993; Ignatieff, 1997; Weiner, 1998.

[31] See, for example, the work of Castells, 1996; Castells, 1997a; Castells, 1997b. Furthermore, relevant work in this area is being carried out by Ray Loveridge who has been explored the growing importance of new information communication technologies in organizing decision making within companies and the new flexibility of boundaries this produces. See, for example, Hooley, Loveridge, & Wilson, 1998; Casson, Loveridge, & Singh, in Boyd & Rugman, 1997.

[32] See, for example, Pavri, 1997; Watkins & Winters, 1997.

slowly gaining ground. Just recently the international human rights movement succeeded in drawing increased attention to economic, social and cultural rights that are entailed in human rights, supplementing the attention which political and civil rights received during the past decades, for example by such organisations as Amnesty International.[33]

HONOUR AND DIGNITY: TWO MODALITIES OF HUMILIATION

'Honour humiliation' in hierarchical agrarian and industrial societies: Human beings are subjugated and turned into tools within an imposed hierarchy. Humiliation is a 'normal' device of hierarchy-building, meaning that honour is attacked, defended, won and lost within a social hierarchy of dominant and subordinate groups, and this is accepted as legitimate.
'Human-rights humiliation' in today's global and egalitarian knowledge society: The subjugation of human beings, including their use as tools or their destruction, is morally condemned. Human-rights humiliation can be defined as the 'illegitimate' violation of human rights and the infliction of moral and emotional injury. There is a deep link between dignity and human rights insofar as humiliation attacks a person's core dignity as a human being, and inflicts very deep emotional wounds.

Table 2: Honour and dignity: two modalities of humiliation

In the following section the attempt will be made to dissect the elements of the concept of humiliation and differentiate three levels of 'depth.'

The Concept of Humiliation, Its Core and Its Principal Peripheral Layers

'People may differ in their responses not only by choosing different branches of interpretation but by stopping at different levels of discrimination within the same branch. If two persons choose the same branch but stop at different levels of discrimination within that branch, we say they have understood [the point of departure formulation] with different depths of intention' (Fox, 1992, 6). Or, as formulated above, seeking greater depth means asking 'why' and 'how' beyond the point where others stop asking. In the following, the concept of humiliation will be differentiated into three main degrees of depth, the inner core of the concept, the middle layer, and the periphery (including four peripheral layers).

The categorisation into seven layers is designed to present the concept of humiliation to researchers who focus on work that is placed at different 'depths.' It is meant to show how the concept of humiliation may invite research and which approaches and disciplines would be suitable at which layers.

Layer One, 'Putting Down,' Or the Inner Core of the Notion of Humiliation

Jan Smedslund, the founder of 'Psycho-logic'[34] cautions psychological research not to overlook core rules and elements. He warns psychologists against trying to appear 'scientific'

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[33] See for example the Human Rights Internet (HRI) on www.hri.ca.

[34] See Smedslund, 1988; Smedslund, 1998; Smedslund, 1997. '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

by mistaking 'scientifically looking' methods for sound science in places where core rules are blatantly apparent and studying 'infinite objects' would be silly. He writes: 'The finding that all bachelors are in fact unmarried males cannot be said to be empirical.' Smedslund warns that a lot of research is as pointless as trying to make surveys in order to find out 'whether bachelors really are all males' (Smedslund, 1988, 4). This, Smedslund states, would be an inexcusable waste of time and resources, and in addition a basic confusion of 'the *ontological status*' (4, italics in original) of psychology's research object.

It seems that the core of the notion of humiliation is well described by Smedslund's philosophy. The core of the concept of humiliation is a 'downward push.' The etymology of the word humiliation illustrates this point. 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) and 'a-baisse-ment' (French) all mean 'de-gradation.' All these words are built on the same spatial, *orientational* metaphor that places itself within a framework of relations. Analysis of the etymology of the word humiliation thus shows that at its core is the sense of a 'downward push.'

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 & Johnson, 1980, 14, capitalisation in original). If 'up' is happy, then 'down' must be 'unhappy': 'being put down' or humiliated makes unhappy. Kövecses, 1990, suggests that 'emotion concepts' have a distinctive metaphorical structure in language, and recent work (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996) indicates that emotion metaphors may indeed be culturally universal.

The first tool that comes to mind as being used for 'putting down,' is language. The terms 'idea,' 'notion,' 'concept,' 'item,' may be translated into the German word 'Begriffe.' The related verb is 'begreifen' and means understanding, or more precisely 'grasping.' In other words the details of the world are grasped, they are subjugated by words. This approach has some affinities with Zygmunt Bauman's perception that nature was the victim of a 'declaration of hostilities that made the unprocessed, pristine world into the enemy. As is the case with all genocide, the world of nature…had to be beheaded and thus deprived of autonomous will and power of resistance…The world was an object of willed action: a raw material in the work guided and given form by human designs…Left to itself, the world had no meaning. It was solely the human design that injected it with a sense of purpose. So the earth became a repository of ores and other "natural resources," wood turned into timber and water – depending on circumstances – into an energy source, waterway or the solvent of waste' (Bauman 1992, x-xi).[35]

The assertion that a 'downward push' is the core of the notion of humiliation entails more than a static state such as 'happy is up;' it rather describes a process and invites questions, such as, who is being put down? Or, who is putting down? These questions indicate that the core concept of humiliation is deeply relational, that humiliation is both a process

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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).

[35] I owe this reference to Dennis Smith. See also Smith, 1999, on Bauman. As Smith points out, Bauman's analysis overlaps with the approaches of critical theory (e.g. Adorno and Habermas) and post-structuralism (e.g. Foucault and Lyotard) but cannot be fully aligned with either. This paragraph is adapted from Lindner, 2000d.

occurring within social relationships and an emotion experienced by individuals or groups.[36] It is clear that relationships and experiences are closely connected. As Kenneth Gergen argues, emotions are 'elements within relational scenarios, actions that gain their intelligibility and necessity from patterns of interchange' (Gergen, 1994, 9). For example, anger or depression may be viewed not as a personal event, but as a constituent of a particular relational dance.[37] It is within this conceptualisation of emotions – and, as will be noted, Gergen is not its only advocate – that humiliation is located.

Emotions play many different roles within contemporary theories of psychology.[38] However, the study of humiliation is especially suited to an approach that emphasises the individual's interdependence with her environment. Relational concepts of mind such as James J. Gibson's ecological psychology of 'affordance' are relevant. Gibson 'includes

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[36] The last point may be hotly debated. Michael Bond, Professor at the Department of Psychology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, writes to the author (1999): 'I believe that you must draw a fundamental distinction between individual humiliation [you humiliated me] versus group [or national] humiliation [you or your group humiliated my group]. This personal/group distinction is important since people may act to avenge different sorts of affront [and create different sorts of affront for others!'

[37] 'Let us first deconstruct the traditional emotional terms - concepts such as anger, love, fear, joy, and the like. That is, let us view such terms as social constructions, and not as indexing differentiated properties of the mind or the cortex. With the aid of such deconstruction we are relieved of the endlessly burdensome search for the signified - that is, the elusive essence of anger, love, and so on. Further, the individualist conception of such terms may be bracketed. This critique also enables us to view the language of emotion, not as a set of terms referring to off-stage properties of the mind, but as performatives. That is, when we say, "I am angry," "I love you," and the like, we are not trying to describe a far off land of the mind, or a state of the neurons. Rather, we are performing in a relationship, and the phrases themselves are only a constituent of more fully embodied actions, including movements of the limbs, vocal intonations, patterns of gaze, and so on' (Gergen, in McGarty & Haslam, 1997, 10).

[38] Antonio R. Damasio, 1994, with his book *Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, provides a perspective on the important 'constructive' role that emotions play for the process of decision-making; it shows how the traditional view of 'heart' versus 'head' is obsolete. Daniel Goleman, 1996, in his more widely known book *Emotional Intelligence* relies heavily on Damasio. Goleman gives, among others, a description of the brain activities that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. The *Handbook of Emotion and Memory* (Christianson, 1992) addresses the important interplay between emotions and memory (with chapters by Bower, in Christianson, 1992; Heuer & Rausberg, in Christianson, 1992; LeDoux, in Christianson, 1992; Leichtman, Ceci, & Ornstein, in Christianson, 1992; McGaugh, in Christianson, 1992; Nilsson & Archer, in Christianson, 1992). Silvan S. Tomkins, 1962, developed theories of the human being and emotions (see his four volumes of *Affect Imagery and Consciousness*; see also Virginia Demos, 1995, editor of *Exploring Affect*, a book that eases the otherwise difficult access to Tomkins' thinking). Donald L. Nathanson builds on Tomkins' work; he writes on script, shame, and pride. Scripts are 'the structures within which we store scenes;' they are 'sets of rules for the ordering of information about SARS' (Stimulus-Affect-Response Sequences) (Nathanson, 1996, 3, see also Nathanson, 1987; Nathanson, 1992). Other writers working on scripts include Eric Berne, 1972, with his book *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* which illuminates Script Theory from the clinical perspective, Abelson, in Carroll & Payne, 1976 (see also Schank & Abelson, 1977) who address the issue from the cognitive perspective, and Tomkins who has already been mentioned and who adopts a personality-psychological perspective. The sociology of emotions is also relevant; see especially the work of sociologist Thomas J. Scheff on violence and emotions such as shame (Scheff, 1988; Scheff, 1990; Scheff, in Kemper, 1990; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991; Scheff, Retzinger, & Gordon, 1992; Scheff, 1997a; Scheff, 1997b). I thank Reidar Ommundsen and Finn Tschudi for their extremely helpful comments on aspects of these fields.

environmental considerations in psychological taxonomies' (de Jong, 1997a, abstract).[39] M. A. Forrester, 1999, presents a related approach, labelled 'discursive ethnomethodology,' that focuses on 'narrativization as process bringing together Foucault's (1972) discourse theory, Gibson's (1979) affordance metaphor and conversation analysis. Joseph de Rivera conceptualises the dyad as basic unit of the study of emotion, as does Roy F. Baumeister, and Romano Harré.[40]

To summarise, the core of the concept of humiliation seems to be 'putting down,' or 'pushing down,' a relational notion that invites the question of who is the actor and who is the targeted party, or who is the humiliator and who is the victim. This question leads to dyadic and relational conceptions of humiliation and to epistemological stances for explaining it, such as social constructionism as promoted, for example, by Kenneth Gergen.

Layer Two, Legitimate or Illegitimate Abasement, Or the Middle Layer of the Notion of Humiliation

Lee D. Ross disputes Smedslund's position and argues that psychology is not about asking whether phenomena exist or not, but about the question how they exist, to what extent and in which way.[41] Psycho-Logic does not make research superfluous; this is Ross's position. The apparent dissent between Smedslund's and Ross's position may gain clarity and discontinue presenting itself as dissent when we assume that Ross addresses another degree of depth of questioning as compared to Smedslund. Ross does not focus on the very core, but on more peripheral layers of the concept of humiliation.

As explained above, the way humiliation is perceived and handled within societies differs profoundly according to where the societies concerned are to be found on a continuum that stretches between two extreme positions, neither of which may be fully realised in practice. This continuum extends between the following poles: on the one hand, a hierarchical 'honour' society in which personal, dynastic or group 'honour' as determined by position in a rank order is regarded as the highest value and where the universalistic ideal of human rights is absent; and, on the other hand, an egalitarian 'human rights' society in which the legitimate claim of all individuals and groups to be treated with decency and respect is paramount and the assertion of honour on the basis of hierarchical rank regarded as illegitimate. The fundamental shift in basic cultural paradigms from 'honour' to 'human rights' transforms the way the experience of humiliation is socially constructed and indicates that humiliation is more likely to be defined as an illegitimate and unacceptable social practice within human rights frameworks.[42]

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[39] Gibson's work is hotly debated. W. Sharrock & Coulter, 1998, acknowledge that the work of James J. Gibson is widely acclaimed to be among the most important contributions to the critique of cognitivist approaches to the study of human visual perception, but question his assessments. See 'Some Remarks on a Relational Concept of Mind' (de Jong, 1997a), and the two subsequent exchanges (Meyering, 1997, de Jong, 1997b).

[40] See Joseph de Rivera & Dahl, 1977; Baumeister, 1986; Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Harré & Secord, 1972; Harré & Lamb, 1986; Harré, in Harré, 1986; Harré & Gillet, 1994. I thank the anonymous reviewer of this paper (in comments from 10th November 2000) for drawing my attention to de Rivera and Harré.

[41] Personal communication with Ross January 2000, quoted with his permission.

[42] Bond comments on this point: '… these feelings of unjust treatment are likely to be stronger in cultures with an egalitarian, or individualistic cultural tradition (Hofstede, 1980, chapter 5) where human rights legislation (Humana, 1986) empowers groups as well as individuals. In this light social norms promoting diversity and encouraging contact across group lines become countervailing forces against the drift towards group ethnocentrism. We need to begin the tasks of understanding the

The fieldwork in Africa showed how the notion of humiliation may be characterised by diametrically different connotations in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, since cultures are open and interpenetrate, the result is a multitude of hybrid or even internally inconsistent variants of acts and feelings of humiliation. More specifically, the 'downward push' was found to be a universal core meaning of humiliation that was as relevant in Africa as much as in Europe. Yet, 'putting down' somebody was not necessarily seen as illegitimate in all places and at all times; it was, for example, regarded as being a perfectly legitimate strategy by all concerned within the extremely hierarchical structures that have traditionally existed in Rwanda and Burundi. Conversely, in the more egalitarian Somalian society, where nomadic pride and independence were paramount, the researcher was assured that humiliation had not occurred, at least not in the past, because 'a man is killed, not humiliated.' Yet, since cultures are open, also Africa is deeply touched by human rights ideals that endow a person with a sense of dignity that 'ought not' to be humiliated; this new notion frequently stands in opposition to traditional practices, particularly to strict ranking orders, a fact that often creates secondary conflicts that, once again, might have humiliating effects.

William Ian Miller wrote a book entitled *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*,[43] where he links humiliation to honour as understood in the Iliad or Icelandic sagas and explains that these concepts are still very much alive today, despite a common assumption that they are no longer relevant. Cohen and Nisbett also examine an honour-based notion of humiliation (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). The honour to which Cohen and Nisbett refer is the kind that also operates in the more traditional branches of the Mafia or, more generally, in blood feuds, a scenario with which the present author is familiar 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; in this latter case, 'healing' humiliation means restoring the victim's dignity by empathic dialogue, sincere apology, and finally reconciliation.

Research by Ekelund & Tschudi, 1994, relates to the distinction between an old honour code context and a recent human rights context that does not anymore compel people to accept humiliation as normal, but turns it into a psychological problem. Ekelund and Tschudi employ Tomkins' Script Theory as an interpretative framework for a phenomenological understanding of abusive men. They find two contrasting script structures: 'A hypermasculine Macho script where violence is an instrumental and more or less effective means to dominate women, and a Nuclear script where violence by definition is an ineffective strategy which is related to deep and unresolved problems not necessarily connected to a need to control and dominate women. The authors conclude 'that the results conform best with a Nuclear script interpretation, where the man's relationship to his father seems to be an unresolved and deeply problematic theme' (abstract).

Geert Hofstede's work also touches upon the opposing poles of hierarchical societal structures as opposed to egalitarian structures. He has developed a classic systematisation of

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structure of these social norms (Moghaddam & Studer, in Fox & Prillentensky, 1997) and of using information about these norms to predict inter-group behaviors in diverse societies! (Bond, 1998, 11).
[43] 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).

culture dimensions; initially he detected four dimensions of culture. The first dimension is '*power distance*.' Power distance is 'the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally' (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, 419). Hofstede had carried out research on IBM employees around the world and had found that there are countries where subordinates follow their superiors' orders rather blindly, where organisations are centralised, with many levels within the hierarchy, and where employees on the lower levels tend to have low levels of professional qualification, - these are the countries with a high power distance, for example Mexico, South Korea, or India. Countries with low power distance have rather decentralised organisational structures and flat hierarchies, and highly qualified employees are to be found at any level of the hierarchy (for example USA, or Scandinavia).

It is to be expected that research on humiliation will render very different results if carried out in a traditional hierarchical societal structure that accepts the act and experience of humiliation as normal 'institution,' as opposed to societal contexts that frame the act of humiliation in a human rights spirit, namely as illegitimate and traumatising act. Vogel and Lazare document 'unforgivable humiliation' as a core obstacle in the treatment of couples (Vogel & Lazare, 1990). It is to be expected that couples will define humiliation in deeply differing ways according to their anchoring within larger societal code frameworks. The same is to be expected from crimes of violence. Robert L. Hale addresses *The Role of Humiliation and Embarrassment in Serial Murder* (Hale, 1994).[44] James Gilligan, a psychiatrist, suggests that humiliation creates violence (Gilligan, 1996), while Scheff and Retzinger[45] extended their work from shame and rage to violence and Holocaust, and studied the part played by 'humiliated fury' (Scheff, 1997a, 11).

In the field of psychology, Linda Hartling (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999) pioneered a quantitative questionnaire on humiliation (Humiliation Inventory) 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.' This questionnaire will describe 'normality' in very traditional hierarchical societies, in opposition to, for example, modern Western societies.

To conclude this section, it appears that the inner core of the notion of humiliation, the 'downward push,' may occur in two ways, firstly as a highly legitimate, 'normal' and even 'necessary' practice in traditional hierarchical societal contexts, and secondly as a profoundly illegitimate, hurtful and traumatising act and experience in human rights contexts.

Currently, hierarchies are being dismantled, both globally and locally, in a multitude of organisational and institutional contexts, from corporations to family relations. This transition is difficult and entails several problems, among others the process by which humiliation that was perceived as normal in a ranking order causes deep suffering when viewed from a human rights perspective. The journal of psychohistory, particularly the work of Lloyd de Mause,[46] or the work of Alice Miller,[47] explain how child rearing practices that guided former child rearing principles in fact were highly destructive. In 'Humiliation - the Worst Form of Trauma' (Lindner, 2000a) the present author tries to describe how principles, procedures and behaviour that in hierarchical honour based societies were 'normal,' today, in

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[44] See also Lehmann, 1995; Schlesinger, 1998.
[45] Scheff, 1988; Scheff, 1990; Scheff, in Kemper, 1990; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991; Scheff, 1997a.
[46] See, for example, Lloyd de Mause's work on child abuse, de Mause, 1990 and de Mause, 1998.
[47] Miller, 1983.

a human rights context, are viewed as basically harmful and traumatising, and that it is particularly the element of humiliation that inflicts the deepest wounds.

Layer Three, Different Cultural Modes of 'Putting Down,' Or the First Peripheral Layer of Humiliation

Furthermore, there is the periphery of the notion of humiliation. It starts with culture difference as the inner layer of this periphery. In some cultures – for example, in Somalia – it is perceived as humiliating to slap somebody with a shoe, in other cultures this would not mean anything. Furthermore one victim might get passionately vengeful while another victim may stay calm under exactly the same circumstances. In other words, cultural and personal differences characterise how the act and the feeling of humiliation are lived out.

Colonel Nur Hassan Hussein, from the Red Cross, Secretary General of the Somali Red Crescent, related to the present author on 9th January 1999 in Nairobi[48] that the worst humiliation in traditional Somali clan life would be to slap a man with a shoe (because this is done to women). Next would be rape and thereafter killing with mutilation, especially of the ears. He explained: 'Slapping with the shoe is extremely shameful, it creates a big problem with the other clan, it will mobilise the whole clan. As is mutilation, and rape. Killing and beating alone has fewer consequences. Because with the shoe and with mutilation you give a message! You are not just having a problem, losing your temper, or having a fight with a respected adversary, but you degrade the other intentionally!' This example shows that a foreigner who does not share the same cultural knowledge with her hosts is well advised to learn the cultural codes that are alien to her, otherwise she will inflict humiliation without knowing it.

Examples of culture difference in handling humiliation are uncountable. A German or French citizen for example, may perceive it as extremely humiliating if s/he is addressed with 'Du' or 'tu' instead of 'Sie' or 'vous.' A foreigner with English background, who is used to a simple 'you,' will not be able to fathom the humiliation entailed in addressing somebody inappropriately with 'you.' A police officer in France or Germany for example, who intends to humiliate a criminal, may use 'Du' or 'tu' because of its strong humiliating potential. Thus a foreigner may humiliate a German or French citizen inadvertently just by being uninformed. Clearly, this example is partly also fitting into the previous section, since it is related to hierarchical order, however, the same hierarchical order is not expressed in the same way in different cultures. Though English speakers may not understand the use of 'Du' and 'Sie,' they will understand different codes of ranking as pertaining to, for example, the British public school elite in its relation to 'lower' classes.

In Thailand you should not step on a piece of money, because this would mean stepping on the image of the king and besmirch and humiliate his reputation; in Muslim countries you should not turn the naked bottom of your feet towards Mecca; in some parts of the world you are expected to cover yourself in order to not insult your hosts, in other regions this would be irrelevant; in China and Japan it would be rude and fit in the definition of humiliation if criticism were aired directly and openly, in the United States the same behaviour would be interpreted as constructive problem solving. Examples can be expanded indefinitely. A vast amount of literature addresses this field,[49] particularly literature for

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[48] I will quote more from this interview further down.

[49] Geert H. Hofstede's work is to be placed here, see for example, Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, 1996, see also Fons Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, Michael Harris Bond, 1988; Bond, 1996; Smith & Bond, 1999, Clyde (Kluckhohn & Murray, 1948; Kluckhohn, in Tax, 1962), to name a few big names in this field that is characterised by a fast growing number of publications.

business personnel that sets out to enter into business relationships with people with different cultural background.

Layer Four, Interpersonal Variations in Stable Personality Traits

It is to be expected that humiliation is played out differently according to which individuals are involved, not just which cultural codes form its backdrop. This assertion is evident when looking at widely known personalities such as, for example, Nelson Mandela; it is clear that many other people would not have had Nelson Mandela's strength and wisdom in overcoming humiliation. However, Nelson Mandela is not the only one who gives witness to variation between people. It must be assumed that personality traits in general[50] play a part in affecting the tendency of individuals to perpetrate acts of humiliation, how they perceive other people's behaviour, and how they react when victimised by acts of humiliation.

'In the last ten years or so, there has been some real progress in understanding how personality traits are organized. Results from many studies, using a statistical technique called factor analysis, has led to the conclusion that a great deal of the differences between people can be summarized in five dimensions, or "factors," of personality. The Big Five, also known as the Five Factor Model (FFM), is a way to organize the many different conceptions of personality that theorists such as Freud have championed and that different tests measure. Some have viewed the FFM as psychology's equivalent to the periodic table in chemistry. Others see it as a map, with the factors akin to lines of latitude and longitude. Virtually all personality traits, motivations, and personality types can be described in relation to one or more of the Big Five factors' (Rubenzer, 1997, 1).[51]

The factor 'neuroticism' may be taken as a personality factor that lends itself to the expectation that high scorers will handle humiliation differently to low scorers: 'High scorers are prone to negative emotions like depression and anxiety, and also to jealousy, feelings of inadequacy, and anger. They tend to be tense, moody, "irrational", and to compare themselves to others. They tend to be dissatisfied with themselves, their marriages, and their jobs, and they worry too much. Such people tend to cope poorly with problems and stress, often doing things that make matters worse, such as blaming themselves or others, or ignoring the problem. Low scorers are perfect for high stress jobs, as they are stable, secure, and emotionally hardy. They may tend to overestimate their abilities and positive qualities' (Rubenzer, 1997, 1).

To exemplify this point, a person who is 'prone to negative emotions like depression and anxiety, and also to jealousy, feelings of inadequacy, and anger' may interpret other people's behaviour as humiliating much more easily and suffer from them more than a person who is 'stable, secure, and emotionally hardy.' The latter may handle situations in such a way that humiliation does not play a big role, since she either does not suffer that much from manifest incidents of humiliating acts towards her, or forecloses them by early and firm resistance.

This section pertains to the rift in academia as to whether 'nature' or 'nurture,' genes or environment are the basic principle that guides the human condition. One may ask: is there any way out of a stable trait? McCrae et al., 2000 recommend any 'intervention in human development' to address the 'culturally conditioned development of characteristic adaptations that express personality.' They write, 'Temperaments are often regarded as biologically based

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[50] See, for example Hogan, Johnson, & Briggs, 1997.

[51] See also Saucier & Ostendorf, 1999. The authors found 18 distinct content themes common to personality description in the English and German. The propose that these 18 subcomponents delineate necessary features of a more finely faceted measurement model for the lexical Big Five factors.

psychological tendencies with intrinsic paths of development. It is argued that this definition applies to the personality traits of the five-factor model. Evidence for the endogenous nature of traits is summarized from studies of behavior genetics, parent-child relations, personality structure, animal personality, and the longitudinal stability of individual differences. New evidence for intrinsic maturation is offered from analyses of NEO Five-Factor Inventory scores for men and women age 14 and over in German, British, Spanish, Czech, and Turkish samples (N = 5,085). These data support strong conceptual links to child temperament despite modest empirical associations. The intrinsic maturation of personality is complemented by the culturally conditioned development of characteristic adaptations that express personality; interventions in human development are best addressed to these' (Abstract).

Researchers who emphasise 'nurture' over 'nature' may reject this layer's significance, and rather concentrate on the following layer that focuses on the individual's embeddedness in her environment. Conversely, researchers who regard the genetic make-up of a person as central will give this layer higher priority.

Layer Five, Intra-personal Variation in Children Caused by Exposure to External Influences

Whole disciplines, including all the therapeutical schools, are based on the belief that human nature is not fixed, but malleable. These schools would not accept that a human being is 'neurotic' at birth and will continue so through life. Therapists may accept certain stability in personality traits, but they will not focus on this aspect; on the contrary, they will take as their field of activity all the aspects of personality that are variable and that stand in a meaningful dialogue with their environment. Such schools will not be satisfied by interpreting the suffering of a person by saying, 'she has "neuroticism" as personal trait, and therefore she will perceive as hurtful humiliation what others will not perceive as such, or at least others will defend themselves in a way that protects them from the suffering; this is human nature, nothing can be changed.' A therapist will go further and search for meaning in the suffering of the client or patient, meaning, that, if addressed and discussed, may be altered, together with its harmful effects. A therapist will, for example, focus on the conditions under which a person grew up and assume that the same person, if born in a more nurturing environment, would have developed a much healthier and robust psyche. The client and the therapist, both hope that therapy will restore this robustness, at least partly. This means that they expect to find that people vary over time; in other words they assume that a person will, hopefully, react to humiliation differently after therapy as compared to before, or may discontinue inflicting humiliation on others after therapy.

Bruce D. Perry relates a gruesome story that provides evidence of the severity of the potential effects of humiliation; in this story one consequence for children is addressed, namely 'affective blindness': 'A fifteen year old boy sees some fancy sneakers he wants. Another child is wearing them – so he pulls out a gun and demands them. The younger child, at gunpoint, takes off his shoes and surrenders them. The fifteen year old puts the gun to the child's head, smiles and pulls the trigger. When he is arrested, the officers are chilled by his apparent lack of remorse. Asked later whether, if he could turn back the clock, would he do anything differently, he thinks and replies, "I would have cleaned my shoes." His "bloody shoes" led to his arrest. He exhibits regret for being caught, an intellectual, cognitive response. But remorse – an affect – is absent. He feels no connection to the pain of his victim. Neglected and humiliated by his primary caretakers when he was young, this fifteen-year-old murderer is, literally, emotionally retarded. The part of his brain which would have allowed him to feel connected to other human beings – empathy – simply did not develop. He has affective blindness. Just as the retarded child lacks the capacity to understand abstract

cognitive concepts, this young murderer lacks the capacity to be connected to other human beings in a healthy way. Experience, or rather lack of critical experiences, resulted in this affective blindness – this emotional retardation' (Perry, in Osofsky, 1997, 128).[52]

This quote illustrates how deeply the human psyche may be altered by the impact of experiences of humiliation, especially when this happens to children, and how such an impact may harm a human being that otherwise would, presumably, be able to develop in a much more constructive and socially acceptable way. Therapy would, most probably be the more difficult the earlier such harmful influences impinged on the patient. A person who experienced humiliation as a child and was deeply harmed, may, through her wounds, also be expected to react to later incidents of humiliation in different ways than persons who were not injured in this way. This section is relevant for the study of personalities such as a Hitler in Germany,[53] or Siad Barre in Somalia, insofar as supposed childhood damage may turn them into perpetrators.

The field work in Somalia and Rwanda gave deep insights into the psychological struggle of child soldiers, and children who are forced to kill. For example, on 12th February 1999 the Resident Representative of the Dutch Relief & Rehabilitation Agency, DRA (Reconciliation Programme) Stephen Gerardo took the present author to a youth camp where about three hundred Hutu and Tutsi youth came together for *bushingantahe* (or *bashingantahe*) discussions, a traditional form of respectful problem solving through talking. 'Thousands of minors (children and adolescents) have participated in genocides and in assassinations. Adults used bribery, drugs and personal influence to incite these young people to consider killing trivial. Many adolescents have been drafted into the militia and the army. They have lost all notion of respect for human life. Just as in the case of adults guilty of such crimes, these minors - at the same time both executioners and victims – must be identified and judged. Whatever the outcome, they should be entitled to therapy to facilitate their r-eeducation and their social rehabilitation. Simple confinement would make these "executioner" children even more violent and would represent a great potential danger for the societies of the region. It is an acute problem requiring the rapid establishment of specialised structures' (Institut Universitaire d'etudes du developpement Genève (IUED), 1995, 5,6).

The integrity of the self may be damaged by humiliation, even in cases where humiliation is meant to be 'pro-social' as in honour societies. Yet, even in human rights societies, offenders against social norms are publicly shamed and humiliated, and many may even feel that their wrongdoing requires this punishment and accept it. However, supposedly 'prosocial humiliation,' may entail the potential to become 'anti-social humiliation' – this is

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[52] Very narrow windows - critical periods - exist during which specific sensory experience is required for optimal organization and development of any brain area (e.g., Singer, 1995; Thoenen, 1995). Absent such experience and development, dysfunction is inevitable (e.g., Carlson et al., 1989). When critical periods have been examined in great detail in non-human animals for the primary sensory modalities, similar use-dependent differentiation in development of the brain occurs for the rest of the central nervous system (Diamond, Krech, & Rosenzweig, 1964; Altman & Das, 1964; Cragg, 1967; Cragg, 1969; Cummins & Livesey, 1979). Abnormal micro-environmental cues and atypical patterns of neural activity during critical and sensitive periods can result in malorganization and compromised function in other brain-mediated functions such as empathy, attachment and affect regulation (e.g., Green et al., 1981). Some of the most powerful clinical examples of this are related to lack of "attachment" experiences early in life. The child who has been emotionally neglected or abandoned early in life will exhibit attachment problems which are persistently resistant to any "replacement" experiences including therapy (Carlson et al., 1989; Ebinger, 1974). Examples of this include feral children, Spitz's orphans (Spitz & Wolf, 1946), the Romanian orphans (Chisholm et al., 1995) and, sadly, the remorseless, violent child (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988; Myers et al., 1995; Mones, 1991; Hickey, 1991; Greenberg, Speltz, & DeKlyen, 1993)' (Perry, in Osofsky, 1997, 128).
[53] See, for example, Miller, 1983.

addressed by Klein (1991, 103). He argues that 'humiliating degradations …have as their final aim making a gung-ho Leatherneck out of an undisciplined, self-centered teenager.' He adds that ' there are studies which document the fact that medical education abounds with instances of personal put-downs and ridicule used by faculty and supervisors in the teaching of medical students and residents.'

Lakoff supports the view that humiliation, even if used with 'prosocial' intentions, may not be prosocial after all, 'Evidence from three areas of psychological research - attachment theory, socialization theory, and family violence studies - shows that the Strict Father model[54] does not, in fact, produce the kind of child that it is supposed to foster. It is supposed to develop children who have a conscience and who are morally strong, capable of resisting temptations, independent, able to make their own autonomous decisions, and respectful of others. But such research, especially socialization research, shows the Strict Father family tends to produce children who are dependent on the authority of others, cannot chart their own moral course very well, have less of a conscience, are less respectful of others, and have no greater ability to resist temptations' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 327).[55]

To be exposed to humiliating treatment may influence the entire psychic apparatus of the person concerned in a destructive way, giving rise to particular suffering that – in certain cases – may lead the victim of humiliation to become a perpetrator and set off 'cycles of violence.' Humiliation inflicted on children seems to cause particularly severe impairment.

Layer Six, Intra-personal Variation in Adults Caused by Exposure to External Influences

Children who are exposed to humiliating treatment may develop 'affective blindness' as is referred to above. Children with 'affective blindness are deeply handicapped in their capacity of being a person, they cannot apply the whole range of possible competence that a human being may possess if undamaged. However, not only children suffer from humiliation. Survivors of Holocaust and genocide may be marked for life by this experience, even though they were adults at the time of the incident. Fieldwork by the present author in Somalia and Rwanda gave ample evidence to the traumatic effects of genocide. The healthiest and most capable human being is broken down under such circumstances, however, the damage is not to be compared with the much more basic destruction in children.

However, a person who has been humiliated as a child, and then encounters humiliating situations as an adult, may become obsessed with humiliation and the plan to remedy it, for example by revenge. In the case of Hitler, a sequence of humiliations seems to have accumulated. Hitler grew up in Austria, with a loving supportive mother on one side and a harsh father and on the other (Bullock, 1991). The mother obviously contrasted the father's behaviour starkly and positioned the father's behaviour in a light that let it appear as more hurtful and humiliating than the presence of a mother would have done who would have justified and matched it. In his book *Mein Kampf* Hitler writes about his father: '…the old man began the relentless enforcement of his authority' (Hitler, 1999, 9). Hitler devotes another part of *Mein Kampf* to the humiliating position Germans suffered from in Austria. Hitler describes how Czech part of the population tried to 'eradicate' German influence, and how enraged he was that only a handful of Germans in the Reich had any idea of the 'eternal and merciless struggle' under way 'for the German language, German schools, and a German

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[54] '…children must not be coddled, lest they become spoiled. A spoiled child lacks the appropriate moral values and lacks the moral strength and discipline necessary for living independently and meeting life's challenges' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 314).

[55] See also Elias, 1996; Elias, 1994. I owe this reference to Dennis Smith.

way of life' (10). This piece of evidence illustrates that Hitler started his career in a very complicated situation, - not as a subject of the powerful and prestigious German Empire, but as a member of the German population in Austria who felt increasingly excluded and humiliated by Czech influence, and, even worse, who felt thoroughly neglected and betrayed by their own kin, namely the Germans in the Reich, who did not take their brothers' sufferings in Austria seriously at all. Furthermore, humiliation did not end for Hitler in Austria; he participated in World War I on the German side and experienced its humiliating defeat.

The hurt of humiliation created hunger for retaliation and Hitler promised to put this into effect. He claimed that he could restore Germany's power, pride and honour, putting it beyond the reach of enemies who wished to impose further humiliations upon it. He created a new 'culture,' the 'culture' of the Aryan 'Übermensch' ['super-human being'] who, according to his advocates, had a right, even an obligation to rule the world. The present author addresses these issues in several articles,[56] and aims at future research that will probe the supposed correlation between the degree to which Hitler and his followers felt humiliated and the degree of alleged cultural superiority that they constructed for themselves. The research project was triggered by this hypothesis and its potentially dangerous implications, since, if this correlation does exist, humiliation is capable of not just creating mild cultural differences, but also constructing a degree of cultural arrogance that has the potential to bring about genocide and Holocaust. This has, of course, to be carefully studied in further research.

Layer Seven, Intra-personal Variation Triggered by Exposure to External and/or Internal Influences

However, even independently of any therapeutical intervention, different life spans and situations cause people to act differently. Youth seems to lend itself to greater idealism, including fanaticism, than old age. Young men in youth gangs often fanatically defend their honour against humiliation, and an opponent's smile at the wrong moment may suffice as humiliation; there are few older men to be found in such gangs. However, other factors apart from age may alter the forms in which humiliation is enacted and perceived. Emotional events such as 'falling in love' may be relevant. A person 'in love'   with her enthusiasm and positive view on life will gloss over manifest acts of humiliation against her, or even foreclose them by winning over the potential humiliator by her optimism. However, even daily moods may change a person's manner of handling of humiliation; some days may be 'good days,' other days 'bad days' filled with frustration. Leonard Berkowitz, social psychologist, initiated research on the link between frustration, anger, aggression, called the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1993).[57]

To summarise all sections, the concept of humiliation contains
1. a core that builds on the universal idea of 'putting down,'
2. a middle layer that plays out the core in two diametrically opposing ways, namely that this 'putting down' is legitimate or not,

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[56] 'Love, Holocaust and Humiliation. The German Holocaust and the Genocides in Rwanda and Somalia' (Lindner, 1999b), 'Were the Germans Hitler's 'Willing Executioners'?' (Lindner, 2000r), 'Were Ordinary Germans Hitler's 'Willing Executioners'? Or Were They Victims of Humiliating Seduction and Abandonment? The Case of Germany and Somalia' (Lindner, 2000q), 'Hitler, Shame and Humiliation: The Intricate Web of Feelings Among the German Population Towards Hitler' (Lindner, 2000i), 'Were Hitler and Siad Barre 'Robin Hoods' Who Felt Humiliated by Their Own Followers? (Lindner, 2000s).
[57] See also Berkowitz, 1964. Berkowitz 1964. Berkowitz, 1972. Berkowitz, 1974. Berkowitz, 1978.

3. a first peripheral layer pertaining to cultural differences that affect groups of people,
4. a second peripheral layer that relates to differences in stable personality traits and the way these differences pertain to experiences of humiliation,
5. a third peripheral layer which relates to deep damage inflicted on children by humiliation altering their overall personality make-up in a deeply injurious way,
6. a fourth peripheral layer that addresses the hurt that is inflicted on adults by incidents that entail humiliation,
7. a fifth peripheral layer that concerns variations in the emotional condition of a person that influence the orientation of the person concerned towards acts and experiences of humiliation.

Concluding Remarks

A re-examination of the processes and relationships that constitute the dynamics of humiliation is long overdue; this is the position taken by Donald C. Klein in his article 'Humiliation Dynamic: An Overview' (Klein, 1991, 93), part of a special edition of the *Journal of Primary Prevention*: '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.'

Some important work has already been done. For example, the just mentioned *Journal of Primary Prevention* pioneered work on humiliation in 1991 (Klein, 1991), and 1992 (Barrett & Brooks, 1992; Smith, 1992). In 1997 the journal *Social Research* devoted a special issue to the topic of humiliation, stimulated by *The Decent Society* (Avishai Margalit, 1996). In an essay entitled 'On Humiliation,' Frederic Schick introduces *The Decent Society* (Schick, 1997, 131, italics in original) with the following words: '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.' Related to Margalit's approach is 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[58]).

The research on humiliation that forms the basis for this paper is a further contribution to the goal of building a decent society. Figure 1 depicts the four layers of depth that have been developed here. At the core, there is the core of the concept, 'pushing down,' the middle layer, namely the transition from legitimate to illegitimate use of this downward push, and the periphery with a large number of variations that are both culture-dependent and differing between individual persons.

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[58] Max Scheler set out some of these issues in his classic book *Ressentiment* (Scheler, 1961).

Periphery I - IV:
cultural and
individual
diversity

difficult transition

Middle
Layer I:
Hierarchy
(subjugation
is
legitimate)

Core:
'pushing
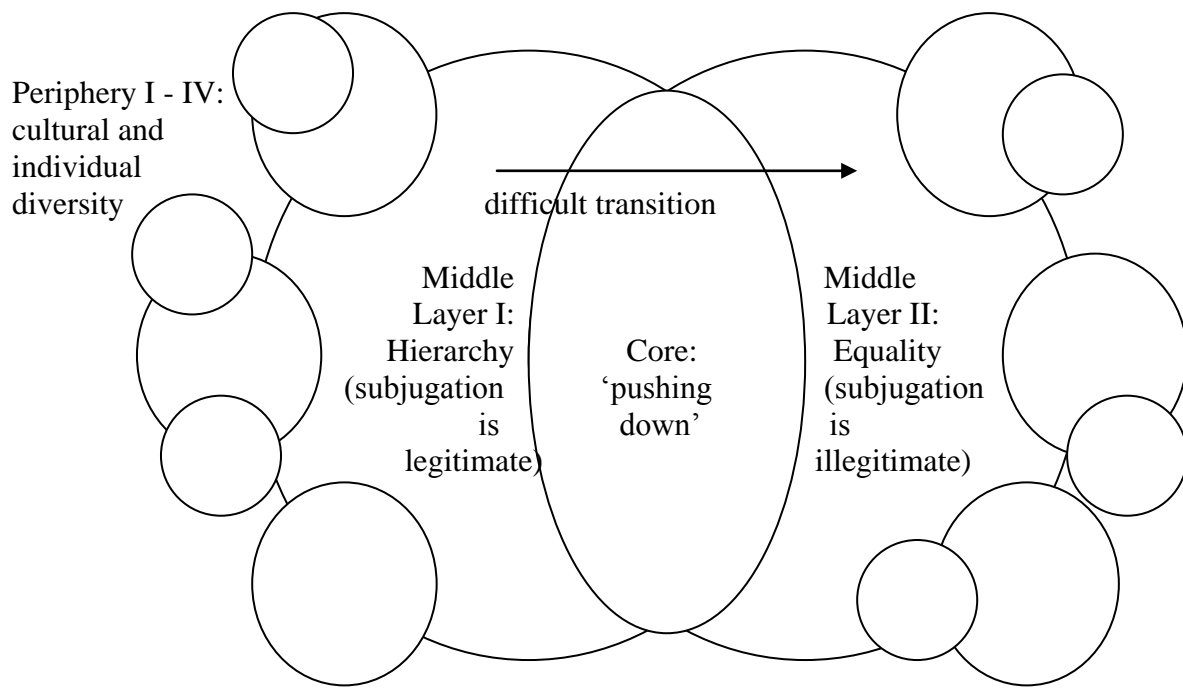down'

Middle
Layer II:
Equality
(subjugation
is
illegitimate)

Figure 1: The concept of humiliation, its core and its peripheral layers

Table 3 gives an overview over the layers of the concept of humiliation and to what extent they may be described as universal phenomena or relative ones, as well as the level of conceptualisation on macro-, meso,- or micro-levels.

The Layers of the Concept of Humiliation, Their Universality and Level of Conceptualisation				
Layers	**Level of conceptualisation**	**Universality**	**Number of variations**	**Salience of Humiliation**
1. 'Putting down'	Pertaining to the whole of human kind (social and organisational psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, anthropology)	Universal	One form	
2. Legitimate or not	Pertaining to groups (social and organisational psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, anthropology)	Universal (two basic forms)	Two forms	Human rights turn formerly 'normal' subjugation into trauma
3. Cultural variation	Pertaining to groups (cross-cultural psychology, anthropology)	Relative	Culture-dependent, as many variations as cultures	Misunder-standings that cause feelings of humiliation
4. Variation in personality traits	Pertaining to individuals (psychology, all of its fields)	Universal (endogenous, nature)	Five basic forms	High scores on neuroticism
5. Variation in psychological damage	Pertaining to individuals (psychology, all of its fields, e.g. developmental psychology)	Relative (exogenous, nurture)	As many variations as psychological damage	Experience of humiliation during childhood
6. Variation in psychological damage	Pertaining to individuals (psychology, all of its fields)	Relative (exogenous, nurture)	As many variations as psychological damage	Experience of humiliation
7. Variation in emotional state	Pertaining to individuals (all fields of psychology)	Relative	As many variations as emotional states	Any kind of frustration

Table 3: The layers of the concept of humiliation, their universality and level of conceptualisation

To summarise, seen from the perspective developed in this paper, the study of humiliation entails examining seven levels: firstly, the analysis of humiliation as inscribed within a fundamentally relational understanding of a 'downward push' that represents a universal idea; secondly, comparative macro-historical analysis which locates the process of humiliation concerned within the larger framework of honour and human rights; thirdly, humiliation in relation to cultural codes; and fourthly, fifthly, sixthly and seventhly, micro-social analysis focused upon the endogenous dispositions of a person, the exogenous influences a person is exposed to, as child or adult (including involvement in humiliating experiences such as, for example, rape victims or survivors of genocide), and variations in emotional states.

The question presented in the beginning of this article concerning the relation between humiliation and war, Holocaust and genocide may be answered in a way that examines each of these layers. It may be expected, that, as shown in Table 3, the probability that humiliation,

including its possible consequence of leading to cycles of violence, may play a more significant role the more layers are furthering the occurrence of humiliating acts and experiences. The core layer, the 'downward push' is an idea that theoretically is available to everybody in the same way, the maximum possible degree of this 'downward push' (killing, war, and genocide) may be exhausted by perpetrators to very different degrees. A person, for example, who feels frustrated, who, in addition, lived through humiliating experiences in her past, and scores high on neuroticism, who lives in a culture of human rights that defines subjugation as illegitimate and traumatic, and who, furthermore, lives in an inter-cultural context within which she feels humiliated, may be more prone to set in motion cycles of violence than a person who does not feel frustrated, who has not lived through humiliating experiences, and scores low on neuroticism, who lives in an honour context where subjugation is tolerated or even defined as 'good for you,' or lives in a human rights context that extends respect, and lives in inter-cultural relations that do not humiliate her.

This paper is intended to make a contribution towards building a decent society, both globally and locally, by presenting an analysis of the concept of humiliation that may improve our understanding of the workings of humiliation. This will, hopefully, be a useful tool in identifying and thus helping to prevent or heal humiliation – and also provide an orientation for the further research that is urgently needed.

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