How Global Citizenship Can Heal: Supporting Thomas Friedman

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Thomas Friedman (2005) has just written a fascinating book about the flattening of the World. He describes in rich detail how the globalization of technology breaks down barriers, creates unprecedented level playing fields, and gives access to people who so far were excluded.

However, there is another message out there as well: The gap between the rich and the poor increases. This means that the world does not grow flatter, on the contrary. A UN report has found that the world is more unequal today than it was 10 years ago, despite considerable economic growth in many regions (*Report on the World Social Situation 2005: The Inequality Predicament*, by DESA, August 2005, obtainable from https://unp.un.org/details.aspx?entry=E05RWS&change=E).

How can we reconcile these opposing descriptions of our world? Which is true?

I think both are true and Friedman's world will help heal the gap.

My reflections derive from more than twenty years of international therapeutic experience coupled with the social psychological research on humiliation that I began in 1996. My four-year doctoral research project in social psychology was entitled, *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties* (Lindner, 2000, University of Oslo). My book *Making Enemies Unwittingly: Humiliation and International Conflict,* will be published soon (Lindner, 2006, Westport, CT: Praeger).

Globalization and egalization

Two transitions characterize current historic times. Firstly, there is rising awareness that there is *one* humankind inhabiting our tiny planet. Humankind is coming together into

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one single in-group. Anthropologists – read for example William Ury (1999) – call this the *ingathering* of the tribes of the earth. Various aspects of this trend have been described and analyzed by many, among them by Manuel Castells (1996), and more recently, as mentioned above, by Thomas L. Friedman (2005).

Secondly, there is an increasing awareness of human rights ideals. The first paragraph of article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, reads: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Millions hope that human rights calls will soon represent more than empty rhetoric and will render equal dignity to all citizens in this *one tiny interdependent global village* of ours.

Both transitions are related, however, one precedes the other and the time-lag of the second as compared to the first causes great pain. *Globalization* (understood here as the coming-together of humankind) has not yet merged with *egalization*.

I coined the term *egalization* to match the term *globalization* and at the same time differentiate from words such as equality, equity, or egalitarianism because the main point is equal dignity. The term *egalization* is meant to avoid claiming that everybody should become equal and that there should be no differences between people. *Egality* can coexist with functional hierarchy that regards all participants as possessing equal dignity; *egality* cannot coexist, though, with hierarchy that defines some people as *lesser* and others as *higher* beings.

Globalization is driven by technology, while *egalization*, though pushed by *globalization*, it is ultimately driven by ethical decisions. We could decide to crack down on flattening tendencies in favor of protecting the privileges of the haves and keep out the have-nots. It is an ethical decision to throw our weight behind the technology that flattens the world.

If we imagine the world as a "container" with a height and a width, *globalization* addresses the horizontal dimension, the shrinking width. *Egalization*, on the other side, concerns the vertical dimension; human rights call for a flat "container," for all of us to dismantle the high "container" of masters at the top and underlings at the bottom. As of yet, we still live in a "high container," or in an *undignified* and *ramshackle global village* were millions suffer. Human rights defenders work for *globalization* to "marry" *egalization*, in other words, for a *dignified* and *decent global village* for all.

How becoming a global citizen is healing for me

What I gained through building a global identity as my primary identity is personal healing and a deeper understanding of what the world needs to heal.

My personal experience of homelessness makes me identify in great sympathy with the quest for "home" and belonging and its potential to cause violent conflict. My personal life experience resembles that of many Jews who, over centuries, felt at home in their

dreams of Jerusalem without ever having been there; it also resembles that of Palestinians who feel that Haifa, for example, is their home, even though they were born in a distant refugee camp and have never set foot in Haifa. I was born into a displaced family from Silesia, which is now part of Poland. Together with millions of others, they lost their homeland in 1945. My parents have lived in continuous trauma since that time. The loss of their homeland broke their hearts. During the first twenty or thirty years of my life, my identity was like a "black hole" of non-belonging. This is how I felt: "Where my family lives, we are not at home, we are rather unwelcome guests; however, there is no home to go to."

From 1984 to 1987, I opened one chapter of "book Earth" in more depth, namely the chapter "Arab World." I was first a psychological counselor and clinical psychologist at the American University in Cairo, till 1987, and then had my own private practice in Cairo, from 1987 to 1991. I offered counseling in English, French, German, Norwegian, and, in time, also in Egyptian-Arabic. My clients came from diverse cultural backgrounds, many from the expatriate community in Cairo – Americans, Europeans, Scandinavians, Palestinians, and citizens of other African countries – as well as from the local community, both Western-oriented, and traditionally-oriented Egyptians. Part of my work was "*culture-counseling*," meaning that foreign companies working in Egypt asked me for my support in understanding Egyptian culture, Arab culture, and Islam.
    From 1991 to 1993, I wrote my doctoral dissertation in social medicine about quality of life, or how a "good life" is being defined in Germany as compared to Egypt. I furthermore collected experience as a politician and activist (see www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin.php). In 1996, I began with my current social psychological research. Since 2001, I dedicate my time to developing a *theory of humiliation* and promoting *humiliation studies* as a new global and transdisciplinary field – please see Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, HumanDHS, http://www.humiliationstudies.org, and Lindner (2006).

Given my background in a displaced family, I could be tempted to wish to reclaim "my homeland." But I have chosen another path. The world has become my "homeland" and I am a "global citizen." I do not feel the need to fight for Silesia where my parents were born, because wherever I am, I consider my home. I am at the forefront of a growing number of people who are developing a global or at least multi-local identity and become citizens of the world. My home is now what William Ury (1999) calls the *global knowledge society*.

Practicing to be a *global citizen* demonstrated to me that human beings all over the world indeed are connected in their wish for recognition, a wish that turns into feelings of humiliation when this recognition is felt to be failing. I have learned that this universal human desire for recognition and connection can make me feel at home everywhere.

Admittedly, embracing all humankind as *my family* has often been a painful process. Such a process is like building a ship while at sea. It meant learning to "swim" and not to "cling." Developing a global identity meant that I transformed from being attached to lost land (Silesia) in pain, to connecting to the global knowledge society in joy. In other

words, I have replaced a circumscribed piece of land (Silesia) with knowledge and with the entire planet Earth and all humanity. As a consequence, I do not wish to stir up resentment and ultimately war against Poland in order to "re-conquer" Silesia and reinstate the Silesian culture of my parents. Not only would the price be too high (war) – the world and I no longer use land as a main resource.

True, by identifying primarily with all humanity, in many ways I am betraying my parents' Silesian culture, accepting what Judith Viorst (1987) writes about in *Necessary Losses*. This I do, even though I love my parents deeply, profoundly resonate with their suffering, and would be overjoyed if their cultural practices could survive. Losses hurt. I do not let go of "my culture" easily. However, this loss also enriches me. It teaches me to appreciate diversity and understand the conditions for diversity to be enriching.

I deeply resonate with Ury's conceptualization that for many millennia (since the inception of complex agriculture around 10,000 years ago), humankind has been caught in the rather malign win-lose framing that is brought about when land is the resource that people depend on. The emerging *global knowledge society* today promises to bring back the more benign win-win framing that hunter-gatherers enjoyed prior to the era of agriculture, this time knowledge – not wild food – being the expandable resource that renders win-win framings.

How defining the world as one world heals the world

There are lots of disadvantages connected to defining oneself as belonging to a sub-group of humanity (as opposed to all humanity), and one of them is the trap of bias. A host of biases usually occurs in relationships between in- and out-groups.

Phenomena such as the *false polarization effect*, which makes us underestimate what we have in common with out-groups, are central. Solomon Ash (1907-1996) was a pioneer in studying biases such as *reactive devaluation*. Reactive devaluation means that any proposition for compromise that is put forward by an out-group is rejected, regardless of its contents, while the own group's arguments are regarded by its members with sympathy, merely because they come from within the group. As a result, even the best solution is rejected: I cannot embrace your proposal, even if it is marvelous and totally I agree, because I would betray my in-group.

Another bias, the *attribution error* describes the human tendency to believe that *our* successes are *ours*, while our failures are due to adverse circumstances; this evaluation is turned into its opposite when *others* are judged. *Others'* successes are perceived as due to favorable circumstances, while only their failures are *theirs*. As long as our out-groups do not know how negative we think about them, there is no problem. However, our world increasingly grows interdependent. When the world learns how we forgive ourselves what we do not forgive others, and how we deem us to be noble and others not, feelings of humiliation can cause violent rifts that otherwise would not be there.

In 1993, I wrote my doctoral dissertation in social medicine on the topic of quality of life. I asked Egyptians and Germans "What is a good life for you?" (Lindner, 1993, *Quality of Life: A German-Egyptian Comparative Study,* Hamburg: Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Hamburg). What I found was that all have in common the wish for society to be cohesive and harmonious. All desire a world in which their children can prosper and be happy. The difference was that *secular distance to religion* was seen as a guarantor for social cohesion by many of my German interview partners, while the Egyptian interviewees saw *secular distance to religion* precisely as a hindrance to a "good life." In other words, all parties wished for society to offer a good future to their children, but they differed on the methods: religious beliefs were seen in opposing ways, either as a beneficial force that holds society together, or as a potential divider.

In the case of the "Cartoon Wars" of 2006, triggered by Danish cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, all sides feel that their most noble beliefs are being exposed to humiliation, namely their noble vision for a world that offers a good life to their children. All participants feel deeply hurt and humiliated. All sides regard the others' attacks as evil. Muslims imagine that the cartoons are part of a "Western" conspiracy against Islam, and in the West, many construe the situation to mean that Muslims wish to attack "our freedom." Both sides are wrong. Both endanger world peace with views that are the result of biases such as the above-discussed false polarization effect, attribution error and reactive devaluation, which obscure that we all wish for the same, a world that is livable for future generations.

To conclude, the destructive outfall of in-group/out-group biases is that urgently needed efforts to find joint solutions to destructive conflicts and safeguard world-wide cohesion are hampered. The involved parties are incapacitated in their efforts to cooperate on finding and implementing good solutions, among others due to blindness as to the fact that we all have more in common than we think, and secondly, because urgently needed good solutions are rejected. Humankind is well advised to avoid in-group/out-group differentiations. The solution is to define all humankind as *one single* in-group, with *no* out-group. Our commonalities need to be our priority, not our differences. Diversity enriches, however, it can also divide. Diversity is enriching only when we embed it into our common identity of being *one single* family of humankind who faces the joint task of building a sustainable future for our next generations.

Concluding remarks

The question of "home" is profoundly relevant for the inhabitants of planet Earth. It is relevant for the identity of each citizen, for the solution of conflicts around the world, and for the kind of world that we envisage to build for our children in the future. Do we wish to build a world of domination/submission, where a few have luxurious homes and the rest has virtually nothing? Or do we want a world that provides everybody with a dignified home? Do we envisage a world of separate nations (with "enemy nations" endangering our homes)? Or do we want the entire world to be our nation that gives home to all? How should local and global aspects of identity be combined? What should we reply, when we are asked, "Where are you from?"

I have discussed these questions at great length with my dear friends on all sides of the divides of conflicts in many world regions. There are two ways out of homelessness, two ways out of being denied a dignified home: violent fight for a limited piece of land, or building a profoundly new global world of all-encompassing inclusiveness. Nobody forces us to define "homeland" in narrow ways. We are free to adopt the entire planet as our home and transform it, in the future, to house all humankind in a sustainable way. I regard such a struggle to be more benign than competition for narrowly defined pieces of land. Safety is not to be found in "owning" territory, because the concept of ownership is relational – it is dependent on its larger social context. Safety emanates only from building secure relationships among all world citizens in an all-encompassing home. The mere option of such a vision, I hope, can facilitate compromises by reducing the despair with which people hold on to every inch of land they believe is "not yours." And it might decrease the anguish with which people cling to "my culture," whose contents and boundaries they elevate to be the essence of their identity, a strategy that easily divides the world and introduces conflicts that an interdependent world cannot afford which needs emergency rescue for a host of global problems.

Primary identity built on sub-segments of the Earth's land, or erected on national, ethnic or religious delineations, precludes what we need most when we wish to cooperate for building a better world: in-group trust. The maximum one can obtain with out-groups are

friendly alliances. We never give the unconditional bonus of trust to out-groups – even the most friendly ones – that we give to our fellow in-group members. Pressing people into in-group/out-group delineations incapacitate the world. We need to give due priority to our commonalities, to our belonging to *one single* in-group of humankind, where everybody enjoys respect for equal dignity.

The world believes that Germans during World War II ought to have stood up and not stood by when Jews were transported away. 6 million people died in the Holocaust. Today, 12 million children die each year before they are 5 years old, of preventable diseases and poverty. I identify with that. Global exploitation of resources and the destructive effects of the way we use them makes our world unlivable for coming generations. I do not want to stand by. And in order to stand up, I identify with all humankind as my first priority, as my home, and relegate all "local" identities to a second plane. The *global village* is my home, I call it my *World House* (see also Immanuel Kant's term "Welthaus"), and I wish to have as many diverse rooms in it as possible, however, only if they do not destroy the house. Currently, we live in a *deplorably undignified Welthaus,* where millions suffer. In order to stand up, I do my utmost to design my life as a global citizen and try to do whatever I can to protect my family. This orientation not only heals my wounds from feeling homeless, but also leads me to believe that my experiences may be helpful to others and stimulate fruitful visions for a sustainable future world.

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