How Research Can Humiliate: Critical Reflections on Method

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Abstract

This paper addresses the question of research methodology and how it may contribute to deepening rifts instead of healing them. The paper describes how the author's research experience in the field led to an on-the-spot revision of methodology. The research project concerns the role played by humiliation in armed conflicts. Ironically, the researcher discovered that the methodology initially attempted was itself humiliating to the people being questioned. Furthermore, it was humiliating for the researcher to discover this. As a consequence of this discovery, a very rapid learning process occurred, guided by a commitment to achieving a dialogue about experiences and feelings that was as authentic and open as possible. The paper plots this process of discovering the humiliating effect that certain social psychological methods may have, especially in cross-cultural contexts with a colonial backdrop and within populations that have suffered greatly from war and genocide.

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How Research Can Humiliate: Critical Reflections On Method

Gary Boelhower calls for "deep listening and transformative dialogue" (Boelhower, 1999, in the editor's introduction for the 1998-1999 Annual Edition of the *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, 1). Boelhower writes "there is a growing recognition that authentic leadership must be defined as the coordination and affirmation of partners rather than the management and persuasion of subordinates. There is a growing body of literature that reimages the posture of authentic leadership as one of attentive listening and open dialogue rather than one of proclamation and defense. This issue of the *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict* challenges each of us to take that posture of deep listening and transformative dialogue, to recognize again the need to expand our vision but also our reach." Boelhower applies the notion of deep listening and transformative dialogue to the field of leadership. However, this notion may be applied to other fields as well, for example, to methods of research.

This paper addresses the question of research methodology and how it may contribute to deepening rifts instead of healing them. The paper describes how the author's research experience in the field led to an on-the-spot revision of methodology. The research project concerned the role played by humiliation in armed conflicts. Ironically, the researcher discovered that the methodology initially attempted was itself humiliating to the people being questioned. Furthermore, it was humiliating for the researcher to discover this. As a consequence of this discovery, a very rapid learning process took place guided by a commitment to achieving a dialogue about experiences and feelings that was as authentic and open as possible.

The struggle with method will be the focus of this paper. The article is organized in three parts that follow chronologically the development of the project. The first part summarizes the reflections that accompanied the preparatory phase of the research when possible social psychological methods were being evaluated. The second part addresses the experiences that occurred during the first two weeks of interviewing in Somalia, and shows how a critical discourse analysis of the interviews led to the conclusion that the method chosen was in fact patronizing and humiliating for the interview partners. The third part of the paper describes the method that was finally adopted in the subsequent fieldwork in Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Egypt. The paper makes the argument that certain social psychological methods may have a humiliating effect, especially in cross-cultural contexts with a colonial backdrop and within populations that have experienced great suffering as a result of war and genocide.

Before Africa

The research project that forms the starting point for this article is based at the University of Oslo, and is 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.[2]

The project started in 1996 with the following basic text (Lindner, 1996, 1): "Could it be that there are fundamental psychological mechanisms which play an important role in starting, maintaining, or stopping armed conflicts? If yes, then it would be beneficial to know more about these mechanisms, in order to develop appropriate measures to cope with them."

The hypothesis was put forward that subjective feelings of being humiliated play a central role in starting, maintaining, or stopping armed conflicts in most cultures. It claimed that struggles around objective factors or power imbalances – though certainly relevant – do not generate violent responses on their own; conflicts around objective factors and power imbalances can also lead to non-violent confrontations, or even to compromise and cooperation. It was suggested that it might often even be the other way round, namely that feelings of humiliation feed on objective factors and then create a violent conflict (Hitler's Germany being a horrible example: economic hardship and unemployment combined with feelings of humiliation after the First World War made the German population susceptible to Hitler's demagogy). The preliminary conclusion was that it could in many cases be more effective to address and attend to feelings of humiliation – by widening of the time perspective, placing an acute conflict into a discourse before and also after the acute conflict phase – than to neglect them and face their violent effects.

The following questions were identified as relevant: What is experienced as humiliation? What happens when people feel humiliated? When is humiliation established as a feeling? What does humiliation lead to? Which experiences of justice, honor, dignity, respect and self-respect are connected with the feeling of being humiliated? How is humiliation perceived and responded to in different cultures, for example, Somalian, Rwandan and Burundian culture? What role does humiliation play for aggression? What can be done to overcome violent effects of humiliation? What about practices such as rape in war – is war-rape humiliation turned into a weapon? And, finally, what about the link between micro- and macro-level, namely destructive effects of humiliation and its consequences for peace and cooperation in two kinds of relationships, the relations between nations and ethnic groups in the global arena, and the relations between people in the many contexts of everyday life?

[2] This article is one in a line of articles building on this research, see Lindner, 1999a; Lindner, 2000a; Lindner, 2000b; Lindner, 2000c; Lindner, 2000d; Lindner, 2000e; Lindner, 2000f; Lindner, 2000g; Lindner, 1999b; Lindner, 2000h; Lindner, 2000i.

The choice of methodology for the empirical part of the project was a long and difficult process that lasted from 1997 to 1998. I will not describe this process in detail here, since it is not the main focus of this paper. The point relevant for this article is that the internal divisions within psychology concerning methodology – for example with regard to the epistemological standing of qualitative versus quantitative method – was all-absorbing. The approach finally chosen before leaving for Africa was a multi-layered interview strategy, combining "Psycho-Logic" reasoning,[3] Grounded Theory,[4] and part/whole analysis,[5] including as quantitative elements Cantril's well-established Self-Anchoring Scale (Cantril, 1965, 22) that was adapted to the notion of humiliation.[6] Thus qualitative and quantitative methods were joined, following views put forward, among others, by Bryman, 1988, that the gulf between qualitative and quantitative represents an ideological divide and that "these differences are more apparent than real and that there is in practice a considerable underlying unity of purpose" (Robson, 1993, 6).

Against this background, a semi-structured interview guideline was developed addressing questions such as: Can humiliation lead to war, to Holocaust, genocide and ethnic cleansing? Can humiliation lead to international terrorism? And also the more fundamental questions such as: What is humiliation? What happens when people feel humiliated?

The following section will describe the experiences undergone in Africa after having arrived in 1998 with the interview guideline.

In Somalia, the first two weeks

I arrived in the north of Somalia in November 1998. Somalia became independent in 1960. At that time a dream existed of a united Somalia. The colonial powers had split the Somalian people five

[3] Jan Smedslund argues that "even though ordinary words have very variable meanings, they also have a stable core meaning, and many partly overlapping words may also refer to the same core meaning. In summary, it may be possible to explicate a skeleton system of important concepts underlying the complex surface of an ordinary language… A formulation of such a system can only approximate some of the psychologically relevant features of ordinary language and must necessarily ignore others. However, one may envisage successively more complex scientific language, including an ever higher number of psychologically important distinctions" (Smedslund 1988, 5).

[4] Grounded Theory as first developed and presented by Glaser & Strauss, 1967. Using Grounded Theory means trying to avoid simply applying existing theories to data (usually interviews, taped and written down), or merely accepting conventional explanations, but instead being as open as possible, developing arguments and categories out of the data, as they emerge.

[5] Thomas Scheff (1997) recommends proceeding from "the ground," comparing data from different locations in a "part/whole analysis," and, finally, developing hypotheses that can be tested quantitatively. Scheff, 1997, 9: "Quantitative analysis leads to verification or disconfirmation of a hypothesis. But verification is the third step in part/whole morphology. Before taking the last step, it is usually necessary to take at least one of the earlier steps: exploration (conventional eyewitness field work using qualitative methods), and/or microanalysis of single specimens and comparisons of specimens."

[6] Cantril's original version was adapted as follows: There is a ladder from 0 to 10 (IMAGE OF LADDER). Suppose we say that the top of the ladder (POINTING) represents the highest amount of respect for you and the bottom (POINTING) represents the worst possible humiliation for you. Where on the ladder (MOVING FINGER RAPIDLY UP AND DOWN LADDER) do you feel you personally stand at the present time? Where on the ladder would you say you stood five years ago? And where do you think you will be on the ladder five years from now? Where would you put (name of group, for example Tutsi or Hutu) on the ladder (MOVING FINGER RAPIDLY UP AND DOWN LADDER) *at the present time?* Where did (name of group) stand *five years ago?* Just as your best guess, where do you think (name of group) will be on the ladder *five years from now?*

ways, although ethnic Somalis are united by language, cultural, and devotion to Islam. “Most other African countries are colonially created states in search of a sense of nationhood. The Somali, by contrast, are a pre-colonial nation in search of a unified post-colonial state. Most other African countries are diverse peoples in search of a shared national identity. The Somali are already a people with a national identity in search of territorial unification” (Mazrui, 1986, 71).[7]

After independence in 1960, Somalia operated for a few years as a political democracy (1960-1969). This system was increasingly perceived as anarchic, a perception that allowed a dictatorial “savior” to seize power. President Mohammed Siad Barre assumed power and tried to create a more centralized political order. He fell from power in 1991. His position had been fundamentally weakened by his failed attempt to recapture the Ogaden from Ethiopia in 1978.[8] Somalia’s defeat was a considerable humiliation that undermined Barre’s political position.

He attempted to preserve his power by finding scapegoats for the country’s ills. In particular, he put the blame upon the Isaaq people in northern Somalia. The military were unleashed against the Isaaq population with quasi-genocidal results. Edna Adan, former wife of the president of “Somaliland” (December 1998) tells the story: “The regime then began to try to impose its authority by force. You have the airport here, just 5 km from us where we sit now. The airport where you just landed, Hargeisa airport. Russian MIG airplanes, fighter planes, would take off from that airport to come and bomb the city here, where we are. Bomb civilians, women and children, and homes. And do a 4 km circle and just go and land again at the airport, just 5 km away.”[9]

When the Barre regime collapsed in 1991, Somalia disintegrated and lost all its public institutions: no government, no ministries, and no public services. As a result, the Somali clans reclaimed their traditional independence. Faction fighting between the clans during the 1990s resulted in a great deal of bloodshed with many atrocities being carried out on all sides. However, the Isaaq in the north rose from violence and pacified their region; they formed a self-proclaimed republic, “Somaliland” that built on its identity as former British protectorate (note: NOT colony). Somaliland is not recognized by the international community or by other Somali leaders.

The rest of Somalia remained a deeply divided country, war-torn for almost a decade, full of bitterness and suffering. Peace conference followed upon peace conference, none was successful, until, very recently, a peace conference in Djibouti brought real progress: on 27th August 2000, a new president, Abdulqasim Salad Hasan, was elected, and for the first time after a decade of “non-existence” Somalia was represented at the United Nations in New York.

An Australian humanitarian aid worker confirmed in an interview with the author (29th November 1998) that he even today feels the effects of a very equal colonial relationship: “The North of Somalia was a British protectorate: There was respect for the Somalis; there was a kind of equal

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[7] “There was during the colonial period a British Somaliland, an Italian Somaliland, and a French Somaliland. A section of the Somali people was also absorbed separately into Kenya under British colonial rule. The fifth component became the Ogaden, a section of Ethiopia. The dream of independence for the Somali was in part a dream of reunification” (Mazrui, 1986, 71).

[8] Two of the components were indeed reunited at independence - former Italian Somaliland and former British Somaliland coalesced into the new Republic of Somalia. But neither Kenya nor Ethiopia were prepared to relinquish those areas of their colonial boundaries which were inhabited by ethnic Somali. As for French Somaliland, this became the separate independent Republic of Djibouti.

[9] See also the Africa Watch Report *Somalia: A Government at War with its Own People* (Africa Watch Committee, 1990).

relationship. When England gave away the Ogaden [or Haud, a semi-desert that England gave to Ethiopia against the promises they had given the Somalis], the Somalis were very angry: 'You are our friends (!) how can you betray us!' And also the British officers were annoyed with London, who just gave the Haud away as a kind of normal bargaining chip. So, there was a kind of partnership [between the Somalis and British]."[10]

One reason for this to a certain extent equal relationship between the British and the Somalis may be their extreme pride. A British soldier describes the Somali bravery, toughness and unbreakable pride, and his admiration for this in a blood-chilling book (Hanley, 1971). Humanitarian aid workers repeatedly asserted to me that Somalia is the most difficult place in the world to work in "because Somalis are aggressively honest and tell you right in your face if they don't like you." However, they added, "but at least you know where you stand."

As soon as I arrived in Somaliland I was "beleaguered" by Somalilanders who urged me to promote their dream of becoming an internationally recognized independent republic. They argued that they had been humiliated to such a degree by their Somali brothers and sisters that they were no longer able to be part of a united Somalia. They insisted that the "cultural" differences between them and the other Somalis were, after all, too significant. Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Yussuf Sheikh Mader, the religious head and so-to-speak the "King of Somaliland" gave me an audience and asked me in a very dignified meeting to become an international ambassador for this plight.

Here I was, after my "scientific" struggle with "method," in the middle of a political hotspot among fierce and proud nomads! When I later showed film fragments that I had recorded in Somaliland to Somalis from southern regions of the country, they reacted with passionate anger, because they disagreed with what the interview partners from the north said in the film. I subsequently felt obliged to include the following disclaimer in the film: "Somalia is a deeply divided country today, where almost everything is politicized, and almost everybody seems to have a political agenda. This film touches upon many very sensitive political topics. It has to be kept in mind that the interview partners speaking in this film respond to an interviewer who is a white woman, and thus a member of the international community who is not neutral, but part of the overall political arena."

Did this mean that everything I observed and learned in Somaliland was politically manipulated in order to influence me as a representative of the international community? Somalis from southern regions say, "This north Somali talk about humiliation is just political manipulation, they want to impress you, a naïve lady with human rights ideals and a soft heart! You know, these people from the north, they were humiliating others before, this they do not tell you! They behaved arrogantly and humiliated us" (conversation in December 1999).

When I asked the southerners whether this meant that their brothers and sisters from the north were telling lies when giving gruesome accounts of harassment and quasi-genocide, then I learned, "Sure, many of them have suffered terribly, and sure many feel thoroughly humiliated. But they forget to tell you what they did to others, this is one thing, and the other thing is that they politicize their originally authentic feelings and exploit and instrumentalise these feelings for political aims" (December 1999).

This was my situation: a researcher as a representative of the international community, being influenced and manipulated for a political cause. I could shrug my shoulders and say, "So what, these people want a nation, this is not my business; on the contrary it is just another facet of humiliation to be studied, namely

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[10] Concerning the historic facts, see for example Mazrui 1986. Many people I talked to in Somaliland in 1998, were proud of the "equal" colonial relationship with the British. See for an intense illustration Hanley 1971.

that it is like disease, - you may have it and need help, or you may pretend to have it because you want the incentives that are entailed in getting help."[11] But what about those I spoke to who were digging out graves from the quasi-genocidal onslaught, and who searched for help in documenting it? They invited me in, gave me their lovely tea that might have cost them more than they could afford, and this they did because they hoped that I had the capacity to bring them funds! What about this situation?

There were many more sides to my situation. I recall an "interview" with a man in his fifties, a brave, wise, and certainly a very tough man with a life experience that hardly any western man or woman would have survived. He is a former nomad who trained, already as a small child, to survive in one of the harshest environments of the world, Somali semi-desert. He recounted how he learned already as a six year old boy to never really sleep, to always be alert to danger, and how he learned to discern the traces of dangerous animals and enemy clans. Later on he left the desert and became a MIG airplane bombardier and studied in Russia. In the Ogaden war in 1978 he participated in the bombing of Ethiopia.

Russia abandoned Somalia during this war and sided with Ethiopia, inflicting a humiliating defeat on Somalia. Somalia was subsequently supported by the United States and he also studied there at a military academy. When his Isaaq clan was threatened with eradication by its own government in the 1980s, he joined the guerrilla forces and became a commander, responsible for the lives and deaths of many. He says, "I spent my life in danger, war and fighting. I saw so many of my friends die."

Later he became a minister in the government of Somaliland. Somaliland is poor, people sell live-stock and get financial support from their family members who are dispersed in the whole world, for example in Norway, Canada, and the United States. This means that this man lives now in a poor country that has virtually no means to provide a dignified life to him and also not to all the other brave fighters who are proud that they put their lives against a dictator and helped oust him.

How could I dare to call a conversation with such a man "data collection" from an "informant"? How could I come with my theoretical reflections about whether I should use a structured or semi-structured interview? How could I ask this man pre-meditated questions from a "structured" interview? I felt humble; it was I who felt humiliated. Initially I did not really know why. Was it that I felt humiliated by my own belief in an inflated importance of "scientific" method?

I sat down (November 1999 in Somaliland) and wrote down a careful discourse analysis of my own actions.[12] I made a protocol of my feelings: Was this not ridiculous, here I came from abroad in order to apply western theory, and "collect data" on its basis, to a warrior who knew more about life, death, strategy, responsibility and a thousand other things, all under life threatening conditions, than we, those in the rich west with our "cute little theories"?

The day I arrived I bought the local dress and did not wear any western outfits anymore, and though the house in which I stayed was a palace compared to many other houses, it was not the expensive hotel

[11] Gadamer discusses truth and method (Gadamer, 1989). See also Spencer's account of *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth*, Spence, 1982.

[12] For discourse analysis and how discourse is shaped by and shapes power relations, for example by turn taking, etc., see for example Bourdieu, 1977; Burke, 1998; Foucault, 1980.
See for discourse and power in cross-cultural contexts Bandlamudi, 1999; Bremer, 1996; Clyne, 1994; Crawford, 1999; Gumperz, 1982; Henwood, 1998; MacMartin, 1999; Morgan, 1998a; Morgan, 1998b; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Sitaram & Prosser, 1998; Valsiner, 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1998; Wethrell & Potter, 1992; Williams & Chrisman, 1994.

either. But still, here I was, a representative from the west, despite all my modesty displaying western riches and superiority, trying to collect data from these proud, war-torn "wild animals" as if they were in a zoo? I felt that I was violating the basic laws of human rights, namely respect for every human being's dignity. I felt that I, believing myself to be strongly grounded within a human rights framework, was humiliating all those I talked to as long as I used as a starting point western theory.

But – the next question – if I want to respect human rights because I believe in them, how could I then "understand" and respect a Somali framework of thinking that often does not seem to adhere to it? I met with survivors of the quasi-genocidal onslaughts that had occurred in that society, reaching a peak in 1988. I put myself into their shoes, as far as I could, and tried to empathize with their perspective. I was very moved by the survivors' accounts. At the end of each interview I asked what forms of healing might be envisaged. I thought, for example, of truth commissions like in South Africa. I imagined victims and perpetrators talking to each other, the perpetrators asking for forgiveness after having listened to the victims' accounts, and the victims reaching a kind of "catharsis" by opening up, speaking about their feelings, and being able to forgive.

I imagined that such a process would conclude in a mutually satisfactory way to be followed by peaceful co-existence between opponents. This way of thinking and feeling was in line with a human rights' definition of humiliation as being a violation of the deepest core of personal dignity.

However, in the interviews another answer to the question about strategies for healing was given, repeatedly. It was as follows (interviews in 1997 in Oslo, 1998 in Somaliland, and 1999 in Nairobi): "The elders of the opposing groups (clans, sub-clans, or so-called diya-paying groups[13]) must sit together and talk. They should decide on the amount of compensation to be paid. Finally, in order to stabilize the situation in the long term, women should be exchanged between the groups for marriage. These women will embody the bridges between opposing groups, since they have their original family in one group and their children in the other."

Whenever I got this response I was sharply reminded of my western individualistic background as opposed to the much more collectivistic and group-oriented Somali view. Paying compensation and exchanging women was not at all what I had thought of. It would certainly have been the last thing I, as a European woman, would be willing to participate in myself. If I were one of the victims concerned, knowing that my clan had received compensation and that women were being exchanged would hardly satisfy me. I would certainly feel that my personal dignity required another kind of healing.

Where was I then? "Going native" was no option, nor being an arrogant western researcher. I had worked for seven years in Egypt (1984-1991) as a counselor and had acquired a gut feeling for both traps. I knew how blind western arrogance could be. I knew that I had to find a way along the lines of humility, and humbleness as Robert Merton described in 1949 (Merton, 1949), especially in his chapter "Science and Democratic Social Structure."[14] I had to exercise humility not only towards the subject and research carried out so far by other researchers, but, and this was the point here, towards those who knew more about the subject than me (also called "informants").

Gergen (Gergen, 1997a, 1) addressed similar processes of questioning: "My commitment to social psychological inquiry has now exceeded three decades; the commitment has been a passionate one throughout. However, the nature of this passion – the

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[13] "diya" means compensation for injuries.

[14] I owe this reference to Ragnvald Kalleberg, sociologist at Oslo University, and see also chapter 3.3 in Engelstad, Egeland, Grenness, Kalleberg, & Malnes, 1996; see also Engelstad, F. and Kalleberg, R.,1999; Kalleberg, 1989; Kalleberg, 1994.

sense of the inquiry and its significance - has changed substantially over this period. The 'message' of the discipline, as it initially kindled my excitement, now seems deeply mistaken - in certain respects even injurious to the society."

Further down in the same text Gergen summarizes the view of social psychology that he later learned to criticize, and that may have stood at the beginning of my project:

> To summarize, the message of social psychology inherent in the prevailing Zeitgeist was that empirical research can furnish an unbiased and systematic description and explanation of social behavior, that the accuracy and generality of these theoretical accounts are subject to continuous improvement through research, and that there is nothing so practical for society as an accurate, empirically supported theory. In effect, scientists can offer the society enormous riches in terms of principles of human interaction, and with these principles the society can improve itself. With respect to our understanding of selves, progress in knowledge is interminable (4).

Gergen clearly lived through a similar kind of agony as I experienced in Somalia. He describes the feelings of embarrassment about foolish naivety that also haunted me as follows:

> The preceding pages were difficult to write, much like attempting to reignite the naive idealisms of adolescence. No, I don't wish to abandon all the premises and certainly not the optimistic sense of potential for the discipline. However, it was essential to squarely face the foolishness if some sort of salvaging was to take place. For me, the first step in critical self-reflection was the growing realization of the historical perishability of social psychological knowledge. Much of the above enthusiasm depends on the belief that knowledge accumulates: each experiment can add to the previous and the accretion of findings gives us an improved fix on the realities of social life. But what if social life is not itself stable; what if social patterns are in a state of continuous and possibly chaotic transformation? To the extent this is so, then the science does not accumulate knowledge; its knowledge represents no more than a small, and perhaps not very important history of college student behavior in artificial laboratory settings (4).

Towards the end of his paper, Gergen presents the "The Creative Challenge" and explains that for the constructionist, the "discourses of the profession are themselves constitutive of cultural life" (15). He contrasts social psychology that is based on a realist (or objectifying) accounts of science with the constructionist approach, where social psychological inquiry enters "into the creation of new forms of cultural life."

The following quote from the end of Gergen's text became important for the ensuing period of my research in Somalia, and thereafter in Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Egypt, and various places in Europe:

> …constructionist psychologists have also pursued alternative forms of methodology, reasoning as they do that research methods also convey values and ideologies. Feeling that experimental technologies place a divide between the scientist and subject, privilege the scientist's voice over the subject's, and invite manipulation, they seek means of broadening the range of research methods. Qualitative methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) are one significant step toward an enriched social psychology, as are discourse analytic procedures. Further, we are invited to experiment with our very forms of scientific expression. Professional writings in social psychology inherit stale traditions of rhetoric; they are intelligible to but a minute community of scholars, and even within this community they are

> overly formal, monologic, defensive, and dry. The nature of the social world scarcely demands such an archaic form of expression. Constructionism invites the scholar to expand the repertoire of expression, to explore ways of speaking and writing to a broader audience, perhaps with multiple voices, and a richer range of rhetoric (17).[15]

In Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Egypt

Altogether I finally carried out 216 qualitative interviews, from 1998 to 1999 in Africa (in Hargeisa, capital of Somaliland, in Kigali and other places in Rwanda, in Bujumbura, capital of Burundi, in Nairobi in Kenya, and in Cairo in Egypt), and from 1997 to 2000 in Europe (in Oslo in Norway, in Germany, in Geneva, and in Brussels). The topic has been discussed with about 400 researchers working in related fields.

The title of the project indicates that three groups had to be interviewed, namely both conflict parties in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi, and representatives of third intervening parties. These three groups stand in a relationship that in its minimum version is triangular. In case of more than two opponents, as is the case in most conflicts, it acquires more than three corners.

Both in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi representatives of the “opponents” and the “third party” were interviewed. The following people were included in the “network of conversation”:

- Survivors of genocide were included, that is people belonging to the group, which was targeted for genocide. In Somalia this was the Isaaq tribe, in Rwanda the Tutsis, in Burundi also the Hutus. The group of survivors consists of two parts, namely those who survived because they were not in the country when the genocide happened - some of them returned after the genocide - and those who survived the ongoing onslaught inside the country.
- Freedom fighters (only men) were interviewed. In Somalia these were the SNM (Somali National Movement) fighters who fought the troops sent by the central government in Mogadishu from the north of Somalia; in Rwanda these were the former Tutsi refugees who formed an army, the RFP (Rwandese Patriotic Front), and attacked Rwanda from the north in order to oust the Hutu government which carried out the genocide in Rwanda in 1994; in Burundi these were also Hutu rebels.
- Somali warlords who have their retreat in Kenya.
- Politicians, among them people who were in power already before the genocide and whom survivors secretly suspected of having been collaborators or at least silent supporters of perpetrators.
- Somali and Rwandan/Burundian academicians, who study the situation of their countries.
- Representatives of national non-governmental organizations who work locally with development, peace and reconciliation.
- Third parties, namely representatives of United Nations organizations and international non-governmental organizations who work with emergency

[15] See related texts Burr, 1995; Danziger, 1997a; Danziger, 1997b; Danziger, 1990; Danziger, 1997c; Danziger, 1997d; Danziger, 1997e; Danziger, 1997f; Danziger, 1997g; Danziger, 1997h; Edwards, 1998; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1999; Campos, Ramos, & Bernal, 1999; Billig et al., 1988; Edwards, 1988; Gee, 1999; Shotter, J. and Gergen, K. J.,1989; Gergen, 1965; Gergen, 1973; Gergen, 1982; Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Gergen, 1994; Gergen, 1997b; Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2000b; Ibanez, 1991; Mead, 1934; Middleton, D. and Edwards, D.,1990; Moscovici, 1998; van Rappard, 1997; Potter & Edwards, 1999, Rorty, 1991; Sampson, 1978; Sampson, 1991; Shotter, 1993; Spence, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978; Wetherell et al., 1998; Woofitt, 1992; and see for emotions in this context: Lutz, 1988; Tavris, 1989.

- relief, long-term development, peace, and reconciliation.
- Egyptian diplomats in the foreign ministry who deal with Somalia; Egypt is a heavy weight in the OAU.
- African psychiatrists in Kenya who deal with trauma, and forensic psychiatry. In Kenya many nationals from Somalia and also Rwanda/Burundi have sought refuge, both in refugee camps, but also on the basis of private arrangements.
- Those who have not yet been interviewed are masterminds of genocide in Rwanda, those who have planned the genocide. Many of them are said to be in hiding in Kenya, and other parts of Africa, or in Brussels and other parts of Europe, or in the States and Canada. Some are in the prisons in Rwanda and in Arusha, Tanzania.

Dialogue was the answer to my struggle for method.[16] Steinar Kvale writes, “The conversation … is not only a specific empirical method: it also involves a basic mode of constituting knowledge; and the human world is a conversational reality” (Kvale, 1996, 37). I had to enter into dialogue with people who knew much more about the subject I was to examine than me, namely about feelings in genocide, especially feelings of humiliation. I had to consider them as the experts.[17] I had to become more aware of the social relations I actually formed by entering the scene as a researcher.[18]

In order to enter into dialogue, I had to be authentic. Taylor writes about *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Taylor, 1990). Being authentic meant to disclose my biography. I had to explain why I was in Africa, and how the project idea had developed. I revealed that I had been deeply formed by the aftermath of World War I and II in Europe. I told the story of my father who lost his left arm because he, being a young adolescent and at the same time soldier, did not want to be an occupant, but a friend of those his country had occupied, and how he was severely punished. I recounted how I grew up in my father’s head, building my “virtual” home in his memories of the farm he was due to inherit, but lost when the part of his country where this farm was located was handed over to another country, and he had no more home, not even a place to go back to. I described how this fate had almost destroyed him, how he seldom smiled for 50 years. I shared how I grew up in a so-called “refugee-family,” always feeling like a guest, feeling foreign, never being at home, and certainly not belonging to the rich. I explained how I later tried to live and work in as many cultures as possible in order to acquire a gut-feeling for how human beings in different cultures define and handle life and death, love and hatred, peace and war. I concluded with explaining how all this led up to the research project.

This account dramatically changed the relations I had in Africa. Before I opened up in the described way, I met polite faces, telling me, if they gave me their time at all, what they thought I wanted to hear, but deep down not believing for a minute that I could understand even a tiny percentage of their reality. This I was told later.

After opening up, I learned many things. I learned that an average African view of the European visitor could be described as follows: “You from the west, you come here to get a kick out of our problems. You pretend to want to help, 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

[16] See Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1944; Wold, A. H.,1992; Billig, 1998; Campos, 1998; Josephs & Rommetveit, 1998; Hermans, 1999a; Hermans, 1999b; Prosser, 1978.
[17] Beynon, 1984 defines the Ford workers in this way, - I owe this reference to Ragnvald Kalleberg.
[18] Argyle writes extensively about social relations, see Argyle & Henderson, 1990; Argyle & Cook, 1976; Argyle, 1994; Furnham, A. and Argyle, M.,1981; Argyle & Colman, 1995; Argyle, Collett, & Furnham, 1995; Argyle, 1992; Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Argyle, 1974; Humphrey & Argyle, 1962; Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981. Ragnvald Kalleberg introduced me to this literature.

people with dust when bumping childishly and proudly around in your four wheel drive cars! Look how you enjoy being a king, while you would be a nobody back home in your country! You could not afford anything the like back home! All you want is having fun, getting a good salary, writing empty reports to your organization back home, in order to be able to continue this fraud. You pay lip service to human rights and empowerment, but you are hypocrites! 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 once, not only to the greedy among us who exploit your arrogant stupidity for their own good!" (this is a condensation from statements that were repeated in Somalia and Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya).[19]

Not only did I learn, I felt that also many of my African friends learned. Many had little knowledge of the fact that Europe had not always been rich and peaceful. World War I and II were mostly bloodless images from history. Through my account it became palpable to them how terrible the suffering was that people in Europe had endured. This surprised many and it humbled them. I felt that many stopped being arrogant towards me. I observed how they hesitated pushing me into the category of those westerners who do not even have the guts to admit that they want to have fun when they set out to "help," and who deceive themselves and others when professing to high ideals. I saw how automatic this line of thought was, and how eyes and mouths stood still for fractions of seconds in astonishment when I told about my background. I then escaped the contempt felt on the African side for westerners who expect to be thanked for being altruistic while being hypocrites.

I felt that Africans learned even more, namely that there was hope. The extent of division and violence in the 20th century in Europe is breathtaking, and still there is peace now between the former archenemies in the center of Europe, a peace that hopefully will include South Eastern Europe soon. Thus the example of Europe embodied in me and in the painful past of my family, created hope. More, I was considered by many as "one of them," as somebody who could, perhaps, fathom the extent of suffering they went through. I approached everybody as a fellow victim, a co-researcher on the way out of violence and war. And I felt that, though it was difficult to get through the wall of disgust towards "western hypocrites" I managed in many cases to enter into an open and mutually respectful relationship with those who really struggled for peaceful change.

Authentic dialogue meant that I could not pretend. I had to approach people around me in the state I was in. I continuously struggled with the topic of humiliation in my head, I almost never thought about anything else. I pursued a multitude of hypotheses and lines of thought and I drew every interlocutor into this process. Thus my fieldwork became two large dialogues, an inner dialogue and an external one. Many of the people I talked to became friends and will be part of my network also in the future. Thus the initial question of structured versus non-structured interview was transformed into an existential undertaking where I went in with my whole being.

Since I had very limited funding, and could not afford hotels or taxis, I depended on my feet, on local transport and on people housing me. I could hardly ask those Africans who lacked resources for themselves to help me, and I turned to those "westerners" who, in African eyes, came to enjoy themselves, namely members of western NGOs and multilateral organizations like the UN. As was to be expected, the African stereotype of these people was oversimplified, and I met very sincere men and women in this group.

Many of them saw the danger of humiliating "recipients" of help instead of helping them. Sam Engelstad, UN's Chief of Humanitarian Affairs, and, on several occasions Acting Humanitarian Coordinator in Mogadishu in

[19] See also Maren, 1997 and Hancock, 1989.

1994 analyzes as follows:[20] "During my own time in Somalia in 1994, humiliation was never far from the surface. Indeed, it pretty much suffused the relationship between members of the UN community and the general Somali population. In the day-to-day interaction between the Somalis and UN relief workers like ourselves, it enveloped our work like a grey cloud. Yet, the process was not well understood, and rarely intended to be malevolent."

Engelstad added, "Among the political and administrative leadership of the UN mission, however, humiliation and its consequences were far better understood and were frequently used as policy tools. Regardless of intent, it was pernicious and offensive to many of us."

These quotes from Sam Engelstad illustrate how a high international official is extremely sensitive to the processes of humiliation in the politic realm. His well-formulated description testifies that the African voices quoted above were not alone with their critical observations concerning the behavior of international helpers. Gergen taught me to see the workings of the dynamics of humiliation also in the field of research methodology. Social psychology methods have to be rethought, not only in the light of cultural differences, but also with respect to a general sensitivity to the knowledge and expertise of "co-researchers."

Conclusion

The argument of this paper is that when investigating any research topic, especially in a culture unfamiliar to the researcher, the overriding objective must be to discover the most effective strategy for achieving authentic dialogue. Once that dialogue has been opened, there is a greater chance of discovering how the culture and the society actually "work." In other words, the validity of any research deeply depends on the relationship between the involved persons, and humiliating research methods will not only be unethical but also lack a central requirement of any research, namely validity.

The research being described in this paper has the ultimate objective of building a theory of humiliation.[21] Such a theory will, hopefully, illuminate a wide range of human situations, not only research methods, and, perhaps suggest ways of working towards a healing of the wounds of humiliation, especially those wounds aggravated by violent conflict.

The methodology that emerged in the course of this research overlaps in an intriguing way with the approach taken by initiatives such as the War-torn Societies Project in Somalia.[22] Wherever I went, this NGO received a lot of praise for being different from the common run of aid agencies. These were often described to me in terms of a parody that contains elements of truth: They come along, build wells (or some other installations or services liable to be ecologically unsound or unmanageable in the longer run), create a few jobs for some chauffeurs, secretaries and security personnel, and then disappear again.

The War-torn Societies Project, in contrast, concentrates on Participatory Action Research and attempts to develop an agenda for development together with the communities concerned; it thus tries to "empower" people and turn them from "recipients" into "actors." Empowerment means undoing humiliation; and "research" means moving - intellectually and psychologically - more often and more carefully between, on one side, the

[20] Personal communication from Sam Engelstad (28.9.1999), quoted with his permission. See also: The Lessons-learned Unit of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations & The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs UN Programme (1995). Lessons Learned from the United Nations Operation in Somalia: At the Strategic and Operational Levels 19-20 June 1995. Oslo: NUPI. Also: O'Halloran 1995.
[21] I am working on the development of such a theory with Dennis Smith.
[22] See http://www.unicc.org/unrisd/wsp/index.htm.

"incoming helper's perception or ideology of what people need as aid," and the "support that local people *really* need" on the other side.[23]

For future research and also NGO activity a greater application of action research seems therefore to be useful. Ahmed Yusuf Farah, 1999, writes in *Assessing the viability of War-torn Society Project (WSP). Participatory action research in a stateless situation: in case of the WSP Somali programme*:

> In spite of the fact that War-torn Societies Project methodology was directly derived from some of the basic ideas and experiences of PAR (Participatory Action Research), what makes WSP methodology different and unique is that it represents a quantum leap from a research methodology designed to be implemented at the micro level to implementation at the macro level, addressing broad issues by providing a neutral space and involving a variety of actors, internal and external, who play key roles at the macro level. Four years (1994-1998) of participatory action-research carried out by the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) in four carefully selected countries (Eritrea, Mozambique, Guatemala and Somalia) have produced innovative and practical projects, the operational experience and an overview of the project have been produced (1).

My research in Africa is intended to contribute to a larger movement in the development of methodological approaches. This movement has been well described by Gergen who writes about "Sensitivity to the influences of diverse cultural traditions" in *Toward a Cultural Constructionist Psychology*, "To assist in this effort new methodologies have emerged attempting to dismantle research hierarchies, and replace the traditional autonomy of the researcher (an invitation to cultural blindness) with more collaborative forms of inquiry. Perhaps the most visible form of collaborative research is that of participatory action research" (for example Reason, 1994 in Gergen & Gergen, 2000, 7). In *Organizational Science in a Postmodern Context* Gergen points out that action research (Reason & Rowan, 1985) and "appreciative inquiry" (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990) have developed forms of research in which the researcher and the researched collapse their traditional roles to collaborate in what may be viewed as the realization of local knowledges' (Gergen, 2000a, 10).[24]

Gergen's approach is also illustrated by the Ethnic Conflicts Research Project ECOR[25] whose organizers take the following position towards field studies:

> Field studies in conflict areas are only possible on the base of mutual confidence through long-standing personal contacts with members of the respective political or ethno-nationalist movements. We understand our work as a form of participatory action research. A central activity is building up

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[23] See literature about Action research in the ejournal Action Research International, http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/arihome.html, and Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; Boyarsky & Murphy, 1998; Carson & Sumara, 1997; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Gustavsen, 1998; Kalleberg, 1989; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998; Marrow, 1964; McNiff, 1992; Neal, Watts, & Calhoun, 1995; Reason, Peter,1994; Reason et al., 1985; Reason, 1988; Srivastva et al., 1990; Stringer, 1999; Torbert, 1991; Whyte, 1991; Zuber-Skerritt, 1991.

[24] "Appreciative inquiry" shifts the focus from who is right and wrong, fostering tolerance, or developing rules of proper conduct, to modes of collaborative action. This is used when organizations confront conflict - between management and workers, men and women, blacks and whites and so on (Gergen, 1995, 11).

[25] See http://www.oneworld.org/euconflict/guides/orgs/eu_h-s/366.htm.

> conjunctural teams of local researchers through training courses and learning by doing. Since collaborators usually are members of indigenous communities, our work contains elements of community development, but limited to funds made available. Traditional anthropological methods such as interviews and participating observation are honoured. Core principles of scientific research such as objectivity and impartiality are maintained. In the process the chimera of neutrality has been given up in favour of an approach which allows a degree of active participation. Solidarity with the plight of threatened peoples may produce dilemmas but does however not force us to cross the borderline and to adopt a partisan position.[26]

In conclusion, my own position is centered upon a dedication to the employment of non-humiliating methods not only for achieving a greater understanding of humiliation as a process and an experience, but also for research in general. Humility seems to be the central requirement, especially humility towards the experience of people who survive under circumstances to which most researchers are novices. Furthermore, authenticity in a dialogue between equals seems to be elemental. Humility and authenticity, this was the method employed for the research project in Africa described in this paper. This article describes a process, the process of seeing that humiliation plays an important role for research methodology.

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[26] Retrieved from http://www.oneworld.org/euconflict/guides/orgs/eu_h-s/366.htm in November 1999.

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