



Lessons from North Africa: The Dynamics of Displacement

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The North African Uprisings

The wave of revolutionary uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, from Morocco to Bahrain – demanding liberation, democracy and the right and means to live a full life – has been watched throughout the world. Cyberspace and new information technology have played a key political role. Cell phones and laptop computers helped protestors to organise and also sent vivid depictions of mass resistance to a global audience. They provided vital guidance for the international media that dispatched their men, women and cameras to the region as soon as they were convinced that this was a ‘big story’.

The internet and mass media obviously did not cause these uprisings. Nor are cell-phones and social media risk-free: after all, those who use them may be identified, sought out and harmed by the threatened regime. However, the internet provides hard evidence that tells the world what people in North Africa and the Middle East already know: that these revolutionary movements are being driven above all by the desperation and raw courage of hundreds, then thousands, then hundreds of thousands of people, above all young educated men and women.

Before the uprisings, most Europeans (I cannot speak for North America) living outside North Africa and Middle East did not think very deeply about those regions. In the popular European mind, such countries were reduced to their rulers: Egypt *was* Mubarak, Libya *was* Gaddafi, and so on. Now everybody knows different. The societies trapped beneath the weight of oppression have been revealed and have spoken.

Human rights and honour

The protesters have demanded for themselves what is ‘normal’ in many countries on all continents: the right to have a voice; the right to express their identity and interests in public spaces; the right to have free and fair elections; and the right to organise peacefully, both at work and in the political arena. Above all, the right for all to have their dignity and humanity respected, guaranteed and protected.

These dramatic events show the power of the ideals of citizenship and liberal democracy, which in this region has been opposed for decades by the reality of autocratic rule, in some cases sustained by the West. They also suggest that an older code, which is, incidentally, strong everywhere in the world, is also operating. Tribal loyalties and the honour code evidently remain strong in the Libyan army, for example. The honour code has humiliation at its centre. The man of honour (and it is normally a man, not a woman) can, by definition, impose humiliation on others and can protect himself and those he cares about from suffering humiliation. The honour code respects strength. It is very different from the human rights code, also highly valued by Libyans and many others, which respects rights and protects weakness. Both codes are active, in Libya as elsewhere.

The neo-liberal experiment

However, there is another factor also at work. These events expose serious weaknesses in the neo-liberal project of capitalist globalization, which has planted

its heavy footprint in North Africa, especially Egypt. This is discussed by Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet, who edited the book *Egypt: The Moment of Change*, which was published in 2009 before the events at Tahrir (or Liberation) Square. They write that 'For partisans of capitalist globalisation, Egypt is an important example of the progressive character of the neoliberal project' (El-Mahdi and Marfleet 2009, 4).

This neo-liberal project was enthusiastically adopted by the Mubarak regime. As a consequence, health care, education, telecommunications, transport, electricity, sanitation, water, irrigation, and electricity have all been privatised since 1990s. However, along with privatisation came increasing inequality, a great rise in unemployment, a strong current of popular discontent, and systematic repression.

Ironically, the neo-liberal experiment, in places such as Egypt, has had two unintended consequences. It has, unintentionally, provided protesters with new means to organise and a new willingness to take the risk of confronting armed state power.

The first point, obviously, relates to the use of new information technology. This technology is the lifeblood of capitalist or business globalization. Sophisticated exponents of the neo-liberal project like Thomas Friedman argue that rapid movement of information across the world without hiding anything is absolutely essential for making economies work effectively. However, as we know, new information technology is also very useful for people planning resistance to existing political regimes.

The responses of telecommunications companies to this situation have been divided. Vodafone Egypt, 44.7% owned by the government, sent out pro-regime messages at the start of the revolution (see, for example, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/03/vodafone-egypt-text-messages> for a report by *Guardian* columnist Charles Arthur). By contrast, Facebook in Tunisia apparently made efforts to defend the privacy of their users, including demonstrators, by routing all logins via a secure https protocol.

Turning to the second point, a core message of neo-liberalism is that the race of life is won by the

swift and crafty, and that if you want to avoid failure and degradation, the riskiest thing is to do nothing at all. Neo-liberalism shows no pity for those who are 'losers' or those that do not look after themselves. One consequence of this situation is that many people in North Africa who are young and fit enough have had to consider the option of migrating abroad, possibly illegally, to a richer country with more employment opportunities.

This is very challenging. It often means dealing with criminals, facing threats of violence, taking highly risky forms of transport, being prepared to engage in deceptions of many kinds, and adapting to intense discomfort. This rigorous 'training regime' teaches those who receive it how to overcome disappointment and try again if they do not get what they want immediately. It is evident that migration is a deeply unsettling experience for many people who do it.

However, the experience of international migration toughens people up. This leads us to the second unintended consequence of the global neo-liberal project which is that it has given people throughout the world, especially young people, a harsh but effective training in how to face up to uncertainty and cope with risk. These are highly transferrable skills. In practice, this training has produced a generation of people that includes many who, as has been seen, now feel equipped and ready to engage in the uncertain and risky business of opposing oppressive regimes.

Comparing North Africa and Eastern Europe

Nobody knows what the outcome of the current wave of revolutionary and protest movements will be. The different countries involved so far [by March 2011], including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain, are very different from each other in many ways. It is worth mentioning that the same applies with respect to the countries involved in the East European uprisings after 1989 that are sometimes mentioned as a point of comparison. East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and so on

were also very different from each other. It is much too early to draw detailed conclusions with respect to a comparison between North Africa and Eastern Europe but I would like to make one preliminary suggestion.

The revolutions in Eastern Europe obviously had deep and particular historical roots. However, in the immediate background of all those events was increasing evidence that the Soviet Union was losing its international authority and its capacity to get its own way, especially in its more ambitious international projects. One of those projects was the war in Afghanistan that had begun in 1979. As everyone knows, in that year Russian troops very rapidly overthrew the existing Afghan regime and installed their own favoured politician as president. This was followed by several years of guerrilla warfare, ending in stalemate, but eventually the Russians decided to build up an Afghan army of indigenous troops, put that Afghan army in charge of maintaining order, and withdraw the Soviet army declaring that the job was done.

In fact, the Russian military withdrawal was widely recognised as a defeat and certainly diminished the prestige of the USSR. From 1989 onwards, the global powerhouse of communism was clearly China rather than Russia, a decisive shift towards the East. This situation reduced the fear of military intervention by Moscow in the rebel cities of Leipzig, Budapest, Prague, and so on. It also helped to them that the Soviet President was Mikhail Gorbachev who had no stomach for a fight, rather than his more belligerent and less imaginative predecessors.

Turning back to North Africa, the recent uprisings also have deep and particular roots. However, it is worth asking, even in a very preliminary way, whether there are any parallels to the circumstances just described in Eastern Europe? For decades the United States has been the dominant international power in North Africa, although Europe's continuing influence remained important. It is therefore worth asking: have the United States' recent difficulties in Afghanistan, and its imminent withdrawal, played a part in the politics of North Africa in some ways similar to the part played by Soviet experience in the politics of East Eu-

rope? In other words, have America's recent failures and embarrassments decreased fears that Washington will immediately come to the aid of oppressive regimes friendly to America when they are challenged from below? It may also be relevant that President Obama has adopted a more tactful and 'hands off' posture in foreign relations than the second president Bush.

Just as significant, perhaps, is the massive economic crisis that has hit the United States, and the whole of the West in 2007 and has continued since then. This has exposed the fact that Western finance and big business have depended on a massive amount of credit that is not backed by solid assets. When confidence collapsed throughout the Western world, North American and European governments had to raid their treasuries to bail out the banks. Now these Western governments, in turn, are having to rely on Asian governments, especially China, to keep purchasing their treasury bonds. Here we have a systemic crisis that has undermined the prestige of the United States and accelerated a global shift of power from West to East.

Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* recently wrote that this financial crisis had brought forward by a decade the public spending crisis Western governments were facing as their populations grew older and economic growth slowed down. It had also caused an 'accelerated shift in the global balance of economic power' towards the East. He added that 'What the crisis has accelerated even more sharply is a shift in attitude towards the west and the US, in particular. As Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, has noted, Asians no longer respect the west's competence, battered as it has been by military misadventure and then financial mishap' (*Financial Times*, 1st February 2011).

Perhaps the perceived weakening of the United States' global position and its government's self-confidence contributed to the North African insurgencies just as much as, twenty years before, the perceived weakening of the Soviet Union and its leadership contributed to the revolts in Eastern Europe. In each case the people saw that the dominant outside power in

their region had been humiliated, decided that their best hope for a decent life in a decent society was to take action on their own account, and saw that the best time to act was immediately. They struck while the iron was hot.

The meaning of globalization

These comments on Eastern Europe and North Africa take me right into the heart of my theme, which is the relationship between globalization, liberation and humiliation. One thing I have discovered in the past few years is that these words are heavily ‘loaded’: in other words, they carry a great deal of emotional, ideological and political baggage. Let me illustrate this.

Many years ago – in fact in October 2002 – I gave a paper at an Asia-Pacific Development conference at Shandong University in Jinan, China. My topic was globalization and the social sciences. The people in the audience at Jinan were mainly drawn from Russia, China, Korea and other parts of East Asia.

On this occasion I approached the topic very much in the manner of a wide-ranging historical sociologist, with the emphasis on the ‘historical.’ With great panache I said that globalization, properly understood, was not something that began recently but in fact was a process that had been going on for centuries. That was because people had been establishing links of all kinds over political borders and across ocean and continents since long before the beginnings of the Silk Road. According to that criterion, the Vikings, the Mongols, the Assyrians, the Lebanese and the Venetians and many others had all been engaged in globalization across the centuries.

As far as I was concerned, way back in 2002, ‘globalization’ – this process of continually creating and transforming relationships between communities, peoples and governments through trade, exploration and war – was an important aspect of what I would call world-formation or world-building. This is a bit like nation-building but on a higher societal level. By world-formation or globalization I meant a long-term historical process that is continually reshaping the world at the highest level of organization, for example

through the collapse of the old European empires and the changing balance of power between east and west, and also the shifting relationship between Europe and America. I argued that, century by century, through this long process of globalization, the world was becoming increasingly interdependent and more like a single global society, even though political power continued to be divided up or shared among a number of states.

I think I had in mind – back then in 2002 – that the world would eventually become like some kind of super European Union, a sort of ‘World Union’ (or stronger United Nations) – and that perhaps within this new ‘World Union’ Europe itself would be a sort of ‘global Scandinavia’, only with a much more just and effective economic organization than it has now as well as a humane military with highly educated soldiers. The soldiers would all have done university-level courses in civic responsibility and they would all have in their pockets annotated copies of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which they would consult carefully before pointing their weapons at anyone.

In fact, I did not go into that kind of detail – but I do remember the looks of amused disbelief verging on contempt that appeared on the faces of some of the people in the audience, notably some of the Russians. Not long afterwards, a senior scholar from one of the leading institutes in Moscow stood up to speak. He roundly denounced globalization saying that it was nothing more or less than Americanization – in fact, not just Americanization but worse: globalization was American imperialism.

Well, in fact (and obviously) I could see where he was coming from, especially when we take into account the world-wide deployment of American troops and armaments, the build-up of pressure for an invasion of Iraq that was occurring at that time, and the widespread enforcement of the so-called Washington Consensus which had the effect of making it easier to implement the neo-liberal strategy. As everybody knows, the Washington Consensus insisted that taxes, wages and government spending should all be kept as low as possible on the grounds that this encouraged the investment of new business capital and the increased influence of ‘healthy’ market forces. Low tax-

ation also meant that most of the profits produced by foreign inward investment were exported and did not benefit the society in which then investment had been made, even though key local intermediaries, especially in government, did benefit financially.

The Washington Consensus was forced upon governments that wanted to attract increased amounts of foreign investment from the United States or agencies such as the World Bank and IMF, which were under heavy American influence. The result had been to slow down the development of health, education and welfare provision for the mass of the people in those less wealthy and less powerful counties that were forced to follow that particular investment and governance regime.

My Russian colleague had some strong points but he was only half-right. He did not take into account the fact that what might be called the 'Brussels Consensus' was different from the Washington Consensus. The EU's bureaucrats are a very different proposition from the chiefs of the US Treasury. The EU was, and remains, fundamentally *dirigiste* in spirit. It believes, for example, in transferring European public funds to poorer regions where necessary – not at all a neo-liberal notion. One of the half-hidden stories of the past quarter century is the way European bureaucrats have used the ideology of the market as a cover for building up new public institutions enforcing regulatory and financial controls. Nicolas Jabko has told this story in his book called *Playing the Market* (Cornell UP 2006). This is relevant because North Africa was strategically placed between the American and European zones of influence. This meant, for example, that the French tradition of the reforming bureaucrat remained strong in countries such as Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. This made a big difference.

It is very striking that Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco were all listed in the UN Human Development Report in 2010 as being in the global top ten of countries that had made the greatest improvement in human development during the forty years since 1970. Their biggest successes were in the areas of health and education rather than in economic growth. As a result of their efforts people were living longer and more healthily, and they were becoming better

equipped as citizens and workers. In other words, in those countries people came before profits. Successes like this help to explain the revolution of rising expectations in North Africa. In the words of two editors of the UN report, the Tunisian administration had the 'guts to go so directly against the conventional wisdom in the heyday of the Washington Consensus' and 'Similar stories seem to explain the success of the other North African top movers' (<http://www.eggovernmentiro.com/node/39450>).

In Jinan, my Russian colleague, a deeply educated man whom I certainly respected, was not at that point concerned with these important subtleties. While I was trying to be detached and dispassionate and take a bird's eye view of historical time and geographical space, he had a clearer idea than I did about what was at stake, politically. The message that he was giving to me was as follows: 'Why don't you get real! As far as we are concerned, globalization means being pushed around by rich and powerful outsiders who force us to play their game by their rules – the rules of the so-called free market – and, surprise, surprise, we end up being losers in this game we did not ask to join. This is an attempt to humiliate us and we resent it intensely.' He did not use all those words but I could see that was his message. In three words it was: 'globalization is humiliating.'

The meaning of humiliation

I had a second lesson in the emotional and political impact of specific words when, two months later, in December 2002, I went to Cambridge, Massachusetts for a few days. This time the theme of my talk was globalization and the dynamics of humiliation and I gave it to a small audience at Harvard mainly consisting of historians. As in Jinan, these were also deeply educated people whom I greatly respected. Perhaps, I thought, I might get a more sympathetic, or at least understanding, audience on this occasion.

I explained that by humiliation I meant outrageous and unacceptable displacement or exclusion from the place where the humiliated person or group thought they rightfully belonged. They were pushed

down or pushed out. I added that 'place' does not always mean a particular geographical location. It can also mean a particular social location or a particular social condition – such as being a member of a respected upper class, or the acknowledged leader of a particular group.

I argued that a central theme in many cultures was how to deal with humiliation as a recurrent human experience, and I illustrated this by mentioning two medieval legends from Europe. Both these legends have gone round the world because of Walt Disney. One was the story of the struggle between the Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood. The Sheriff of Nottingham was a member of the conquering Norman regime that had been imposed upon England in 1066. From his strong castle he oppressed the people of Nottingham. Robin Hood and his 'merry men' founded a local resistance movement against the Norman oppression. Robin Hood's men hid amongst the trees in Sherwood Forest. When they ventured into Nottingham the sympathetic local crowd protected them. Robin Hood could not overthrow the Normans but he regularly humiliated the sheriff, bringing him down, disrupting his schemes and making him look a fool.

The other medieval legend is the Pied Piper of Hamelin. If the Sheriff of Nottingham evokes political oppression everywhere, the pied piper with his brightly coloured costume and his seductive musical instrument (his pipe or flute) reminds us of the impact upon ordinary people of big business with its glitzy technology and fancy advertising.

Most people know the story, I think. The town of Hamelin has a big problem with vermin. They can't get rid of their rats. They don't know what to do. A glamorous stranger arrives from over the hill and says that he can solve the town's problems but he wants an absolutely enormous sum of money in return. The leaders of Hamelin agree. The pied piper plays his pipe and the rats follow him out of the town. The pied piper then comes back for his payment but the townspeople refuse to pay the price he wants. So he picks up his pipe again, plays an even more seductive tune – and all the children of Hamelin follow him out of town and over the hill and are never seen again.

This story is about powerful outsiders who offer you deals. You may think you can out-bargain them but you cannot. They seduce their way into your community, devalue your skills and beliefs, make you dependent on new technologies that seem magical and which you cannot control, at least not without learning many new things and, then, as a final insult, they cause disruption in your families and take away your sons and daughters. The children of Hamelin were turned into economic migrants.

The central point of the argument I made to my Harvard audience was that political and business leaders who found themselves able to dominate communities or even whole countries were very likely to find themselves imposing humiliation upon them.

Well, if the Russians had been quietly contemptuous, the Americans were quietly furious. Well, not quietly in fact. I was roasted – in a gentlemanly way, but roasted. There were some references from members of the audience to 'European arrogance' and one colleague expressed his irritation at the burden the United States had to carry in dealing with the rest of the world, which meant that it was for ever being drawn into other peoples' disputes and never being thanked for solving their problems. Above all, 'globalization' was regarded by this audience as the United States sharing its secrets for success with the rest of the world. The suggestion that this act of generosity could be interpreted as imposing humiliation on the world was received by some members of this audience as being, in itself, deeply humiliating to the Americans themselves.

I received additional confirmation about American sensitivity a few years later when I published a book on these matters. Throughout the process of writing the book, my publishers were very happy with my working title, which was 'Globalization and Humiliation.' Then, in the final stages of production, I received a message from the publishers who told me that if I wanted the book to appear I would have to change the title. This was because the marketing director for the United States completely refused to market a book in America with the title 'Globalization and Humiliation.'

After a brief struggle, I compromised.¹ The book

is certainly about globalization and humiliation but it is now called *Globalization: The Hidden Agenda* (Smith 2006). In fact it has now been translated into Arabic by the National Centre for Translation in Cairo and this version is due to appear in May 2011.

Neo-cons in Washington

Globalization. The Hidden Agenda (2006) was written at a time when 9/11 and the second invasion of Iraq were very recent memories. At that time, America was showing a neo-conservative face (or 'neo-con') to the world. The neo-con approach was a mixture of two elements: imperialist self-assertion in the late-nineteenth century spirit of Cecil Rhodes (who declared he would like to 'annex the stars'); and the puritan self-righteousness inherited from the early days of America's existence as a settler society. Settlers from Europe, whether in South Africa, Ulster or North America, were typically escaping from circumstances where they did not fit in. They carried with them to their new home the feeling that they had been pushed out. They felt aggrieved and badly done by. They were determined that they would not suffer degradation and diminishment again so they set out to possess and protect their new home as completely as possible. This led to a degree of ruthlessness. This ruthless was fed partly by fear and partly by a strong conviction of their own virtuousness, which was identified as the source of their strength.

The argument I made in the middle of the last decade suggested that, with the neo-cons in power, Washington's approach to the rest of the world, [as described by, for example, Thomas Friedman in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (HarperCollins 2000) and by Thomas Barnett in *The Pentagon's New Map* (G M Putnam 2005)], combined many of the negative aspects both of the Sheriff of Nottingham and the Pied Piper of Hamelin. However, Washington is not the whole of America and that picture needs balancing.

Aspiration and displacement

It must be recognized that the revolutionary risings in North Africa, like those in East Europe twenty years before, were, in part, a tribute to the ideas of freedom, prosperity, and security combined with a fundamental equality of respect for people from all kinds of background. No country has made this vision as central to its national identity as the United States. America's optimism, its spirit of hope, is not a myth but is a constantly reinforced cultural achievement, fed by politicians, business people, street-level activists and the mass media.

We are all familiar with the model of social behaviour that lies at the heart of this vision. It comes from Adam Smith and says that human beings are driven to maximise or optimise the potential benefits of the social situation in which they are located and the resources to which they have access. This motivation may be called 'ambition', or 'aspiration' or sometimes simply 'greed.' The motor that drives social interaction, according to this model, is the private search for personal advantage.

America's soft power, its seductive advertising of the American Dream, has been very effective for well over a century. The American Dream has become the global dream. This global victory is epitomized by the urgent and forceful demand of North Africa's young educated elite demanding to have their share of that dream. Ironically, this symbolic victory coincides with a serious worsening of America's economic capacity to deliver that dream to its own people.

In fact, we have already moved into a new global situation that has three characteristics.

Firstly, there is now a huge global constituency that wants the freedom to pursue and obtain a life style that gives them what they see the Americans as having: relaxed enjoyment of material conveniences and the ability to mix those comforts with their own cultural ingredients, their own purposes and their own sense of identity. But, and this is crucial, this same constituency is turning away from the American form of political economy that gives big business the whip hand. The state is back – indeed in most of Asia and Europe it never went away – and sovereign funds

are making the financial weather. Even the American government is getting the message. In his inaugural address, President Obama dared to say: The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works' (*New York Times*, 20th January 2009). This was quite radical stuff in the circumstances, even a little reminiscent of Gorbachev's cautious overtures towards the market economy. Each man – Gorbachev and Obama - saw that the system he had inherited from more conservative predecessors was failing to cohere and deliver. Each man reached out, pragmatically, towards the central principle of the 'opposing' system.

There is a second major change. Beneath all the rhetoric about freedom there is a competition under way to obtain access to increasingly scarce energy resources and valuable assets such as precious metals, water, timber and land. These resources are increasingly scarce because every year the world is becoming more urbanized and industrialized and more voices are making themselves heard, demanding a piece of the pie. In this arena, pragmatism does indeed reign. For example, on February 17th, two days after the recent unrest began in Libya, the president of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev and Italy's Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, were both in Rome. They were witnessing an agreement between Gazprom and the Italian energy company Eni. Gazprom is preparing to take over fifty percent of Eni's stake in the Elephant oilfield which is to be found 800 kilometres from Tripoli in Libya's south-west desert (http://www.eni.com/en_IT/media/press-releases/2011/02/2011-02-16-gazprom.shtml). It will be interesting to see which Libyan authorities the Italians and Russians will eventually be dealing with.

Third, and most fundamental of all, a geo-political earthquake is transforming structures both within and between societies. This is sometimes summarized as the shift of global power from east to west. I think that is an oversimplification. At least three processes are occurring at the same time and they have to be distinguished from each other.

One is the upsurge from below, from the growing army of increasingly well-educated citizens that is flooding into the cities throughout Eurasia, Africa and

America, north and south, men and women who do not accept that they should be denied the rights and benefits they see others enjoying. This movement is reinforced by the collapse of respect for political authority that has been underway since the 1940s. It also overlaps in part with the religious radicalism that offers a framework of intense involvement for some who are dismayed by the ambiguity and compromise they encounter in the growing cities, and who hunger for order and purpose.

At the same time, major transformations are occurring at each end of the Eurasian landmass. In the West, the European Union, which is still too large for its underdeveloped muscles, is increasingly establishing itself as an independent global actor. It is no longer a court of great nobles bowing down to the American monarch that tamed them in the 1940s.

Meanwhile, in the East, China is carefully, bit by bit, reclaiming its place as the Middle Kingdom, the most important country in the world. This process has been underway since 1949 and follows China's 'Century of Humiliation', as the government describes it, at the hands of the Western imperialist powers and Japan.

The point of the analysis just undertaken is that many people and groups in most parts of the world are currently experiencing the trauma of displacement. This is a key social mechanism and the way it operates in particular circumstances helps determine whether globalization is experienced as liberating or humiliating.

From displacement to humiliation

I think social scientists and, in fact, all of us should pay more attention to the dynamics of displacement, including its tendency to generate cycles of humiliation. Of course displacement does not necessarily lead to humiliation. Retired academics sometimes become emeritus professors. Retired Roman emperors became gods, which must surely be regarded as a promotion. More realistically, redundant workers, to take another example, may be provided with support and provided with retraining programmes and new forms of em-

placement. And so on.

In fact, the task of ensuring that instances of displacement, in other words, the movement of individuals or groups from one social location to another, do not become damaging and painful instances of ‘dislocation’, is one of the central challenges facing the world.

We could begin by recognizing that human behaviour is not to be explained only by the dynamics of aspiration, and the private search for personal advantage. That is only half the story. Interwoven with the logic of advantage-seeking, grounded in hope and aspiration, we find the logic of harm-avoidance grounded in fear of displacement and the need to cope with the threat of humiliation.

When people have been pushed out or pushed down, or fear that they might be, the distance between the social or physical place where they feel or ‘know’ they ‘should be’ and the place where they are, or might be, ‘wrongly’ confined is painful to experience or contemplate. The main point is that displacement becomes humiliating when it is experienced as being forced, outrageous and unacceptable. Because it is impossible to bear, humiliation stimulates action, either on the self, on the situation or the relationship between the self and the situation.

People may, for example, try to reconstruct or undermine the attitudes, groups or institutions that stand in the way of their return to their ‘proper’ social location. Or they may try to escape from their humiliating ‘prison’ and find a better place to be. Or they may try to reconstruct themselves, culturally, emotionally or psychologically so that they are better adapted to their new location which may even eventually become ‘acceptable’ (this was what Adam and Eve’s descendants did after their parents were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, and, as this example implies, the effect was to turn a sense of being humiliated – which is seen as the work of others – into a sense of being ashamed – which is seen as the results of one’s own transgression).

In any case, the downside is that whether the sufferer tries to escape humiliation, to accept it, or to reject it, the outcome is likely to be a perpetuation of cycles of humiliation. Those who escape find it diffi-

cult to trust their new neighbours and out of fear are liable to take repeated pre-emptive action against them. Those who teach themselves to accept that the humiliation was deserved and try to ‘reform’ themselves are vulnerable to being victimized. Those who reject the humiliation may take revenge. In all three cases – fear cycles, victimization cycles and revenge cycles – humiliation is renewed and reinforced.

The humiliation generated by centuries of world-formation processes has created layers of resentment that are sedimented in many cultures, sometimes below the surface. Resentment is the long after-life of anger: anger generated by imperial conquest and oppression, by the unfairness of externally-imposed economic arrangements (offers we ‘can’t refuse’), and the degradations of misrecognition imposed upon the migrant pitched into a cosmopolitan no-man’s land.

This deeply-sedimented resentment is the equivalent of a fossil fuel, buried within the psyches and collective awareness of ordinary people. It is a fuel that can be mined and used to provide the political energy for large projects. There are many examples of this: Hitler, Stalin, Mugabe and so on. This is a very tempting strategy for politicians in countries that lose out in the scramble for raw materials and energy resources, and for leaders who are unable to get their hands on the economic means to satisfy the aspirations of their followers, or who prefer to keep the profits for themselves.

What is to be done?

At this point, Lenin’s classic question comes to mind: what is to be done? I would like to offer some suggestions. One is to recognize that a world in which there is no displacement is difficult to imagine but we should, as far as possible, ensure that displacements are not humiliating because that is rather like scattering explosive material around the living room: something to avoid if possible. It helps if we understand the dynamics of humiliation and, the nature of humiliation cycles. Breaking those cycles is very difficult but it has been done in Northern Ireland. The European Union is another example. The EU was founded

in order to break the revenge cycle that set France and Germany at each others' throats for a century and a half.

All this is very difficult but a strong motivation may be provided by the observation that all humiliation cycles tend over time to turn into revenge cycles. The victims of fear cycles and victimization cycles eventually strike back and take revenge unless they are fortunate enough to have the wisdom of a Mandela or a Gandhi.

Revenge is the deadliest factor in this equation because it comes from the heart of the honour code. In a human rights framework wrongs are put right through a judicial process not by a trial of strength and honour. Violence and war tend to drive out human rights, even when they are undertaken to protect them. That is why they are best avoided: a last resort, not a first.

It is striking that human rights are strongest *within* states and polities where they can be enforced by a state apparatus and a governing establishment. By contrast, relations *between* states – external relations – are more likely to operate according to the honour code. Governments often behave like knights on horseback in their dealings with each other. This ‘honour code’ spirit diminishes as countries form alliances, treaties and frameworks of shared governance. Again, the European Union is one example.

The most effective way to advance human-rights thinking and decommission the spirit of revenge, even if it is difficult to eliminate that entirely, is to bring contesting interests beneath the same roof, to establish forms of governance that encompass them all and which are able to enforce rules and judgments they will all respect and obey. Big cities like Chicago are classic examples of this spirit of mutual accommodation at work. Members of national and ethnic groups whose governments hate each other on the other side of the world get along remarkably well in Chicago even though there is sometimes bad feeling. They organize the distribution of the spoils amongst themselves according to rules and procedures that they have created themselves.

Conclusion

This analysis has certainly not solved these problems but I hope it has partially clarified them. Perhaps one of the new factors to come into the equation in the last few weeks is the discovery that crowds allied with new information technology and the mass media can sometimes overcome dictators and armies. We need to understand much more clearly how this works and what it implies.

Crowds, like explosives, can have both good and bad effects. As Elias Canetti points out in *Crowds and Power* (Canetti 1973), crowds are, potentially, a massive engine of humiliation. The medium-term objective must surely be, as Robert Park argued long ago, to turn the energetic crowd into a rational and democratic public (Park 1904; Park 1975; Smith 1988, 111-133). If this happens, it could be a giant step towards breaking the cycles of humiliation.

Note

1 The publishers were completely professional and thoroughly supportive throughout. The decision about the title was taken on commercial grounds. The point is that the incident dramatically revealed some fears and anxieties associated with use of the word ‘humiliation’

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