

Healing the Cycles of Humiliation: How to Attend to the Emotional Aspects of “Unsolvable” Conflicts and the Use of “Humiliation Entrepreneurship”

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This article identifies the dynamics of humiliation as a core agent in conflicts that escalate into cycles of violence, such as terrorism or genocide, where parties feel humiliated and entitled to retaliate with violence. I describe a 4-year research project on the notion of humiliation, which had its starting point in the hypothesis that the humiliation experienced by Germany after the first World War contributed to the outbreak of the second World War. Then I analyze more recent incidents of genocidal killings in Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi, and conclude with recommendations for healing the cycles of humiliation.

For 30 years a bloodbath was expected in South Africa. Why did it not happen? Partially because Nelson Mandela offered an example of how to overcome the pain and anger caused by systematic institutionalized humiliation under the system of Apartheid. In South Africa, the humiliators and the humiliated sat down together and planned for a society in which “both Black and White” could be “assured of their inalienable right to human dignity.” In stark contrast, the humiliation imposed on the German nation by the victorious powers after World War I sowed the seeds for an even more disastrous global conflict 2 decades later. Unlike Mandela, Adolf Hitler taught his followers to strike back violently; instead of reconciliation he promised the Germans bloody revenge. He claimed

that he could build a Germany full of power, pride, and honor, beyond the reach of enemies who wished to impose further humiliations on it. He tried to create a new culture, the culture of the Aryan “Übermensch” (super-human being) who, supposedly, had a right, even an obligation, to rule the world.

In a similar vein, we face the dynamics of humiliation entailed in terrorist attacks such as those carried out on September 11, 2001, in New York; attacks perpetrated by fanatics who reportedly were ready to give their lives because they were convinced that humiliating their adversary was their holy duty. Mandela, as well as Hitler and other extremist leaders who instigate terror, understand the strength of the feelings stirred up by humiliation, and they all appealed to the deepest wishes of their audiences. However, they used their understanding in vastly different ways. Hitler’s road led to war, Mandela’s to peace. For Hitler, the intense anguish of German humiliation was a source of destructive energy to be directed against targets chosen by the “Führer.” For Mandela, the task was to dissipate the destructive energy engendered by bitterness, to concentrate on implementing human rights rather than victimizing enemies.

As the examples of Hitler and Mandela show, humiliation makes for high stakes. The 20th century was fundamentally influenced by Hitler. If the 21st century is to be shaped by the example of Mandela, the part played in human relations by humiliation must be better understood, especially at times when names such as Osama bin Laden dominate headlines. Research on the social psychology of this powerful force is urgently needed.

Elsewhere I referred to humiliation as the following:

Enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor or dignity. To be humiliated is to be placed, against your will and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you feel you should expect. Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It often involves acts of force, including violent force ... the idea of pinning down, putting down or holding to the ground. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless.” (Lindner, 2000, p. 6)

Humiliation connects many aspects of the human condition: it is inscribed within a societal process (and implies the existence of oppressive hierarchy); it is a process between people including a “humiliator” and a “victim” (and implies an interpersonal act); and, not least, it is an emotional state (and implies the occurrence of an experience and feeling).

This article is organized in two parts, preceded by a section on current research on humiliation. The first part addresses the inner workings of humiliation, and the second part addresses the ways humiliation may be healed.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Compared with topics such as trauma, or shame, humiliation has been studied much less frequently. Humiliation and shame are often confounded rather than differentiated. Tomkins (1962), among others, treated shame and humiliation interchangeably. However, although in many respects related to shame, humiliation deserves to be treated separately. Shame lacks an element that is essential to humiliation, namely the downward push that is already indicated in the etymology of the word “humiliation.” The word humiliation has its roots in the Latin word humus, or earth. In spatial terms, humiliation entails a downward orientation, literally a “de-gradation,” or your face being put into the mud.

Trauma is another notion related to humiliation that is generally addressed without regard for the distinctive role of humiliation for the traumatic experience. This suggests that the feelings associated with trauma are especially intense when humiliation plays a role. Traumatic experiences stemming from disasters such as earthquakes, storms, or accidents can be dealt with much more easily than damage intentionally inflicted to create feelings of humiliation in the victim.

THE INNER WORKINGS OF HUMILIATION

Humiliation – The Nuclear Bomb of the Emotions

It is a universal human experience to feel hurt if put down and humiliated in a way that violates one’s expectations. Humiliation is especially salient if one’s love is being rejected in the very act of humiliation. The following example illustrates this point. As a clinical psychologist, I was consulted by a client I will call Susan (not her real name), whose mother-in-law enjoyed saying, in front of the whole family and with disgust in her voice, “And you want to be part of our family? Who do you think you are?” Susan reported what she felt when confronted with this behavior for the first time: “I was deeply shocked and petrified; I felt cold, could hardly breathe, and I was unable to answer.” She sought help from a clinical psychologist because she felt caught in her own pain and in cycles of humiliation and counterhumiliation. She could not distance herself, could not develop any leisure interests or relaxing hobbies. Her entire life was consumed by her relationship with her in-laws, a relationship she experienced as a continuous flow of incidents of humiliation and counterhumiliation, sometimes minute, sometimes overwhelmingly vicious; she could not stop being obsessed with imagining all kinds of revenge. After her husband’s death, she felt her in-laws tried to trick her out of her inheritance and she was locked in bitter court cases with them for many years. She repeatedly became so desperate that she did “stupid” things (as she called them)– for example, writing

hysterical letters, or shouting at her adversaries in the courtroom-behavior that did not earn her the respect she wished to receive from the judge, her lawyer, and others involved in the case.

Susan's case may be illuminated by referring 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; nondrugs such as gambling, eating disorders, compulsive shopping, workaholism, and codependency 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 this same sense, feelings of humiliation may be as significant and consuming as any form of addiction or dependence.

Fieldwork in Africa sheds light on the way genocidal killings were instigated by extremist Hutu leaders whipping up fear in their followers about acts of humiliation supposedly being planned by their "enemies"-Tutsi neighbors who "had" to be killed (see, for example, Gourevitch, 1996). Hutu had been the underlings in the traditional Tutsi-led Rwandan and Burundian kingdoms. However, 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 1 million people were killed by their own neighbors, 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 "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's Germany provides another gruesome example of the instrumental use of feelings of imagined humiliation. Hitler suspected the Jews of planning to dominate the world and to reduce Germany, along with other nations, to a humiliating slave role. "Providence," as he liked to call it, gave him the task of protecting not only Germany, but the entire world against this fictional evil. Jäckel reported how, during his last weeks, Hitler stated that he had planted a good seed: "He had been the first to tackle the Jewish question realistically, that was the merit of National Socialism and therefore – in Hitler's last words during his last conversation on April 2, 1945 – 'the world will be eternally grateful to National Socialism that I have extinguished the Jews in Germany and Central Europe'" (1991, p. 64).

Feelings of humiliation provide a highly potent element that may be appropriated by leaders. Hitler and the extremist Hutu leaders engaged in what may be called "humiliation -the deliberate activation and manipula-

tion of feelings of humiliation in others for the purpose of achieving personal, social, or political objectives.

Humiliation entrepreneurship may be a very cost-effective method of undermining or eliminating rivals or victims. For example, the “low-tech” mechanism of murder by machete was the basic technique used to perpetrate the large-scale genocide in Rwanda. The Hutu elite succeeded in inciting their population to buy their own weapons and take up arms against those they believed to be their would-be humiliators. The perpetrators even made the victims pay for their death; Tutsi victims paid for bullets so that they could be shot instead of being hacked to death. Moreover, current instigators of global terror have used their victims’ resources (planes, flight instruction schools, airports) and have not had to invest much. The September 11, 2001, attacks required some initial flight training and the purchase of air tickets, whereas the real weapons were the perpetrators’ extremist ideas. Such excessive degrees of mobilization are possible because of the virulence of the feelings of humiliation experienced by perpetrators in the past and feared in the future, and the subsequent urge to retaliate against or preempt such feelings by committing acts of humiliation.

HUMILIATION AND POWER ASYMMETRY

Bar-On and Nadler (1999) called for more attention to be given to conflicts in contexts of power asymmetry. This call was answered by the author’s 4-year research project (1997-2001) exploring the role of humiliation in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi. In this project, I conducted 216 qualitative interviews, addressing Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi, and their history of genocidal killings. From 1997 to 2001 the interviews were carried out in Europe (in Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and France) and from 1998 to 1999 in Africa (in Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, and Egypt). The interviews were often part of a network of relationships that included the researcher and the interlocutors. The latter were invited to become “coresearchers” in a reflective dialogue with the researcher, as well as with various scholars in the field. Three groups were interviewed: both parties in conflict in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi, as well as representatives of third parties who had intervened.

An interview with Edna Adan, Somalia’s first lady during a brief democratic period from 1960 to 1969, provides a vivid illustration of the powerful use of humiliation. In 1969, dictator Siad Barre came into power and ruthlessly suppressed any attempt to oppose him. As a consequence, Edna Adan lived for many years in a political environment characterized by extreme power asymmetry where she suffered abasement, subjugation and repeated imprisonment. In an interview, Edna Adan defined humiliation as feelings of inferiority: “I think humiliation is a very difficult thing to describe. But I think humiliation is when someone tries to

bring someone down to their level. They think that you are above them and they want to hurt you, humiliate you so that you lose the respect you have for yourself and others lose the respect they have for you” (interview on December 3, 1998, transcript p. 1).

Edna Adan was frequently made the victim of humiliation during Siad Barre’s regime. She related the following incident of humiliation, and how she resisted it, to Lindner (2001b):

Once they said I was planning to escape from the country, and I spent six days in jail for that. They put me in a cell of my own, but I didn’t have a toilet. And right in front of the place where they put me, there was a toilet, and it had no doors. And there was the cell next to me, it was full of men, of criminals, of thieves, I don’t know, just men; men all behind the bars. And, so I called out, and I said – you know – “I, – I, – I need to go and use the bathroom!” And that is after I had been the first lady of the country! And they said: “Well, you want to use the bathroom? There is the bathroom! You use everybody’s bathroom! There! You are not better than the others! There is the bathroom they use!” And I thought – how can I use the bathroom with no doors – facing a cell full of men! Full of criminals and people who – you know – and I just came out of my cell and I just looked at those men, and I said: “Listen. I am going to use this bathroom. And, would you be watching your mother or your sister if she was using a toilet and she had no door – is this the kind of men you are that you would watch a woman using a bathroom?” And they said, “No.” And the first one said “turn around,” and they made everyone turn the other way, until I finished using the bathroom. And that was one of the most emotional moments of my time. And the police were so shocked, because they couldn’t get their objective, they couldn’t get me to be humiliated and using a bathroom with all these men watching and shouting at me. So, this is another form of resistance, and resisting humiliation! (Interview on December 3, 1998, transcript p. 1)

This example shows that humiliation, admiration, and fear seem to be intimately connected. Edna Adan’s humiliators may have once admired her as the first lady; they may have even feared her influence when they were “looking up” to her. For them humiliation means “bringing her down to their level,” as she puts it in her.-definition (her tormenters arguably wished to push her down even further, below themselves). The point is that humiliators start out with feelings of humility and inferiority with respect to their intended victims. One highly educated Burundian with a Hutu background tried to find explanations for the ultimate failure of Hutu endeavors to rule Rwanda successfully and peacefully, as follows: “When Hutu got power they had no experience of ruling, which means that Hutu just did the same as the Tutsi before. Hutu have an inferiority complex. Power changed hands but not mentality; those Hutu who came into power just imitated the Tutsi, they tried to be like the Tutsi, marry Tutsi women” (the interview occurred in 1998, transcript p. 2, but the exact place and date of the meeting are not given to protect the informant).

It seems that the Hutu elite-the former underlings-suffered from intense yearnings for recognition from their former “masters.” These yearnings were unbearable because of the dissonance between how the former-underlings-now-masters believed they ought to feel, namely in control, and how they actually felt, namely afraid and insecure. Cognitive dissonance theory as developed by Festinger (1957) hypothesizes an urge to minimize cognitive dissonance. Perhaps, if the Hutu elite had felt confident and at peace with themselves, they would have been able to integrate their former masters, the Tutsi, into a democratic Rwanda. Instead, they massacred their former despised and admired humiliators-elite in a wave of genocide.

THE PERSISTENCE OF HUMILIATING HIERARCHIES

Human history is full of evidence that acts of humiliation (e.g., torture, beating, demeaning seating orders, etc.) have been used routinely as devices to keep oppressive hierarchies in place. Responses of victims of humiliation vary greatly. They may accept their inferior position, they may interpret it as God’s will or nature’s order (and call this attitude humility), a pattern partly illuminated by Galtung’s (1996) notion of “penetration” and Seligman’s (1975) idea of “learned helplessness,” and implicit in the “Stockholm Syndrome,” the emotional bond that may develop between hostages and their captors: An emotional bond between hostages and their captors which is frequently observed when the hostages are held for long periods of time under emotionally straining circumstances. The name derives from the instance when it was first publicly noted, when a group of hostages was held by robbers in a Stockholm bank for five days” (Reber, 1985, p. 759). Others may use the belief in a “just world,” (see Daugherty & Esper, 1988; Figley, 1998; Lerner, 1980) or the mechanism of “blaming the victim” (described by Bandura, 1990), and judge that those at the bottom of the hierarchy deserve their fate because they brought it about by their own-inborn or self-inflicted-shortcomings. Others may be forced or bribed into humility by their humiliators. Those who fill the middle ranks may defend their positions with a combination of bowing toward their superiors and humiliating their inferiors, reminiscent of the description of the authoritarian personality (Adorno; Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950).

In long-standing hierarchical societies, the underling and master relationship is static; both believe their power relations to be the natural order of things. Underlings may be happy or unhappy, but they do not include their inferior status as a significant variable within their happiness equation; they accept their lowly position as an externality, akin to the fact that some people are taller than others, that time proceeds, that we get old and die. Those aspects of life may make people happy or unhappy, but they are beyond the reach of criticism or complaint. Humility may express itself in admiration. Underlings often try to gain access to the elite by imitation. The present author was told in Rwanda, for example,

that a Hutu man who got rich “bought a house, got himself a Mercedes, and married a Tutsi woman.” In books that are widely read in Africa, Frantz Fanon (1963, 1986) described his struggle to become a respected part of the elite: he thought he had to become “French.” Fanon explained how he eventually recognized that the elite he so venerated did not, in fact, accept him in their midst as one of “us.” Imitating the master is not an effective way for underlings to rise up; the result may at best be the master’s mildly contemptuous smile.

The advent of human rights ideals marks a crucial turn in human history. It is one thing to linger in subordination and interpret this experience as divine or natural order; it is a profoundly different experience to live under oppression and define it as a violation of one’s rights. Human rights imply that every human being possesses an inner core of dignity that ought not be lowered or humiliated, and that the notion of second-class citizenship is illegitimate. Any disappointed underling, when brought in contact with human rights ideals, may develop feelings of humiliation and combine them with the desire to retaliate.

The first reaction to a humiliating situation may be depression. The next may be the desire to retaliate with aggressive counterhumiliation. In cases where the victims are in a weak position and do not have sufficient resources, this counterhumiliation may express itself in subtle ways only-in sabotage, for example. However, where the victims have more resources at their disposition, counterhumiliation may take the form of more overt acts of aggression (from throwing stones to guerrilla activities or open violence and terrorism, and, as in Rwanda, even genocidal acts against the former masters). These dynamics may unfold in both synchronic and diachronic stages, from underlings’ humble subservience to depressed apathy and violent uprising, stages that may coexist not only in society, but also in the psyche of the individual. Rising underlings may admire the elite they attack and at the same time feel ashamed of admiring them.

Violence from discontented underlings often surprises the master elite, who typically are blinded by the veneration they customarily receive from their underlings; elites often believe their underlings love them and are like children to them. Masters subscribe to the notion of a “just world” as much as their underlings did. Widespread astonishment at recent terrorist attacks illustrates the degree to which global elites were blind to some extremists’ successful humiliation entrepreneurship through which they were able to create and influence a considerable pool of followers.

THE HEALING OF HUMILIATION

The human rights revolution asks masters to dismantle their own arrogance and move “down” to a point of equality. It also encourages underlings to rise from their humiliating lowliness “up” to a point of equality. In short, the human rights

message is that masters have to learn humility, and underlings dignity and self-confidence. This task entails social change, both globally and locally. Democracy is heralded and dictators deposed. Even management courses promote “flat hierarchies.” There are three categories of actors who influence this transition: (a) the rising “slave” (the category of the oppressed, such as former colonized populations, Black people, and women), (b) the affronted “master” (the category of the oppressors, such as colonizers and White men), and (c) third parties coming from outside (such as the international community which incorporates both master and slave tendencies).

The following two sections contain recommendations designed to prevent or inhibit violent outcomes from humiliation-to break the cycle of violence that can emanate from humiliation and counterhumiliation. My focus is on actions that can be taken by individuals to alter their own contributions to the humiliation-counterhumiliation cycle. However, I recognize that there are powerful additional forces at work: the social structures, interpersonal dynamics, and ideological factors (Doise, 1986) that can perpetuate and reinforce the destructive humiliation-counterhumiliation cycle.

Humility and Humiliation

To prevent or inhibit violent outcomes in conditions of humiliation, rising underlings must become actors rather than reactors. This recommendation suggests that rising underlings should avoid focussing exclusively on their status as victims. It is easy to concentrate on perpetrators and their wrongdoings, but difficult to accept one’s own potential contribution to the process of humiliation. This is neither meant to deny that victims also feel pride and dignity, nor to be read as patronizing advice. The author herself has had experience with victimization, both personally and, as a clinical psychologist, through her clients. This experience suggests that self-humiliation can be a central factor and must be openly faced if there is to be constructive change. It may be beneficial, therefore, for people who have been subject to humiliation to gain a deeper awareness of the possible pitfalls of their own feelings of inferiority and admiration for the otherwise despised (present, former, or imagined) master elite.

The first task for rising underlings is to accept their feelings of admiration for the oppressor (or those whom they imagine to be an oppressor) and not censor them. Often elites do have a monopoly on a society’s talent, because elites have typically accumulated the resources that enable them to excel. As much as it may seem dissonant to admire excellence that is born out of oppression, it would be more constructive for underlings to recognize that wanting to be equal does not automatically bring about equal skills. They may have to allow for learning of skills that formerly were restricted to the master elite and their entourage, from highly

developed competence in handicraft, architecture, administration, to the very core, namely leadership skills.

The resources of a society are undermined when excellence is opposed, even if this excellence is associated with exploitative societal structures. Tutsi excellence, for example, is an asset for the Great Lakes region of Africa, which many highly educated Hutu do indeed recognize. Today's Germany is still impoverished by the exodus and death of its Jewish population (the imagined oppressive super-elite); depriving Germany of their talents was highly detrimental to the level of intellectual excellence in Germany, whereas the United States benefited from the influx of outstanding Jewish scientists and intellectuals. Similarly, the current global situation is characterized by the non-West which marvels at Western achievements; for example, with regard to technology, and admires these achievements, although feeling inferior and humiliated. Destroying a symbol of Western riches, the New York World Trade Center, however, may weaken rather than strengthen prospects of overcoming humiliating inequality. In other words, underlings may need to accept that they stand at the beginning of a learning curve, which does not undermine or negate the basic notion of equal dignity.

Extremism and Moderation

My second recommendation relates to the dynamics of extremism. Underlings who feel utterly humiliated and have the resources to become leaders may develop extremist stances. As discussed earlier, humiliation may lead to obsessive and addiction-like urges for retaliation that, if present in a leader, may bring about uncompromising extremism. Extremist leaders try to force populations into dichotomies such as "either friend or enemy." The more they succeed in polarizing citizens, the more they are able to promote atrocities because they can accuse critics of siding with the "enemy." In such settings, criticism becomes impossible and leaders can instigate massacres such as happened in Rwanda. The more violations of moral codes go unpunished, the further impunity will reign. "Breaking with the 'Culture of Impunity' in Rwanda and Burundi," as worked out at the Institut Universitaire d'études-du développement Genève (IUED, 1995) is the task that must be confronted by moderates. Doing so requires an alliance of the moderates of all conflict parties involved. By moderates, I mean people who try to halt the spirals of humiliation, who translate feelings of humiliation into an attempt to include all opponents in a context characterized by human rights and the promotion of peace. They have the responsibility to treat, pacify, and marginalize their extremist wings, but must do so in a respectful manner.

Furthermore, moderate leaders have to diminish humiliation and frustration in the population to minimize the "weaponry" that could be used by extremist leaders. As discussed earlier, feelings of humiliation are released in a particularly

strong way during the transition of societies to more democratic structures and this release can lead to violence and extremism on all sides. The task to be tackled is to transcend extremism and strengthen more moderate standpoints. Third parties have the responsibility to encourage and facilitate alliances between moderates from all parties involved in conflict, and to support moderates in their task of pacifying the extremists of their respective camps, as well as minimizing feelings of humiliation among the broad population.

In the current global threat of terrorism, moderates have to curb extremist urges for violence, while investing heavily in alleviating those grievances and deprivations (poverty, marginalization, low status, inequality) that have especially humiliating effects as soon as they are understood as violations of dignity within the framework of human rights.

CONCLUSION

In many cases, conflict may not be between equal partners, but the struggle of underlings for recognition and rights. This struggle may be fraught with the psychological pitfalls that often accompany the transition from feelings of humility to feelings of humiliation. Atrocities perpetrated in Rwanda/Burundi and Hitler's Germany, and today's global terrorist threat, may be compared in many ways. Humility and subservience, attitudes that were considered normal in traditional hierarchical societies, may cause shame at a later stage, when human rights ideals have altered the overall framework of what is and is not legitimate. The feelings of humiliation that occur when one understands that a debasing hierarchical order ought not to prevail may become compounded with shame over one's own group's former or present feelings of humility. This mixture may become toxic, as we found among the extremist Hutu rulers in Rwanda.

This mixture may also be at the core of the most unfathomable aspect of genocidal contexts, namely the absence of empathy perpetrators feel for their victims and the obsessive manner in which all members of the targeted victim group are "exterminated" and the world "purified" from their presence. This is clearly illustrated by Heinrich Himmler's indoctrination of the Nazi SS with an apocalyptic idealism beyond all guilt and responsibility, rationalizing mass murder as a form of martyrdom and harshness toward oneself. In his infamous speech at Poznan on October 4, 1943, Himmler explained to his SS-men that he understood how difficult it was to exterminate the Jews, but that this was their duty, heavy and difficult, but necessary for the future.

The lack of empathy on the part of rising underlings is perhaps the most difficult aspect to understand because they should know better – having experienced at firsthand how painful it is to be subjugated. The mixture of feelings of humiliation and unwanted memories of former acceptance of inferiority, of former humility

and even admiration for masters, may be at the core of obsessive genocidal urges that exclude empathy. Intuitively, traditional masters are expected to be the ones incapable of empathy. Indeed, before the revolution, the French aristocracy viewed their underlings as lesser beings not meriting concern. However, such masters in long-standing hierarchies are satisfied if underlings bow. They are not obsessed by committing atrocities to “purify” themselves from their painful relation with a former or imagined elite.

It may at times be less difficult for masters to descend to the level of equality than for underlings to rise to the same level, because rising underlings have to confront remnants of their former, now unwanted, belief in their presumed inferiority and their indignation over their admiration for elites: They have to escape from a dyadic relation in which they were used to being the reactor. Masters know how to be actors; they do not have to learn it. In fact, from this perspective, the former elite have the primary responsibility for understanding the humiliation their former underlings have experienced.

Gaining inner stature is a monumental but vital prime task for rising underlings. Nelson Mandela had the necessary preconditions, perhaps because he was the son of a chief and thus prepared to carry his head high although he belonged to a humiliated group. People like Mandela possess the indispensable calm and moderation to enter into rational and balanced conflict transformation, without urges to purify an unbearable master-slave relationship by exterminating the opponent.

In the following illustrative quote, Mandela describes his arrival as a political prisoner on Robben Island. In the process, he “demonstrated a rare talent for conflict management. Meeting the raw brutality of the guards with human dignity, he built a relation of respect” (writes editor Fredrik Heffermehl to introduce the reader to Mandela’s witness account, in Mandela, 2001, p. 87):

Two officers entered the room. The less senior of the two was a captain whose name was Gericke. From the start, we could see that he was intent on manhandling us. The captain pointed to Aaron Molete, the youngest of the four of us and a very mild and gentle person, and said, “Why is your hair so long?” Aaron said nothing. The captain shouted, “I am talking to you! Why is your hair so long? It is against regulations. Your hair should have been cut. Why is it long... “and then he paused and turned to look at me, and said, “ ... like this boy’s?” pointing at me. I began to speak: “Now look here, the length of our hair is determined by the regulations ... “

Before I could finish he shouted in disbelief: “Never talk to me that way, boy!” and began to advance. I was frightened; it is not a pleasant sensation to know that someone is about to hit you and you are unable to defend yourself.

When he was just a few feet from me, I said, as firmly as I could, “If you so much as lay a hand on me, I will take you to the highest court in the land and when I finish with you, you will be as poor as a church mouse.” The moment I began speaking, he paused, and by the end of my speech he was staring at me with aston-

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ishment. I was a bit surprised myself. I had been afraid, and spoke not from courage but out of a kind of bravado. At such times, one must put up a bold front despite what one feels inside.

“Where’s your ticket?” he asked and I handed it to him. I could see he was nervous. “What’s your name?” he said. I nodded my head towards the ticket and said, “It is written there.” He said, “How long are you in for?” I said again, gesturing towards the ticket, “It is written there.” He looked down and said, “Five years! You are in for five years and you are so arrogant! Do you know what it means to serve ,five years?” I said, “That is my business. I am ready to serve five years but I am not prepared to be bullied. You must act within the law.”

No one had informed him who we were, or that we were political prisoners, or that I was a lawyer. I had not noticed it myself, but the other officer, a tall, quiet man, had vanished during our confrontation; I later discovered that he was Colonel Steyn, the commanding officer of Robben Island. The captain then left, much quieter than he had entered (Mandela, 2001, p. 89).

Moderates like Mandela, around the world, should work for a process whereby extremists are marginalized and calmed, and populations are lifted out of hardship that otherwise might be transformed into political fuel for extremist leaders. This article points out that people who are able to be empathic and stand for human dignity, whatever biographical details may have led to that ability, have a responsibility to step forward in the public arena instead of living lives as passive bystanders, leaving the stage to more radical persons (see Staub, 1993, for a discussion of bystander apathy). There exist myriad alleys for engagement. One can start with learning more about the world just to become better informed, and then perhaps join an organization, for example, a nongovernmental organization, with the aim of strengthening civil society in constructive ways. Nelson Mandela was highly born, a lawyer, had the ANC behind him, and the conviction that he struggled for a good cause that was highly regarded by almost the entire rest of the international community; all these reasons may have contributed to his ability to develop supreme authority even under the most humiliating circumstances. Although the exemplary behavior of people such as Nelson Mandela seems almost unreachable, still, many may find out that they have more to offer than they believe,,: once they make the first step into activity. This article is written in a spirit of encouragement. Current campaigns against terrorism have to be carried forward by people who have understood that in a global village we cannot afford to create enemies; we are bound to work for cooperation.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Evelin Lindner is a cross-cultural and social psychologist, as well as a physician, with a doctorate in both fields (psychology and medicine). She has broad interna-

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