Chapter 7

Genocide, Humiliation, and Inferiority
An Interdisciplinary Perspective

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This chapter argues that the root of genocides does not lie in ethnic fault lines, dwindling resources, "rational" conflicts of interest, or any general "evil" of human nature or modernity, but rather in complex psychological mindsets and behavioral clusters that exhibit their own homicidal – and also often suicidal – "rationality." History offers many examples of ethnic diversity having stimulating and enriching effects; dwindling resources may inspire cooperation and innovation; and "rational" conflicts can be solved by mutually beneficial negotiation. However, all of these contexts may turn sour, acquire a greater emotional intensity, and become essentialized because of another, underlying dynamic: that of humiliation.

Humiliation is related in complex ways to shame, scapegoating, and the depiction of other humans as "beyond the pale." Genocide may involve acts of humiliation carried out in response to fear of humiliation – more precisely, to fear of *future* humiliation, based on an experience of past humiliations and habitual submission. In part for this reason, genocidal perpetrators are not always drawn from long-established elites. Rather, they are often recently-risen subaltern actors, caught in a complex web of elements sometimes labeled as an "inferiority complex." They may be consumed by feelings of shame, along with a lingering admiration for the targets of the genocide. These dynamics are relevant not only for the study of genocide (especially subaltern genocide), but also for terrorism worldwide. They represent an important field of inquiry for all students of human security.

At the outset, we need to raise a number of puzzling questions and observations. For example: what is genocide? We often conceive of the phenomenon as an atrocity in which a powerful group selectively targets a less powerful group (characterized by ethnic or other markers), and we view this as reflecting either "rational" self-interest or "irrational" evil. Strikingly, however, almost every aspect of this framework is open to question. Consider the fact that genocide often seems to be less about "mere" killing and more about humiliating the targeted victims. Victims often are killed only after elaborate humiliation rituals; they are not slaughtered as honorable "enemies," but are dehumanized, degraded

to the level of "pollution," "rats," or (as in Rwanda) *inyenzi*, "cockroaches." Is it conceivable, then, that genocide is more about humiliation than about actual killing? Perhaps killing is part of the humiliation process, rather than vice-versa?

The assumption that genocide's victims belong to a less powerful group also needs to be destabilized. Is it not curious that minorities such as the Isaaq in Somalia, Tutsi in Rwanda, or Jews in Nazi Germany, even when they were objectively rather subdued and politically marginalized, still seemed so threatening to genocidal perpetrators that exterminating them seemed the only "solution"? Why was it not sufficient simply to marginalize them? Why did the perpetrators feel a need to go to elaborate lengths to "send messages" to the victims – messages, that is, of humiliation? Does a simple scapegoat explanation suffice?

We should look more closely, as well, at the element of conflicts of interest over dwindling resources, with genocide posited as the outcome of rational, self-interested calculations. In both African cases that this author has studied in depth, namely Somalia (a quasi- or proto-genocide in 1988) and Rwanda (full-scale genocide in 1994), the countries in question were regarded as beacons of development until shortly before the genocides occurred. International experts flocked to them and sang their praises. Both countries had every reason to continue along their existing path and to work to resolve resource conflicts in constructive ways. Most observers probably would have placed Somalia and Rwanda far down the list of African countries most likely to suffer genocides.

Furthermore, the rational self-interest of the perpetrators was typically undermined – not bolstered – by the genocides that ensued. Many perpetrators of genocides have ended up much worse off than they were prior to the genocide. In several instances, genocide can even be considered a *suicidal* strategy for its instigators. To the outside observer, apart from being immoral, genocide often seems self-defeating.

As for ethnic markers, in pre-Nazi Germany, Jews were much more integrated than they were in Eastern Europe. Somalia, likewise, constitutes the most ethnically homogenous country in Africa (a single ethnic background; a unifying language and religion). In Rwanda, too, historical-anthropological analysis turns up more in the way of ethnic similarity than the ethnic differences that were accentuated by colonial rulers to buttress their dominance. Other countries in Africa are much more fragmented than Somalia and Rwanda.

Does this mean, then, that *homo sapiens* is hopelessly evil by nature, imbued with destructive instincts that regularly burst through the thin veneer of civilization? Or is it, in fact, the other way round? Are humans peaceable by nature, and corrupted by a modernity that spurs them to mayhem?

This chapter argues that the dichotomy of human "nature" versus "culture" is misleading. Human nature is neither savage nor noble, because human nature *is*

culture. And culture is not an automaton. It mediates the environment that humans inhabit in a variety of ways, both driving emotions and being driven by them. Humiliation is perhaps the strongest force in this dynamic. Feelings of humiliation, and fear of humiliation, are "the nuclear bomb of the emotions." As with other emotions, humiliation is a historical-cultural-social-emotional construct: one that changes over time, wields considerable force, and can be directed to destructive ends.

I begin by sketching the background of research on humiliation. I then take a step back and examine the human condition through a historical lens, discussing the transition in human affairs from societies based on "ranked honor" to those proclaiming an "equal dignity," and the relevance of this framing for genocide studies. I then turn to consider genocide, and subaltern genocide specifically, asking questions such as: How does humiliation lend its own "rationality" to genocide? How does genocidal "cleansing" represent a ghastly means of purging feelings of inferiority and shame, derived from concepts of elite admiration?

The Background of Humiliation Research

My scholarly research has focused on the phenomenon of humiliation for the past decade. A doctoral project explored "The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts," focusing on the African cases of Somalia and Rwanda and the European case of Germany.[1] These investigations included 216 qualitative interviews in the three countries, focusing on their history of genocidal killing. Further interviews, some of them filmed, were carried out in Africa and Europe in 1998-99.

As the title of the project indicates, I focused on conflictive parties in Somalia and Rwanda and on those who sought to intervene. The results confirmed my hypothesis that, indeed, humiliation played a key role in war and genocide – not only in the distant past, but at present. In all cases, a fear of imagined future destitution, and of humiliating subjugation at another's hands, figured as a core justification for genocidal killing. In the German case, this fear took the form of a future *Weltherrschaft des Judentums* – a world dominated by Jews. In Rwanda, the fear was of democratic power-sharing with Tutsi, interpreted as meaning a return to Tutsi domination. Somalia's future was also regarded as threatened by the "arrogant" Isaaq tribe.[2]

Since the conclusion of doctoral studies in 2001, my research has expanded to include other cases in Europe, Southeast Asia, and the United States. I seek to construct a theory of humiliation that is transdisciplinary in nature, drawing on anthropology, history, social philosophy, social psychology, sociology, and political science.[3] I see humiliation not as an ahistorical phenomenon rooted in human "nature," but as a historical, cultural, social, and emotional construct that changes over time. I contend that present generations occupy a transitional world-historical juncture, between an "honor world" grounded in conceptions of ranked honor (with a concomitant experience of honor-humiliation) and a future world of equal dignity (with a quite distinct experience of dignity-humiliation).

In traditional hierarchical societies, elites were socialized to translate feelings of humiliation into an urge to react violently. They defended their honor against humiliation – whether with a sword, in duel-like conflicts, or in duel-like wars employing increasingly lethal weaponry. Subaltern actors, namely women and

male underlings, were expected to accept their subjugation humbly, subserviently, and obediently, without invoking or expressing feelings of humiliation. This conceptualization first arose around ten thousand years ago, when hierarchical societal systems emerged alongside complex agricultural societies.[4] Until recently, such hierarchical societal systems were regarded as legitimate, even divinely ordained. Even today, in many parts of the world, populations still subscribe to these concepts.

Humiliation in general can be described in a threefold sense, pointing simultaneously to an act, a feeling, and a process. Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group: a process of subjugation that damages or strips away pride, honor, and dignity. To be humiliated is to be placed, against one's will (or occasionally by consent – for example, in cases of religious self-abnegation or sadomasochism), and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is markedly at odds with one's sense of entitlement. Humiliation may involve acts of force, including violence. At its heart is the idea of pinning or putting down, of holding to the ground. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the process of humiliation is forcing the victim into passivity – a state of being acted upon and made helpless.

People react in different ways when they feel unduly humiliated. Some simply become depressed: anger turned inward against oneself. Others become enraged; still others hide their anger and carefully plot revenge. The person motivated by revenge may rise to become leader of a movement that instigates mass violence – by forging narratives of humiliation, and inviting the masses to invest their grievances in those narratives. Feelings of humiliation and fear of humiliation, if instigated and harnessed in malign ways by "humiliation entrepreneurs," may fuel mass atrocities in an enormously powerful and highly efficient manner.

The most potent weapon of mass destruction is thus the humiliated mind (whether the feeling of humiliation preexists or is manipulated). That mind may be ready to transgress all "normal" calculations of self-interest in response. A relatively small number of people so inclined can humble large armies – not least because cycles of humiliation, if kept in motion, may preempt the need for sophisticated weapons. In Rwanda, household tools such as machetes often sufficed; many victims paid to be shot instead of hacked to death. (In part, this was viewed as a more "honorable," less humiliating death.) Note also that the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, was achieved without access to high-tech bombs or missiles. Modern technology may thus serve as a magnifier of the humiliated mind – as in the Nazi Holocaust, where it enabled mass killing on an industrial scale.

Many elements of this equation merit attention I must unfortunately deny them here, for space reasons. To take one example: what is the difference between a humiliation felt "innately" and such a feeling when culturally prescribed or instigated by means of propaganda? If humiliation is felt at the individual level, how is it transmitted to the group, if indeed it is?[5]

Relatively few researchers have studied humiliation directly and explicitly. Among the few exceptions are Donald C. Klein, and Linda M. Hartling & Tracy

Luchetta.[6] Many scholars, for instance, fail to differentiate humiliation from other concepts. Humiliation and shame are often deployed interchangeably.[7] Donald L. Nathanson describes humiliation as a combination of three innate affects out of nine altogether: namely, as a combination of shame, disgust, and dissmell (*sic*).[8]

My own work addresses humiliation in its own right, not simply as a subvariant of shame. Shame carries a host of prosocial connotations. People who are "shameless," for example, are not seen as fit for constructive coexistence.[9] Shame is an emotional state that is only salient when we accept it – however painfully. Humiliation, on the other hand, is an assault that we typically seek to repulse, and which enrages us. Thus, in my conceptualization, Hitler managed to transform feelings of shame into feelings of humiliation among the German population. In interviews with Germans, Stephan Marks and Heidi Mönnich-Marks asked subjects about their motives for supporting Hitler.[10] One interviewee, born in 1917, described the hard, boring life in his village, and how Hitler's vision had lifted him out of his lowly condition. Hitler, he reported, showed him that his lowliness was not a *shame* to be accepted, but a *humiliation* to be rejected and fought.[11]

The view that humiliation may be a particularly powerful force is supported by the research of Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger, who studied shame and humiliation in marital quarrels.[12] They demonstrated that the bitterest divisions and suffering have their roots in feelings of humiliation and shame. Jan Smedslund developed the concept of "psychologic" which included emotions of anger, forgiveness, and humiliation.[13] William Vogel and Aaron Lazare likewise document humiliation as a serious obstacle in the treatment and counseling of couples.[14] In his recent book, *On Apology*, Lazare writes: "I believe that humiliation is one of the most important emotions we must understand and manage, both in ourselves and in others, and on an individual and national level."[15] His claim is supported by Robert Jay Lifton[16] and Jessica Stern.[17] Robert L. Hale explored the subject in his book, *The Role of Humiliation and Embarrassment in Serial Murder*.[18] Humiliation has also been studied in fields as diverse as love, sex, and social attractiveness; depression, society and identity formation; sports, history, literature, and film.

Of particular interest here is Scheff and Retzinger's extension of their work on violence and the Holocaust,[19] which examined the role of "humiliated fury" – a term coined by Helen Block Lewis[20] – in escalating conflicts between individuals and nations.[21] Vamik Volkan, Joseph V. Montville and colleagues carried out important psychopolitical research on intergroup conflict and its traumatic effects.[22] In his book *Blind Trust*, Volkan argues that a trauma, when experienced as humiliating and not adequately mourned, may lead to a desire for revenge and, under the pressure of fear/anxiety, to collective regression.[23]

In the realm of psychology, sociology, and trauma, Ervin Staub's work continues to be highly significant.[24] Staub makes the point that bystanders need to stand up – and not stand by – when humiliation is perpetrated on their neighbors. Avishai Margalit, for his part, argues that we must not only oppose individual acts of humiliation, but build societal institutions that do not humiliate their citizens.[25] Notions of honor and humiliation are addressed by Richard E.

Nisbett and Dov Cohen, who examine the particular form of honor operative in traditional branches of the Mafia and, more generally, in blood feuds.[26] Bertram Wyatt-Brown has studied the history of concepts of honor in the American South,[27] while William Ian Miller's book *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*, links humiliation to honor as it is understood in historical and literary classics like *The Iliad* and Icelandic sagas.[28] One should also note the research on mobbing and bullying, which touches on the phenomenon of humiliation, and on trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

With these framings in mind, let us consider humiliation in historical context, with reference to the transition from ranked honor to equal dignity, or from honor-humiliation societies to dignity-humiliation societies.

The Historic Transition from Ranked Honor to Equal Dignity

According to William Ury, most of human history passed relatively peacefully, with small bands of hunter-gatherers cooperating in noticeably egalitarian societal structures, amidst abundant resources. By roughly ten thousand years ago, *homo sapiens* had populated the entire globe – at least its more easily accessible regions – and uninhabited land became scarce. No longer could people just wander off to the next virgin valley; it was likely to be populated already (the anthropological term is *circumscription*). Increasingly, people had to stay in place, become more sedentary, and make do with the resources immediately available, primarily through a process of agricultural intensification.

Agriculture introduced a profoundly new way of life, much more malign than previously, because land belongs either to oneself or to another. This win-lose logic, in turn, fuels war. International relations theory uses concepts like the "security dilemma" to describe how arms races and war were all but inevitable in this atmosphere of fear of attack from outside one's community.[29] In response to these novel circumstances, hierarchical societies evolved, with masters at the top and lesser beings at the bottom. Human worthiness became ranked, with different degrees of honor attached to each stratum.

Very recently, however – just a few hundred years ago – humankind faced a second deep transition, as profound as the one that occurred millennia ago. Technological innovations allowed humans to relate to their home, the planet Earth, in new ways. Increasingly, knowledge and not land is the essential resource for sustainable livelihoods. Ury suggests that humankind is on the verge of creating a global knowledge society – "for the first time since the origin of our species, humanity is in touch with itself"[30] – thus returning to the win-win frame of the hunter-gatherers (since knowledge, unlike land, is an expandable resource). Human beings may thereby regain the potential for relatively peaceful and egalitarian societal structures.

Some of the predicted changes may already be seen in the growing acceptance of human-rights ideals, which have wrought a profound shift in the hierarchical

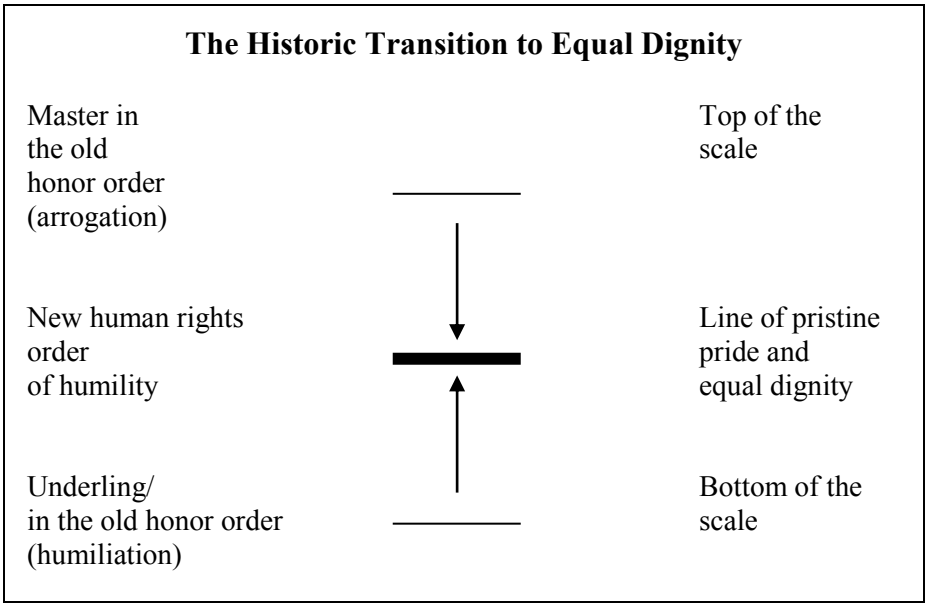

Figure 7.1: The Historic Transition to Equal Dignity

order. In the course of this process, the notion of humiliation has changed its point of attachment. The change is marked by the emergence of the modern meaning of the word "humiliation." William Ian Miller informs us that "the earliest recorded use of to humiliate, meaning to mortify or to lower or to depress the dignity or self-respect of someone, does not occur until 1757."[31] Under this new framework, the downtrodden and the subaltern *gains the right to feel humiliated*. Humiliation moves from being the privilege of the elite to becoming the right of the disadvantaged at the bottom of the ladder. Subaltern actors around the world today are socialized to feel humiliated by their lowliness – now defined as an illegitimate affront to their dignity rather than a legitimate humbling. The elites, by contrast, are called on to regain humility and are no longer permitted to resist such demands by labeling them as humiliating.

The human rights revolution could be described as an attempt to collapse the master-slave dynamic of the past ten thousand years to a midpoint of equal dignity and humility (see Figure 7.1).

The following section investigates the relevance of this historic transformation for the study of genocide, including subaltern genocide.

Genocide and the Historic Transition

In periods of transition, trends and tendencies are typically blurred and indistinct. So it is with the transition now underway from the traditional paradigm of ranked honor to a novel paradigm of equal dignity. Therefore, when we speak of "human rights based societies" in this discussion, we do so in the spirit of a Weberian ideal-type approach.[32] Perhaps genuinely human-rights based societies will emerge in a century or two. So far, we see only seedlings – but growths that nonetheless merit attention.

An important trend is that the more that concepts of human rights permeate a society, the more humiliation becomes hurtful; the more important it becomes as a topic for research; and the more relevance it gains for policy planning. This is because the four basic kinds of subjugation known to honor cultures become conflated in a single kind of humiliation when viewed through a human rights lens.

Subjugation in honor societies can be categorized in four variants.[33] A master uses *conquest subjugation* to drive formerly equal neighbors into a position of inferiority. When the hierarchy is established, the master uses *reinforcement subjugation* to keep it in place. This may range from rituals such as seating orders and bowing rules, to brutal measures such as customary beatings and killings. A third form of humiliation, *relegation subjugation*, is used to push an already subaltern individual still further down. *Exclusion subjugation* anathematizes its targets altogether – by exiling or even killing them.

In honor societies, all these variants are regarded as legitimate tools. The hint of violation that the word "humiliation" carries in contemporary parlance is present solely in relationships among equal aristocrats, not in the attempt to subjugate subaltern others. Attempting to debase others is always legitimate in a ranked society, which dictates that "might is right." Equals, however, will often oppose such debasement – we may label it "honor-humiliation" – and respond, for instance, by a challenge to a duel.

Human rights frameworks turn all four types of subjugation into utterly illegitimate *exclusion humiliation*. Attempts at subjugation of whatever kind are now regarded as a human-rights violation that excludes the victims from humanity. This situation produces intense pain and suffering, because losing one's dignity means being excluded from the human family altogether. In the absence of moderating forces – a Nelson Mandela, for example (see the conclusion of this chapter) – this pain may provoke violence, up to and including terrorism and genocide.

Table 7.1 seeks to summarize this argument, and to explore its relevance to genocide: The more societies are influenced by ideals of human rights, the more salient feelings of humiliation become – in a threefold fashion. First, subalterns feel more humiliated in a system where elites are no longer accepted as benevolent patrons, but come to be viewed as evil oppressors. Second, feelings of inferiority may provoke feelings of *shame* at such inferiority. Third, subalterns may feel *retrospective* shame – that is, shame that they ever admired elites and bowed before them. All three elements may be translated, in the absence of countervailing influences, into an urge to purge and "cleanse" shame and humiliation, along with the people who are seen as triggering these emotions.

Rwanda and Nazi Germany

Rwanda provides an excellent example of this dynamic in action. My research there made it clear that the country does not agree on its history. Rather, it has two core historical narratives. My friends of Tutsi background tended to emphasize the ethnic homogeneity of all Rwandans, the benevolent patronage of their

Table 7.1: The Historic Transition of Human History and Its Relevance for Genocide

The Historic Transition and Its Relevance for Genocide		
	Options for dissatisfied members of a group	**Relevance for genocide**
Prior to 10,000 years ago: Pristine, egalitarian hunter-gathering context	Dissatisfied members of a group had the option to wander off and find unoccupied land with abundant resources, while maintaining egalitarian societal structures.	There is no archaeological evidence that systematic genocidal killing occurred prior to ten thousand years ago.[34]
During the past 10,000 years: Agricultural context of ranked honor	Since unoccupied land was no longer easily accessible, the option of wandering was foreclosed. The remaining options were *acquiescence* to a master's domination, or attempting to replace the master. Dissatisfied masters, for their part, could force subaltern actors into alternative societal structures, and conquer neighboring groups.	There is ample archeological evidence of systematic war during the past ten thousand years, much of it taking the form of conquest of neighboring territory. Masters reinforced their domination of subaltern actors, but usually without excluding them entirely – e.g., to retain them as part of a workforce. Subalterns who succeeded in replacing masters tended to adopt their ways. In sum, conquest and oppression, though often very brutal, were less systematic and fanatical than the term "genocide" normally implies.
Vision for the future: Global knowledge society with equal dignity for every global citizen	Human rights frameworks call on societies to transform themselves in order to provide adequate subsistence to all citizens, so that they may enjoy equal rights and dignity. Humankind is depicted as a single family of equals. The traditional system of ranked honor is delegitimized.	1. Human rights transform the lowly position of subalterns into utterly illegitimate *exclusion humiliation*; the resulting "nuclear bomb of the emotions" may be translated into genocide. 2. Subalterns (former or present) may feel inferiority to masters as *shameful*, as something to be "cleansed" through killing and genocide. In sum, the delegitimization of traditional rank transforms old emotional scripts of submission into new shameful scripts of humiliation. Formerly obedient underlings become angry victims of humiliation. Strong feelings of humiliation may be translated into a call for genocide as a "cleansing act."

Tutsi forefathers over the centuries, and how happily Hutu clients accepted such patronage. Friends with a Hutu background, in contrast, have a tendency to deemphasize ethnic homogeneity, and deny that their forefathers ever acquiesced to Tutsi domination – which, they suggest, was not benevolent at all.

There might be a problem with both these views, one that helps to explain a genocidal outcome. Perhaps both perspectives are correct, at least in part. Might Tutsi rule in the past have been less benevolent than today's defenders wish to portray it? Might Hutu have acquiesced, even admired their patrons/oppressors more than they later chose to admit? Tutsi women, for example, were still highly sought-after trophies for wealthy Hutu men (see Taylor's chapter in this volume). In field research in 1999, I frequently heard it said that a Hutu man who gets rich "buys a house, gets a Mercedes, and marries a Tutsi woman."[35] In other words, a degree of habitual Hutu admiration for Tutsi superiority lived on after the Tutsi had been deposed from formal power, suggesting that voluntary submission to, and admiration for, a Tutsi elite might well have existed earlier as well.

Why was the Hutu revolution of 1959, which overturned the traditional order, not sufficient to transform the Hutu-Tutsi relationship at an existential level? How could the enthusiastic sense of liberation and dignification among Hutu after the revolution of 1959, which deposed the Tutsi rule in favor of the majority population, be transformed into one of the most extreme genocides on the historical record?

As noted above, many genocidal perpetrators have ended up worse off than they were prior to the genocide. To the outside observer, viewed through a lens of self-interest, genocide – apart from being morally repugnant – hardly seems worth the effort. Hitler brought ruin not only upon the world, but upon his own followers and himself. He led an entire society into the abyss, as if this had been his aim. Many Hutu *génocidaires* live miserable lives today. Somalian dictator Siad Barre died in exile – hated, not venerated, in his own country.

Yet Hitler, in taking his own life, declared himself satisfied. Eberhard Jäckel reports Hitler's last words, on April 2, 1945: "The world will be eternally grateful to National Socialism that I have extinguished the Jews in Germany and Central Europe."[36] In other words, it seems Hitler's "gain" was a glory lying somewhere beyond this Earth and beyond physical death. His and his followers' physical preservation on Earth was not necessarily the desired endpoint of his calculus. The "proud and dignified Germany" he sought to build might not take a physical form, but could receive its validation from *die Vorsehung* (providence), where humiliation and its redress would be recognized as meritorious.

Moreover, Hitler is said to have expressed satisfaction at the destruction of Germany in the war's later stages, because he judged that "his" Germans had failed him, and did not deserve to survive. For Hitler, by being destroyed *das Deutsche Vaterland* got what it deserved for failing to heed and implement his vision. After all, as Hitler explained in detail in his earlier book *Mein Kampf*, the German fatherland had neglected, overlooked, and humiliated the German minority in Austria (where Hitler was born and grew up). The elite of the German fatherland had miserably failed in World War I through unintelligent strategies, thus bringing

humiliation upon their entire people. In addition, Germany (and also England, in Hitler's view), was insufficiently alert to the supposed "threat" posed by Jewish world-domination and world-humiliation. In Hitler's mind, he had tried to teach Germans nobility and grandeur – but in vain. Now Germans were reaping what they had sowed: downfall. Hitler's twofold satisfaction could be formulated as him having saved German greatness and protected the world against future humiliation – even if this would be recognized only in the afterlife, and even if everyone else had failed him, including his own people.

We may hypothesize, then, that humiliation – as both act and feeling – is so powerful that it overrides calculations of earthly well-being. It may transform what is regarded as "rational" self-interest (before death) into redress of humiliation and protection against future humiliation, as a quasi-religious achievement (realizable also after death). The "nuclear bomb of the emotions" may encourage the adoption of extreme strategies that pursue a mystical transcendence, and which hamper pragmatic, "here-and-now" solutions. Dynamics of humiliation may thus be as potent and consuming as any addiction: "getting the fix" of redress for humiliation may override all other rationales.

Genocide as a "Cleansing" of the Inferiority Complex

Are not genocide's victims usually members of subaltern minorities? But if so, why are resources mobilized to humiliate and kill people who are already subordinate or powerless? Would not continued marginalization be more "efficient"? *What turns powerless people into such a threat?* In Rwanda, Somalia, and Germany, the elite would surely have gained more by incorporating the minority that they feared (whether Isaaqs, Tutsi, or Jews). Instead, they ascribed preposterous powers and abilities to the minority – namely, its ability to dominate and subjugate the rest – and surprisingly low abilities to themselves, namely their inability to integrate this minority peacefully. Why so little self-confidence?

What we observe here seems to have its roots in the dynamic known as the *inferiority complex*. In psychology, the term is connected with the Viennese psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870-1937). Thomas J. Scheff explains that "the concept of an inferiority complex can be seen as a formulation about chronic low self-esteem, i.e., chronic shame."[37]

Consider, in this context, the situation in Somalia under President Mohammed Siad Barre. Siad Barre initially gave people new hope. He condemned tribalism and clannism. He seemed to stand for a government that would attend to all Somalis' needs, not those of one clan alone. At least this was his rhetoric; perhaps, at the outset, it was also his conviction. He developed the economy and gave Somalis some years of relative peace.

Then Siad Barre set out to fulfill Somalia's great dream of unification. In 1978, he invaded Ethiopia to capture the Ogaden territory and bring the ethnically-Somali Ogaden "home" to Greater Somalia. Somalia's defeat in this conflict constituted a devastating humiliation. Siad Barre, however, survived the

humiliation by locating scapegoats. He targeted his fellow countrymen from the north, accusing them of having caused the defeat. The first objects of his campaign were the Majerteen, whose villages and wells he destroyed; later he turned on the Isaaq people.

In January 1986, the Morgan Report was issued, the work of General Mohammed Sidi Hersi "Morgan," Siad Barre's son-in-law of Majerteen background. Officially it was a top secret report on "implemented and recommended measures" for a "final solution" to Somalia's "Isaaq problem." Morgan writes that the Isaaq and their supporters must be "subjected to a campaign of obliteration" in order to prevent them "rais[ing] their heads again." He continued: "Today, we possess the right remedy for the virus in the [body of the] Somali State." Among the "remedies" he proposed: "Rendering uninhabitable the territory between the army and the enemy, which can be done by destroying the water tanks and the villages lying across the territory used by them for infiltration"; and "removing from the membership of the armed forces and the civil service all those who are open to suspicion of aiding the enemy – especially those holding sensitive posts." (A worn copy of this report, in English, was shown to me in Hargeisa in November 1998.)

Why did Siad Barre choose first the Majerteen and then the Isaaq as scapegoats? Not because they were easy targets. On the contrary, they were among the most challenging targets possible (and he paid the price: the Isaaq-dominated Somali National Movement [SNM] was among the leading forces that eventually toppled Siad Barre in 1991).

During colonial times, prior to independence in 1960, the north of Somalia had been the "British Protectorate of Somaliland," while the rest of present-day Somalia was under Italian rule. Through their traditional occupation as traders, northern Somalis had acquired greater managerial skills than southerners and had learned English under their colonial masters – internationally more useful than Italian after independence was achieved. Siad Barre, an autodidact like Hitler (intelligent, but lacking formal education), hailed from the formerly Italian south – the part of Somalia that was surpassed in education and efficiency by the northerners. One Isaaq woman reported to me during fieldwork in 1998 that she had met the dictator to plead for her imprisoned family members. "You Isaaq, you are so arrogant," Siad Barre allegedly told her. It confirmed her belief that the dictator may have suffered personal humiliation at the hands of Isaaq colleagues more educated than he was.

By choosing not weak scapegoats but strong ones, Siad Barre turned scapegoating into a double victory for himself, at least in the short term. First, he survived politically, by pointing the finger at others for Somalia's disastrous defeat in the Ogaden war. Second, he settled a score – his feelings of humiliation at the hands of the scapegoats.

From the genocide in Cambodia, to Rwanda and Germany, and in innumerable other cases, it is the skilled, the intellectuals, the knowledge carriers who are the first to be exterminated, by those who thereby cleanse themselves of feelings of inferiority and triumph over past humiliations. Thus, the commonly used

term "ethnic cleansing" may refer to more than the expulsion or eradication of another ethnic group. It may reflect subalterns' need to purge and eradicate their own unacceptable feelings of humiliation and shame.

Genocide as the "Cleansing" of Shame over Elite Admiration

This chapter took as its starting point genocide's many perplexing characteristics. One question raised was if genocide is about killing, why are so many victims not only killed, but elaborately humiliated before death? Genocide seems to be about humiliating the personal dignity of the victims, depicting a group as "subhuman," then reducing them to that level. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 offers an intricate and gruesome catalogue of practices aimed at destroying victims' dignity. The most literal way to achieve this was to cut short the legs of Tutsi (whose "superiority" was symbolized by their height, on average greater than that of Hutu), or to sever their Achilles tendons so they would be forced to crawl. These actions not only shortened Tutsi bodies, but "cut them down to size" in a metaphorical sense, obliterating the source of their alleged arrogance.

The driving force behind these actions may be what I term *elite admiration*. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler describes at length the Austrian political personalities whom he most admired – many of them Jews.[38] Reading his text, it becomes obvious to the reader that he once admired Jews, even if only early in life. Later, Hitler attempted to expunge every trace of Jews – along, perhaps, with his admiration for them. Cognizant of their talents and aptitudes, he was convinced that they had the capacity to dominate the world if he did not prevent them from doing so. His fear of this "global elite" and his desire to exterminate them were founded at least in part on admiration of their competence.

Elite admiration and imitation is deeply inscribed in the culture of rank that has dominated the world for the past ten thousand years. It has been taught to, and learned by, subaltern actors through the millennia. Imitating masters was one way that subalterns could ascend in rank (another way was to replace their masters in uprisings). Still today, despite the fact that these mindsets are losing their structural underpinnings, elite admiration and imitation are widespread. Modern celebrity culture attests to this. The most recent "high culture," that of the French court of Versailles, was not only imitated throughout Europe and its colonies, but is today imitated in the French-castle style adopted for millionaires' mansions in Texas, or the dwellings of the newly-rich in contemporary China.

At first glance, such imitation seems to be a quite innocent phenomenon. But it is often dysfunctional and highly inappropriate to the environment to which it is transposed. The urge for imitation, moreover, is often so strong that even disability and self-mutilation may be accepted as consequences. Chinese foot-binding, for example, began as a "luxury" among the idle rich, who did not require women to be mobile enough for housework. But it was soon adopted by the subaltern classes, becoming a prerequisite for marriage – even though the female's reduced physical capacity and mobility had a negative impact on poorer households that could not afford servants. Foot-binding lasted for a thousand years, during which time about one billion women suffered its mutilations.[39]

Earlier, we mentioned the Hutu revolution in Rwanda in 1959, which produced an enormous outpouring of enthusiasm among the subaltern masses. How could this enthusiasm later turn into genocide? What is it about a liberation movement that can carry it too far? What

transforms saviors (and even Hitler and Siad Barre were initially welcomed as saviors) into other- and self-destroyers, when "mere" oppression would have maintained them in power more efficiently? Perhaps what takes place is that *shame becomes unbearable* – shame rooted in subalterns' admiration of former elites, a dynamic accentuated further by the advent of modern concepts of human rights.

Briefly revisiting the difference between shame and humiliation is relevant at this point. Shame may be defined as a humbling experience that a person agrees she has caused, while humiliation describes experiences imposed by others – those that the victim has *not* caused. Shame, by contrast with humiliation, is often prosocial – shamelessness is not a virtue! But there is an exception: a special and emotionally destructive type of shame, namely *unacknowledged and bypassed shame*. This is so unbearable that it cannot even be acknowledged and is accordingly denied and disavowed. For Scheff, bypassed shame is the motor of all violence,[40] the source of what Lewis calls "humiliated fury."

Human rights ideals amplify this phenomenon, because they call not only for an end to tyrants, but for an end to rank altogether. This turns elite admiration into a doubly shameful voluntary self-lowering and self-humiliation. In former times, subalterns rose and stepped into the shoes of their envied masters, taking over as objects of subaltern admiration and imitation. But when the master-subaltern dyad is dismantled, there is no place left for elite veneration. Therefore, shame for elite admiration in subalterns – particular bypassed shame – may explain why such particularly extreme cruelties and humiliations are inflicted when subaltern actors rise up to take "revenge."

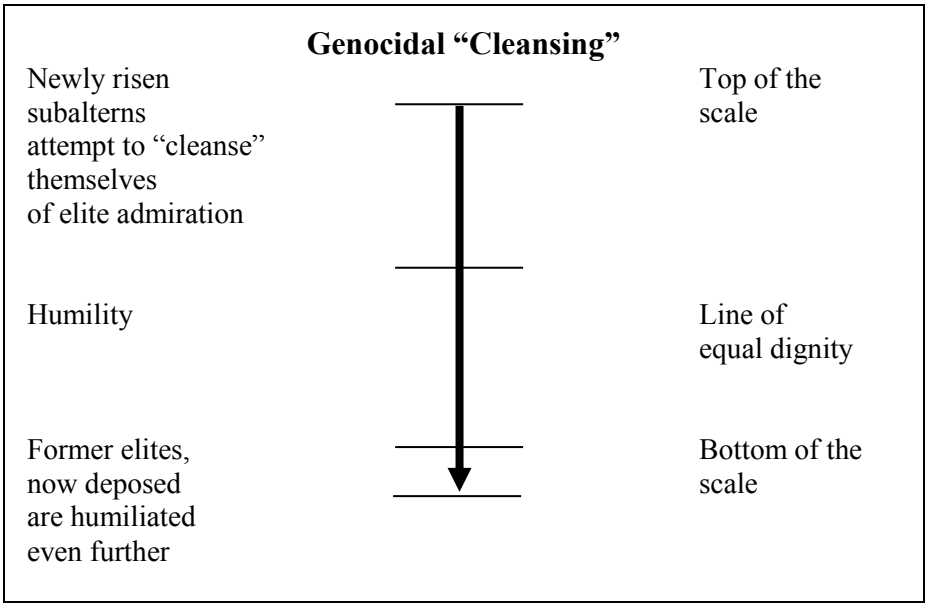

Figure 2: Genocidal "cleansing"

Notions of "cleansing," ethnic and otherwise, thus may also point to subalterns' need to cleanse and eradicate their own elite admiration. The obsession with tearing even the babies out of mothers' wombs, to wipe out "root and branch" every trace of the formerly admired elite, may derive from this shame. For entrenched elites, the "mere" oppression of subalterns might suffice. Rational considerations may prevail; excessive humiliation or killing is simply "not worth the bother." But former subalterns – now risen to power – often seem obsessed with "total cleansing" and may perpetrate extreme forms of violence and humiliation on the former (and, one suspects it is feared, *future*) elites.

For the study of genocide, Figure 1 may be adapted to arrive at Figure 2. The cruelest behavior may not be exhibited by long-established elites, but rather by subaltern actors attempting to "cleanse" themselves of inferiority and elite-admiration.

"Getting the fix," in the case of humiliation, may also be conceptualized as resolving dissonance and self-doubt and gaining "purity."[41] "How can I feel sympathy, let alone admiration, for oppressors I ought to hate!" – this is the dilemma. It may be that genocide's victims are dehumanized and humiliated, before being exterminated not so much because perpetrators actually believe they merit this, but *because they have doubts and need to persuade themselves through the infliction of atrocity*. They may feel a need to go as far as total extermination, precisely because they do not trust their own ability to always hate. They may fear that weakness on this score will lead to a return of the oppressors, and to a fresh round of humiliation.

This doubt is analogous to what Paul Rusesabagina has called the "soft spot." Rusesabagina's story is well-known, and formed the basis for the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda*. He managed to shelter more than 1,200 Tutsi and moderate Hutu in the Hotel Mille Collines, which he managed, while killers roamed outside with guns and machetes. In a BBC *HARDtalk* interview with David Jessel in May 2007, Rusesabagina explained his strategy: he would find what he called the "soft spot" in the perpetrators. "Nobody is totally good or totally evil," he attested.

Rusesabagina described how, at one point, he traveled from his house to the hotel, along with his family and people who had sought refuge in his house. At a roadblock, he was handed a gun and ordered to kill his family and everyone accompanying him; thereafter, he too would be killed. He looked into the eyes of the man who gave this order, while the man proceeded to oversee the killing of others at the roadblock. For five long minutes, Rusesabagina attempted to hold his gaze. He noticed that the man could not withstand it: he had touched this Hutu perpetrator's inner awareness of his own guilt. Eventually, his party was allowed to leave.

Conclusion

Rusesabagina's account may point to possible strategies for genocide intervention, based on a deeper understanding of humiliation and shame. Leaders with genocidal tendencies must, of course, be prevented from taking power, wherever possible. But even democracy offers no guarantees: such leaders may

find ways to manipulate democratic mechanisms and exploit democratic freedoms to incite followers, as Hitler did.

Another strategy, therefore, may be to dignify the masses that otherwise serve as "fodder" for the narratives of humiliation into which they are "invited" by humiliation entrepreneurs. Efforts must be made to explain, through the education system and media, that feelings of impurity and dissonance are an inevitable, indeed healthy part of the human condition; they do not require purgation or "cleansing."

This offers some hope amidst the bleakness that sometimes threatens to overwhelm us. Hunter-gatherer cultures, existing up until ten thousand years ago or so, provided a cultural context that promoted cooperation. This was enough time for such cooperation to be partly "hardwired": for genetic adaptation to derive from cultural adaptation. Then, about ten thousand years ago, a cultural context arose that favored war. The intervening millennia, however, were not sufficient for genetic adaptation – so this aspect is *not* hardwired. Soldiers have to be trained and inculcated to kill their "enemies," since killing is not something that human beings do "naturally" and easily. (We usually forget how much we depend on our expectation that fellow human beings outside our own tribe will not kill us. The global tourism industry, for example, would founder without this expectation!)

We currently inhabit a transitional period that promotes malign aspects drawn from the legacy of the past ten thousand years, such as an orientation toward competition and accumulating material goods; but which also features benign elements derived from the period prior to the rise of agriculture, which is now linked to the similarly benign aspects of an emerging knowledge society. Thus, neither ancient nor modern culture can be said to corrupt or (alternatively) ennoble humans. Rather, certain aspects and elements of these cultures can corrupt, while others exert a positive influence.

I agree with William Ury that for all its negative aspects, globalization – by paving the way for a global knowledge society – may allow us to push toward a more dignified and egalitarian world. We need to become more attentive to this trend, and start channeling it constructively. I call for globalization to be married to *egalization* (the implementation of the human rights ideal of equal dignity). Such a strategy might allow us to build a decent global village, following the call for a decent society issued by Avishai Margalit.

Egalization must be implemented at all levels, from the global "macro" context to the "micro" contexts of relationships with our families, colleagues, and friends – even within our own psyches. Egalization offers an opportunity to dismantle tyrannical systems and their destructive ways of defining human conduct, including the tyrannical behavior that emanates from deep within us. Another way to frame this is as thesis-antithesis-synthesis. In the *thesis*, subalterns subserviently accept oppression. In the *antithesis*, subalterns violently reject oppression. In the needed *synthesis*, human beings transcend oppression rather than merely rejecting it, and construct thereby a new dignified world.

In former times, the process stopped at the antithesis stage. Subaltern actors rose up, replaced the tyrant – and maintained the tyrannical system intact. This is

also what the *génocidaires* and terrorists of today accomplish. They act like tyrants in their fight against tyrants. They focus on the *what*, not the *how*. In many cases, this flows from an enthusiastic fervor for liberation – from aspirations to greater dignity. In my research, I attach the label "extremists" to those who perpetuate cycles of humiliation rather than seeking to end them. "Moderates," by contrast, are those who have the intellectual and emotional resources to end such cycles.

I see some of these dangers, and also the potential for constructive action, in the present-day "war on terror." If we accept that feelings of subaltern inferiority influence the decision to adopt terrorist methods, it hardly suffices for target populations to triumphantly cry: "Oh, they only hate us because they admire and envy us!" – as if the fact of envy bolsters the targets' superiority. And subalterns who rise to power need to understand that feelings of inferiority are not something to be ashamed of, or to "cleanse." They stem, rather, from a historic evolution that first cultivated hierarchies, including emotional mindsets of inferiority and elite admiration for subaltern actors, only later to delegitimize them. The emotional pain associated with this transformation cannot be healed by violent mayhem, whether terrorist or counterterrorist in nature. It can be healed only by gradually expanding boundaries of a world in which all people have equal rights and access to dignity.

In recent times, few leaders have so exemplified the possibility of such a healing strategy as Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Mandela could have followed the example of Rwanda's Hutu leadership. He would certainly have had the power to unleash genocide on the white elite in South Africa. He did not. One can only agree with Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 1997 comment "to white people of this country: you don't know how lucky you are."[42]

Clearly, post-Apartheid South Africa still faces many challenges. However, the lessons that Mandela taught the world are still relevant. After 27 years in prison, some of his prison guards had become his friends. In short, his strategy was not to kill enemies, but to turn them into partners. Let us accordingly end this chapter with a quote from Mandela himself:

> I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.[43]

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[1] Lindner, "The Psychology of Humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany."
[2] See a deeper discussion in Lindner, "Were Ordinary Germans Hitler's "Willing Executioners"?", and Lindner, "Humiliation and Reactions to Hitler's Seductiveness in Post-War Germany "."
[3] See, for example, Lindner, "Avoiding Humiliation", Lindner, "In Times of Globalization and Human Rights", Lindner, "Emotion and Conflict", Lindner, *Making Enemies*.
[4] For a comprehensive description, see Ury, *Getting to Peace*.
[5] Those interested in pursuing these themes further may consult the author's extensive writings at http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php.
[6] Among the few exceptions are Klein, "The Humiliation Dynamic", and Hartling and Luchetta, "Humiliation: Assessing the Impact of Derision, Degradation, and Debasement".
[7] Among others by Tomkins, *Affect Imagery and Consciousness*, whose work is carried further by Nathanson, *Shame and Pride*.
[8] "Dismell" is a neologism created by Tomkins. If "disgust" is a word indicating a bad taste, "dissmell" is the analogue for a bad smell.
[9] See, for example, Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.
[10] Marks and Mönnich-Marks, "The Analysis of Counter-Transference Reactions As a Means to Discern Latent Interview-Contents".
[11] Ibid, paragraph 12.
[12] Scheff and Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence*.
[13] Smedslund, "Social Representations and Psychologic."
[14] Vogel and Lazare, "The Unforgivable Humiliation: A Dilemma in Couples' Treatment".
[15] Lazare, *On Apology*, 262.
[16] Lifton, *Super Power Syndrome*.
[17] Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*.
[18] Hale, "The Role of Humiliation and Embarrassment in Serial Murder".
[19] Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism and War*.
[20] See, for example, Lewis, *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation*, 19.
[21] See also Scheff, *Emotions, the Social Bond and Human Reality*, and Smith, Cambridge, *Globalization, the Hidden Agenda*.
[22] Volkan, Julius, and Montville, *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*.
[23] Volkan, *Blind Trust*.
[24] Staub, *The Psychology of Good and Evil*, Staub, "The Roots of Evil".
[25] Margalit, *The Decent Society*.
[26] Nisbett and Cohen, *Culture of Honor*.
[27] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.
[28] Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays*.
[29] See, for example, the work done by Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict", and Hardin, *One for All*.
[30] Ury, *Getting to Peace*, XVII.
[31] Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays*, 175.
[32] See for more detail Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*.
[33] Smith, "Organisations and Humiliation", 541-544; Lindner, *Making Enemies*, 28-29.
[34] See, for example, Haas, *Warfare and the Evolution of Culture*, 8, or Ury, *Getting to Peace*, 35.
[35] Lindner, *The Psychology of Humiliation*, 351.
[36] Jäckel, *Hitler's World View*, 64.
[37] Scheff, "Shame in Self and Society", 258.
[38] See the first chapters, where Hitler describes his youth and adolescence, in Hitler, *Mein Kampf*.
[39] See, among others, Levy, *The Lotus Lovers*.
[40] Scheff, *Aggression, Male Emotions and Relations*, 4-5.
[41] See Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. As to the topic of purity, see, for example, Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

[42] Tutu and Davis, *Moment of Truth*, interview.
[43] Mandela, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, 542.