

The Effect of Humiliation on the Escalation of Conflicts

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Abstract

Deteriorating security and working conditions for human rights defenders are the topic of the conference *Activists under Attack: Defending the Right to be a Human Rights Defender*, hosted by the Human Rights House Network, 13th -14th October 2004 in Oslo, for which this paper has been prepared.

The paper starts out by establishing the link between human rights ideals and the phenomenon of humiliation. Thereafter, the phenomenon of humiliation is addressed, how humiliation is experienced by the individual person, and which consequences such experiences may have for conflict. Lindner describes feelings of humiliation as “the nuclear bomb of the emotions,” which might be instrumentalised by “humiliation-entrepreneurs.”

Subsequently, current changes in the human rights movement are being discussed. The desire of the human rights movement to build a world where *all* have the opportunity to live dignified lives – realising the entire plethora of human rights, including social and economic ones – represents an even graver provocation to power elites, who often believe in a *just world* and thus entitled to their privileges, than ever before. Their reluctance, in turn, triggers disappointment in hopeful believers among the poor and downtrodden. Human rights defenders are thus placed at the center of ubiquitous feelings of

disappointment, frustration, anger and mutual humiliation: Elites feel humiliated by calls for new humility, and the downtrodden feel humiliated by empty human rights rhetoric.

Human rights defenders are caught in several ways in the current intensification of the human rights revolution. Firstly, they themselves may cause feelings of humiliation in the recipients of their services out of insensitivity, insensitivity that is both more probable and more obscene in a world of large gaps between rich and poor.

Secondly, higher echelons in human rights organisations not seldom undermine the human rights advocacy of their own workers in lower echelons, thus feeding suspicions of humiliating double standards, and leaving their workers discredited and unprotected. The problem here is that the “Realpolitik” of national interests often is incompatible with human rights ideals and, the higher up in ruling structures, the more this “Realpolitik” pushes aside human rights values. This tendency includes organisations that work for human rights, thus introducing a stifling inherent contradiction into their very core.

A very complex case of humiliation occurs when victimhood and humiliation are invoked by people who lack humility. In such cases, human rights advocates are caught in that they are obliged to help victims, however, cannot condone solutions that violate human rights. How are human rights defenders to react if asked to support victims who proceed to become new oppressive masters? How are they to respond to allegations that they humiliate victims by not helping them with violent uprisings? Enraged people, invoking victimhood and feeling entitled to violate human rights as a remedy, may emerge as powerful humiliators of human rights defenders.

We urgently need to expose the inherent incompatibility between *just world thinking* and human rights ideals. Furthermore, the current incompatibility between *universal* human rights ideals and the “Realpolitik” of *national* interests needs to be resolved and human rights ideals are to be realised at all levels of public policy, particularly at the highest global level.

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Deteriorating security and working conditions for human rights defenders are the topic of the conference *Activists under Attack: Defending the Right to be a Human Rights Defender*, hosted by the Human Rights House Network, 13th -14th October 2004 in Oslo, for which this paper has been prepared. The background text for the conference alerts us as follows:

Human rights defenders face a variety of problems and dangers. For example, harassment from State authorities; arbitrary detention and torture; extra judicial killings; “disappearances”; denial of freedom of movement; suspension from their employment; being victims of slander campaigns in government controlled media; in obtaining legal recognition of their associations; exercising their rights to assemble their members, and receiving external funding.

The organisers of the conference asked me to focus on humiliation, on how humiliation is experienced by the individual person, and which consequences such experiences may have for conflict. The organisers indicated that they believe that humiliation plays a role on all sides; not only authoritarian regimes use humiliation against activists, also activists may at times be perpetrators. The organisers suggest that processes of humiliation are always dysfunctional for human rights work. I have been working on the topic of humiliation since 1996, and am the founder of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, please see www.humiliationstudies.org. In this paper, I adapt material from several publications, see Lindner, 2003, Lindner, 2002, Lindner, 2001.

Let me begin with a short overview over the complexity of the notion of humiliation. Humiliation is a phenomenon that is not easily grasped or defined and to study it requires a lot of humility. Humiliation is a word that is used both for the act of humiliation perpetrated by a perpetrator and for the feeling of humiliation felt by a victim. However, sometimes there is no “perpetrator.” The “perpetrator” may just want to help; still the receiver of this help may feel humiliated. Thus help may humiliate – a situation where only the receiver of help defines a situation as humiliating, not the actor. Or, neither actor nor victim may define a situation as humiliating, but a third party. The social worker, for example, who wants to rescue the battered wife, might be the only party to invoke the notion of humiliation, while the wife insists that beating her is her husband’s way of loving her. Marx used the term “false consciousness” when workers did not feel humiliated and did not want to rise. Furthermore, there are “legitimate” and “illegitimate” feelings of humiliation. In the case of honour killings, for example, a father may feel that family honour is humiliated when his daughter is raped and that this humiliation must be remedied by killing her. A human rights advocate will protest and state that killing the girl – rather than remedying humiliation – cruelly compounds humiliation on her and humanity in general. Then, we may expect that humiliation is avoided, yet, some people

seek it, for example in sado-masochism, or religious rites, when people whip and humiliate themselves to praise God. Humiliation thus is an act, an emotional state, a social mechanism, that is relevant for anthropology, sociology, philosophy, social and clinical psychology, and political science. Its multidisciplinary nature may be the reason for why the notion of humiliation has almost not been studied on its own account so far.

The link between human rights and humiliation

The conference, for which this paper has been prepared, addresses the situation of the human rights defender and is hosted by the Human Rights House Network. Thus, I see my first task in establishing the link between human rights and humiliation.

I suggest that human rights ideals entail two elements that are familiar to every person on our planet, however, that both elements reach beyond familiar use. Firstly, human rights ideals bear resemblance with the ingroup ethics we all know – in other words, with the ethical and moral norms that we apply to persons who we regard to be part of our ingroup. However, even though the contents of ingroup ethics are familiar to everybody, the scope of these ethics is new. In tact with the *ingathering* of humankind (*ingathering* is an anthropological term for the coming-together of tribes, Ury, 1999), ingroup ethics increasingly are extended to the entire *global village*¹, and outgroup ethics lose their scope. Human rights ideals, conceptualised in this way, are thus nothing new, on the contrary, they resemble what we all know, only that this is applied to a larger group of people than we are used to, namely to all humankind.

Secondly, human rights ideals entail another element that is familiar to us, the element of revolution, however, also in this case with a new twist, namely as a continuous revolution that never ends, as well as a revolution that reaches further than ever before. Human rights ideas represent a revolution insofar as their advocates advocate a deep social change, a transition toward the notion of *equal dignity for all* – away from societies with *ranked worthiness* for human beings (with *lesser* beings and *higher* beings). As we all know, in former times, it was regarded as normal, even as divinely ordained, that societies included “essentially” *higher* and “by nature” *lesser* beings. In human rights contexts this is not anymore regarded as legitimate.

How is the notion of humiliation connected to those new elements entailed in human rights ideas? Let us start with asking about the human rights defenders’ position in society, both locally and globally.

Human rights call for *equal dignity for all*, and this represents a direct affront against established elite power. Human rights defenders stand in square opposition to power elites who believe that their privileges are legitimate. However, there is more. Human rights defenders call for the dismantling not only of old abusive elites, but for the dismantling of the hierarchical system of ranking human worthiness itself. In other words, human rights defenders do not want to replace old abusive elites with new abusive elites, but change the entire system. As a result, human rights defenders not only stand in opposition to old elites, but also to new elites, namely to those angry revolutionaries who try to violently replace their masters so as to form new oppressive regimes. Thus, human rights defenders are positioned in between reluctant oppressive old power elites (the

¹ My definition of the term *global village* differs from the definition by McLuhan and Fiore, 1986, who coined the term, in that I emphasise the coming-together aspect of globalisation.

former white elite in South Africa, for example) and furious subjugated people who are on the rise (the Hutus, for example, former underlings, recently risen to power, who committed genocide on their former masters in Rwanda). As formulated above, human rights defenders promote a revolution, however, a new kind of revolution, a revolution that is more inclusive and less violent than earlier revolutions, and a revolution that is never ending. Mandela's inclusive dismantling of Apartheid can serve as an example; Mandela could easily have unleashed genocide on the white elite, however, he worked for a constructive and inclusive dismantling of the oppressive hierarchical order of *higher* and *lesser* being, and, this revolution will never be completely "finished."

Feelings of humiliation are at the center of the human rights revolution. They may even be called the "fuel" of the human rights revolution. In the course of their work, human rights defenders typically create feelings of humiliation in underlings, feelings that these underlings were not harbouring before or at least were not aware of before. The process of eliciting emotions has often aided the human rights revolution in that these feelings empower underlings to redefine their lowly position. However, there is a danger. Newly elicited feelings of humiliation also carry the potential of endangering the very revolution, namely when enraged rising underlings, instead of ending humiliation, merely turn the spiral of humiliation another turn. Newly risen underlings, instead of dismantling the abusive ranking of their old masters, may want to reinstate it, and human rights defenders are aggressed when they resist this.

Also old elites use the notion of humiliation, however, in deeply different ways as compared to human rights defenders. Formerly, it was seen as the duty of underlings to accept being *put down* by their masters. Underlings had no right to invoke feelings of humiliation. Only masters were permitted to label their privileged position as "honourable" and defend their honour against attempts to humiliate it, for example in duels, or duel-like wars. Old elites thus often regard human rights defenders as underlings who need to be *taught a lesson* (meaning, be humiliated) so that they should understand *where they belong*, namely somewhere *down* in the ranking scale of human worthiness.

In human rights contexts of *equal dignity for all*, the situation is turned on its head as compared to earlier times. Underlings are empowered, which means that they are permitted to use words such as oppression or humiliation as labels for their lowly state, while masters are told that they ought to descend from arrogating superiority and adopt the new humility of equal dignity, where they join risen-up underlings. In human rights contexts underlings no longer regard themselves as underlings, they do no longer regard masters as masters; the very discourse of master/underling becomes obscene.

To summarise, the phenomenon of humiliation (expressed in acts, feelings and institutions), gains significance in two ways, a) as a result of the new and more relational reality of the world (Lindner, 2004), and b) through the emergence of human rights ideals. Dynamics of humiliation profoundly change in tact with the larger historical transition from a world steeped in honour codes of unequal human worthiness to a world of human rights ideals of equal dignity. In the new historical context, dynamics of humiliation move from honour-humiliation to dignity-humiliation, and, they gain more significance. In the course of these historic changes, human rights defenders face the rage of new elites, as well as the wrath of old elites, both trying to avoid the humility of *equal dignity for all*.

Lindner has coined the term *egalisation* in order to match the word *globalisation*. Lindner defines globalisation as the *ingathering of humankind* and the formation of the idea and reality of the *global village*, while the term *egalisation* captures the struggle for *equal dignity for all citizens of this global village*.

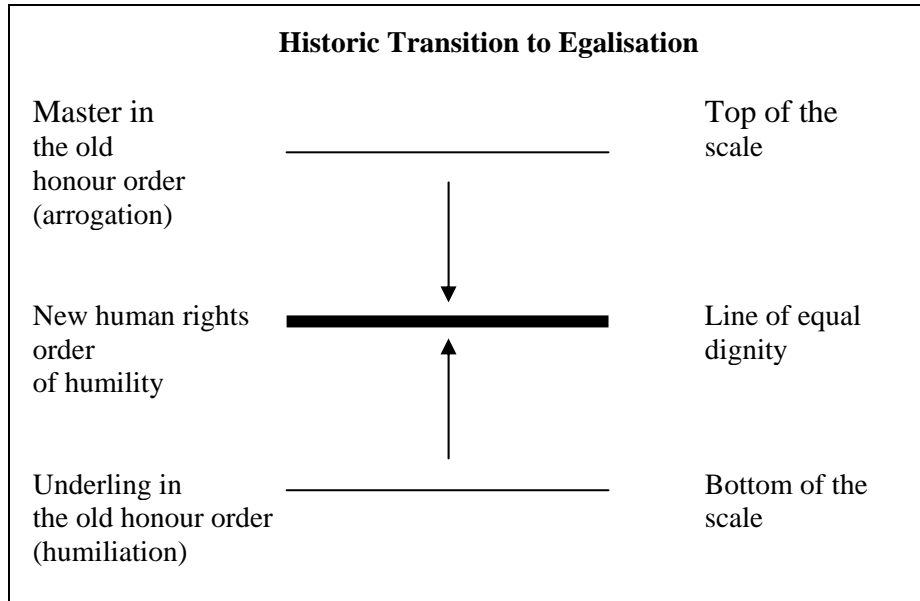


Figure 1: The historic transition to egalisation

To conclude, the human rights revolution could be described as an attempt to collapse the master-slave gradient to a line of equal dignity and humility (see graphics). It is important to note that the horizontal line is meant to represent the line of equal dignity and humility. This line does not signify that all human beings are equal, or should be equal, or ever were or will be equal, or identical, or all the same.

In a human rights context, the practice of masters arrogating superiority and subjugating underlings is regarded as illicit and obscene, and human rights advocates invite both, masters and underlings, to join in shared humility at the line of equal dignity. Both, masters and underlings, however, often resist this call and instead attack human rights defenders.

It is therefore important for everybody to acknowledge that *equal dignity for all* is a norm that, though meant to build a “better world,” may not lead to the “better world” immediately. This is because the transition is difficult. It is not easy to incorporate new norms into our feelings, our thinking processes and our planning of action. The aim to create a world of *equal dignity for all* turns a host of formerly accepted strategies into violations. And these violations carry the potential of eliciting feelings of humiliation and thus may set in motion cycles of humiliation. For example, security and peace can no longer be attained by parading “strength” and holding down people by sheer force. While this might have rendered humble underlings in former times, it does no longer. New norms require new strategies. Old strategies of honourable strength no longer work as

soon as the broader ethical and normative context of human rights does not anymore support them. Human rights defenders are those who draw attention to this fact, however, their message may not always be welcome.

Furthermore, even though it seems counterintuitive, *help can humiliate*, particularly in contexts of equal dignity. And also this affects human rights defenders. Help places recipients into an inferior position and if helpers are not very skilled in highlighting to recipients that equal dignity is safeguarded, this inferiority might lead to feelings of humiliation. Humanitarian aid, just to name one example, is prone to be affected by this dynamic, placing helpers at risk to be aggressed by acts of humiliation that flow out of feelings of humiliation felt by recipients of help, affecting helpers who, on their part, believe that the recipients of their aid are nothing but grateful, or ought to be nothing but grateful.

Feelings of humiliation are the “nuclear bomb of the emotions” and can instigate violent conflict

Feelings of humiliation may lead to three major consequences, a) to depression and apathy, b) they may nurture an urge to retaliate with inflicting humiliation (in humiliation entrepreneurs such as Hitler; genocide, terrorism), or c) they may lead to constructive social change (Mandela). The dynamics of humiliation play out at all levels, at macro, meso, and micro interpersonal levels, and even at intrapersonal levels.

As a clinical psychologist, I have worked with people who were engaged in cycles of humiliation with their social environment, sometimes with family members or colleagues or others. Often, their entire lives were consumed by their attention to the continuous flow of incidents of humiliation and counterhumiliation, sometimes minute, sometimes overwhelmingly vicious; they could not stop being obsessed with imagining all kinds of revenge.

It may be illuminating to refer to the concept of addiction or, more specifically, dependence. Reber (1985) informed us in *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* that “an individual is said to have developed dependence on a drug or other substance when there is a strong, compelling desire to continue taking it” (p. 196). Not only drugs may be associated with addiction or dependence; non-drugs such as gambling, eating disorders, compulsive shopping, workaholism, and co-dependency are often connected with those two terms as well. In all cases, the core of the addiction is the compelling and intense nature of the condition. In the same sense, feelings of humiliation may be as significant and consuming as any form of addiction or dependence. Feelings of humiliation may be mixed with shame over accepting humiliation, or fear of further humiliation, in most cases these feelings are strong and burning. Lewis, 1971, coined the term “humiliated fury.” Lindner created the term “feelings of humiliation are the nuclear bombs of the emotions.”

From political human rights to cultural, social and economic human rights

According to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders – I quote from the background text of the conference for which this paper is written – clear trends are to be observed within some States of restricting the environment in which human rights defenders operate. “Organizations are closed down on the slightest of pretexts, sources of funding are cut off or inappropriately restricted,

efforts to register an organization with a human rights mandate are intentionally slowed by bureaucracy.”

I suggest that we have to be aware that the human rights movement has gained in strength in the past decades, and thus has become more threatening to potential resisters. The human rights movement initially focused on political rights, and only recently has begun to take cultural, social and economic human rights seriously as well. This represents a significant intensification of the human rights movement. It is relatively facile to advocate political human rights and expect citizens around the world to be industrious and create wealth as soon as they enjoy political freedom. However, cultural, social and economic human rights stipulate that more has to be done. See the discussion of positive and negative rights in Lindner, 2003, pp. 120-121. The World Trade Organization is called upon, by a multitude of voices, not least by experts such as Philippe Legrain, 2002, to take terms such as *enabling environment* seriously – and this means much more than freedom from political oppression: it means also fair global rules.

The call for sustainability for the globe, not only ecologically but also socially, however, is a much taller order than the realisation of political human rights. Resistance is to be expected. And indeed, we see a clear lack of enthusiasm for fair global rules, for example, among the wealthy players of the world. The famous *loss aversion* plays a role in these dynamics. Loss aversion means that people dislike losses significantly more than they like gains; in other words giving up privileges is difficult. Also so-called *just world thinking* strengthens opposition to *enabling environments for all* because just world thinking leads people to evaluate those who aim at another distribution of resources as thieves and aggressors; even poor American citizens who have not much more than the American passport and the *American Dream* to lose are pushed into the camp of resisters by such psychological dynamics.

However, as might be expected, the reluctance on the part of the wealthy deeply disappoints those who listen to the human rights message with expectation and hope. One of the buzzwords is *agrarian subsidies* both in the US and in the EU: The amount of subsidy a cow in Europe and America receives per day – US \$ 2.5 per cow – is more than twice the average daily income of a small farmer in the rest of the world, or more than the average earnings of half of the population of the world. The result of such obscene statistics is that advocates of human rights lose credibility and are pinpointed as perpetrators of humiliating double standards. Blindness on the American and European side, blindness as to the fact that human rights advocacy and just world thinking typically are inherently contradictory, both sets in motion and exacerbates this problem. Engaging in empty rhetoric, without being aware of it, is, to say the least, not very smart, and it is humiliating to those who are listening to the human rights message with hope.

Thus, the desire of the human rights movement to build a world where *all* have the opportunity to live dignified lives – realising the entire plethora of human rights, including social and economic ones – represents a graver provocation than ever to power elites who believe that they are entitled to their privileges. Their reluctance in turn triggers bitter disappointment in hopeful believers of human rights among the poor and downtrodden. Human rights defenders are thus placed at the center of ubiquitous feelings of disappointment, frustration, anger and mutual humiliation: Elites feel humiliated by calls for new humility, and the downtrodden feel humiliated by empty human rights rhetoric.

Human rights defenders are caught in several ways

Human rights defenders are caught in several ways in the current intensification of the human rights revolution. At first, as discussed above, human rights defenders face elites who are more unwilling than before to change their ways, and secondly, they are presented with victims who are more enraged and thus unwilling to engage in constructive change. However, there are additional ways of being caught for human rights defenders. Even the most idealistic human rights defenders sometimes enter the stage as perpetrators of humiliation, in some cases due to their own blindness, and in other cases due to wrong attributions. As to the first case, human rights defenders sometimes overlook their own potential for humiliating others; as to the second case, they may be accused of double standards by mistake. In the first case, more self-awareness is needed, in the second, hope theory, as developed by C. Richard Snyder, 2002, may be helpful to avoid cynicism.

Human rights defenders may not recognise their own potential for humiliating others

Human rights defenders may trigger feelings of humiliation in recipients of their services as a result of their own insensitivity or blindness, which, incidentally, is more probable and more obscene in a world of large gaps between rich and poor.

In 1999, in Nairobi, Lindner interviewed Ola Skuterud, Norwegian Red Cross, then head of the Somalia Delegation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Resident Representative Norwegian Red Cross. He pointed out that often, human rights defenders from wealthier parts of the world, when they arrive in poorer regions, are not aware that habits they deem “normal,” may have humiliating effects on their new social environments. Houses, cars, vacations, and other amenities that might appear to be of “minimal standard” to people from richer parts of the world, may represent obscene demonstrations of wealth to poorer neighbours. Blindness and insensitivity, on the part of human rights defenders from wealthier parts of the world, as to the humiliating effects of what they may regard as “primitive life,” when this “primitive life” represents unattainable luxury to the much poorer neighbourhood, might create feelings of humiliation among those poorer neighbours.

This dynamic is intensified, when social and economic human rights are emphasised, because economic human rights highlight that large gaps between rich and poor represent a violation of human rights. The dynamic is intensified through the starkness of this gap itself, on one side, because people from the wealthier parts of the world indeed cannot imagine what it means to be poor, and on the other side, because helper insensitivity is the more obscene in the face of this stark gap. Thus, engaging in what is regarded as luxury by the poor, while preaching social and economic human rights, inherently undermines human rights defenders’ credibility and standing. Their position becomes fragile and insecure when their host country’s government antagonises them, not only because of governmental obstacles, but also because nobody in their nearer social neighbourhood feels motivated to protect them.

Ola Skuterud developed a list of ideas as to how to improve this situation; the first and most important step is to gain more awareness and engage in empathic connectedness (Scheff, 2003) with one’s social environment.

Human rights defenders may be mistaken as allies of power elites

Not all humanitarian helpers and human rights defenders are insensitive or blind to the effect of their own advanced resources. On the contrary, many are very sensitive and highly committed. However, not seldom, they are undermined by their own superiors. Higher echelons in human rights organisations sometimes undermine the human rights advocacy of their own workers in lower echelons, thus feeding suspicions of humiliating double standards and leaving their workers discredited and unprotected. The following text is taken from an interview with an African intellectual, January 2, 1999, in Kenya; I frequently encountered this view with African intellectuals:

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

This quote illustrates that human rights defenders are not necessarily welcome, and, even though their motivations and intentions may be attributed correctly in this quote, they also may not. During her fieldwork in Africa (1998-1999), Lindner carried out numerous interviews with members of humanitarian aid organisations. Many told her that they started out by being dedicated idealists, however, that cynicism quickly seeped in. They described as source for their cynicism not only the obstacles presented by their host countries, but, sometimes more importantly, the inconsistencies as to human rights values displayed by their own superiors.

The higher up in power elites, including the higher echelons of humanitarian organisations, “Realpolitik” has a tendency to push aside human rights values. As soon as so-called *national interests* come to bear, human rights with their *universal* outlook tend to lose out. Thus, human rights defenders who work in lower echelons of organisations are caught. Their idealism does not receive sufficient support from their own superiors, and this lack of support is then wrongly attributed as double standard to all members of such organisations, even to those who are most dedicated. Sometimes, so human rights defenders described to me, the only way to build trust with the recipients of their services was by distancing themselves from their own superiors. In other cases, so I was made to understand, they merely give up their idealism and turn to “just doing the job,” thus validating the worst suspicions on the part of the recipients’ of their help. *The Road to Hell*, by Michael Maren, 1997, was a widely read book among helpers.

To conclude, the fact that human rights ideals have not yet permeated the hearts and minds of all people on our globe, particularly not those of national elites, puts human

rights defenders in lower echelons into dangerous situations. More than 20 people were killed, including the UN's envoy in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, when a suicide bomb destroyed the United Nations' headquarters in Baghdad in 2003. It may be argued that they died because national interests had undermined universal human rights values and strategies, which thus did not receive strong enough support.

This point relates to the above mentioned element in human rights of being universal and addressing all humankind. Often national interests are defined in ways that run counter to the universality in human rights ideas, thus reminding us that the human rights revolution still has a long way to go.

Not all “victims” subscribe to human rights ideals

Very complex cases of humiliation occur when victimhood and humiliation are invoked by people who lack humility. Masters as well as rising underlings may be guilty, and human rights defenders are caught in the middle.

Masters who invoke humiliation and victimhood

Before travelling to Somalia for my fieldwork in 1998, I contacted various organisations in Africa and explained that I wanted to do research on humiliation. I recall a member of a humanitarian aid organisation telling me on the phone from Nairobi that “the NGOs and UN people are fed up with these arrogant and impertinent Somalis.” My interlocutor, who did not want to be named, presented much evidence, for example, he recounted, many Somali refugees in refugee camps are not happy with corn, they want rice, or the women in the camps want money for luxurious cosmetic products – in brief, Somalis apparently did not appreciate the efforts of the international community to help them out of their crisis, but seemed to define this help as their rightful “pasture.” My interlocutor said: “No NGO will support your work if you aim at depicting Somalis as victims!” He concluded that many helpers, especially those who started out as idealists, think that the Somalis “deserve what they get”!

Abdulqadir H. Ismail Jirde, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament in Hargeisa explained in an interview on 19th November 2000, in Hargeisa, that democracy with its majority rule violates the old nomad tradition of decision by consensus of the elders. He explicated that majority rule has the potential to deeply offend and humiliate those who lose out. He described in detail how he would prevent violent responses by approaching losers after voting, how he would express appreciation for their views and show confidence that their views would be honoured at a later stage.

Thus, we might conclude, that, although many Somalis perceive themselves as victims, some among them still have to learn humility. Somalia has never been a proper part of any empire that deserved the name, probably because Somali nomads are known to be proud, stubborn, unruly and fickle. Their pastoral democracy built on equality, as described by Lewis, 1961, did not provide a strong hierarchical ranking order that conquerors could easily instrumentalise and dominate.

In other words, Somalis are difficult to humiliate; they are too proud. Somalis are proud – for example, of the fact that they did not bow to colonisation in the same way others did in Africa (they kept their Islamic faith, for example, unlike neighbouring Kenya).

Yet, there is a dark side to that, namely that some Somalis may not always know enough about the humility that is necessary for effective cooperation. Local warlordism, for example, undermines attempts to build functioning “traffic rules” that protect every citizen.

To use the traffic metaphor, Somali warriors, who follow the proverb “a man deserves to be killed, not humiliated,” may have problems with rules such as “traffic lights”. They may interpret red lights as an attempt to humiliate them. They may vow to choose victory or death instead of bowing in humility. Every single man may want to fight his way through at every single traffic light. The weakest ones are pushed to the wall and there is no peace and calm for anybody.

Indeed, this is not an unfair description of Somalia after the demise of Dictator Siad Barre, and to a certain extent also of the equally proud Afghanistan after the Soviet retreat. Many mountainous or scarce regions, difficult to subjugate by former empires, preserve a degree of pristine pride that makes it difficult for them to integrate into a new world system where humility is important: Resisting humiliation is not everything, learning humility is equally important. Or, masters, when asked to step down, often portray themselves as victims, as victims of humiliation. However, in human rights contexts they have to learn humility instead of nurturing a victim identity. And human rights defenders might be caught in between.

Rising underlings who invoke victimhood and humiliation

This section relates to the above mentioned danger that underlings may wish to become new masters instead of humbly homing in on the *line of equal dignity for all*. In such cases, human rights advocates are caught between their obligation to help victims on one side, and not wanting to condone solutions that violate human rights on the other side. How are human rights defenders to react if asked to support victims who plan to become new oppressive masters? How are they to respond to allegations that they humiliate victims by not helping them with violent uprisings? Enraged people, invoking victimhood and feeling entitled to violate human rights as remedy, may emerge as powerful humiliators of human rights defenders.

My fieldwork in Africa shed light on the way genocidal killings were instigated by extremist Hutu leaders whipping up fear of acts of humiliation supposedly being planned by their “enemies” – Tutsi neighbours who “had” to be killed (see, for example, Gourevitch, 1998). Hutu had been the underlings in the traditional Tutsi-led Rwandan and Burundian kingdoms. In Rwanda, Hutu rose to power in 1959 and triggered a Tutsi exodus. When Tutsi refugees attempted to return to Rwanda by force in 1994, extremist Hutu perpetrated genocide on those Tutsi who were still living inside Rwanda, as well as on moderate Hutu resisting this policy. Almost one million people were killed by their own neighbours, using machetes and other crude weapons. Thus the former underlings, now in power, perpetrated genocide on their former masters. Essentially, the Hutu perpetrators “healed” their own dread of future humiliation, based on experiences of past humiliation, by committing genocide. Thus, leaders can “hook” their followers by playing on their memories of acts of humiliation they once experienced and which they fear the future might have in store for them again.

Hitler, as well, mobilised his followers with a narrative of humiliation. Also he promoted genocide as “remedy” against the future humiliation that, according to his

paranoid imagination, was planned by the “World Jewry.” The German populace, on their part, suffered from multitudes of economic difficulties and harboured a variety of feelings of frustration and humiliation. Hitler succeeded in inviting this broad variety of feelings of disaffection into one single story of national humiliation and its supposed “repair” through war and Holocaust.

Similarly, present day terrorist leaders could be called “humiliation-entrepreneurs,” who use narratives of humiliation to mobilise followers. Also these leaders attempt to merge the broad spectrum of disaffection they meet in broad masses into one single story of humiliation (religious, ethnic, etc.) and then offer their wished-for “remedy,” namely terrorist attacks.

Human rights defenders are caught in the middle. They do not condone oppression and humiliation perpetrated by abusive old elites, locally and globally, however, they also do not support victims (real or imagined) who respond to humiliation with humiliation. Thus, not only oppressive old elites are to be counted as those who resist the human rights revolution, enraged victims, on the way to become new oppressive masters, might antagonise human rights defenders even more violently.

Concluding remarks

What is urgently needed is more awareness as to the inherent incompatibility between *just world thinking* and *human rights ideals*. Furthermore, the current incompatibility between *universal* human rights ideals and the “Realpolitik” of *national* interests needs to be resolved and human rights ideals are to be realised at all levels of public policy, particularly at the highest global level.

Just world thinking hinders the necessary transformation toward fairer global rules, and myopic *national interests* hinder the universal application of human rights. In a world of increasing interdependence, with problems that transgress national frontiers, humankind in its entirety is responsible for our planet, for its sustainability, both ecologically and socially. Self interest is equal with common interest in case of interdependence. It is not possible to save one’s own life in a situation where the entire ship sinks. It is the responsibility of *all* to maintain the ship afloat. It is futile for anybody to try to save their lives in their cabin or lounge against neighbours in other cabins or lounges when the entire ship sinks.

I therefore call for a *Moratorium on Humiliation* and a joint effort as to building a *Decent Global Village*. A *Moratorium on Humiliation* resembles the Moratorium On Trade In Small Arms, or the Moratorium On Commercial Whaling. Read on the instrument of *Moratorium*, for example, in Patten and Lindh, 2001.

Building a *Decent Global Village* follows the call by Margalit, 1996, for a *Decent Society*. Margalit stipulates that it is not sufficient to build *just* societies. We need *decent* societies, he suggests, that include institutions that do not humiliate their citizens. This is a goal that we need to achieve not only at the national level, but, most urgently, at the global level.

I have founded a group and network, Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, www.humiliationstudies.org, to highlight the role of humiliation. In our mission statement you read: “We are dedicated to ending humiliating practices and breaking cycles of humiliation throughout the world. We believe that through this, space is opened

for mutual respect and esteem to take root and grow. Previously intractable conflicts may thus become amenable to dignified resolution.”

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