

In Response to Lacey (2011): Humiliation and Honour in Policy?

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Lacey's (2011) analysis of the role of humiliation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict provides an important approach to further the understanding of this conflict from a social psychological perspective. Lacey (2011) draws upon psychoanalytic theories of trauma and mourning, as well as psychosocial concepts of chosen traumas and victimhood, to delineate the evolution of the dynamics of humiliation in contributing to the perpetuation of the conflict. He connects the Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints, then outlines how, historically and in the present, both groups have reacted within the context of humiliation.

In this commentary, I hope to further elaborate on the definition of humiliation and its relation to dignity and honour as needs for the healthy development of collective or group identity. I discuss how Lacey's (2011) valuable work on the topic leads us to yet a deeper understanding of the conflict. Finally I will push towards social psychologists' responsibility to become social actors with the knowledge they develop so as to create significant policy changes that reflect this acquired understanding.

Lacey accurately relates humiliation to trauma and victimhood. Un-mourned trauma leads to melancholia, that is to say the repeated, relived and deep memory of the past that continues to haunt and affect the psyche in the present leading to "psychological atrophy" (Herman, 1992, p. 86). Humiliation is thus at the heart of trauma. Humiliation, as defined by Linder (2001; 2007), can be understood in three ways: as an act – I humiliate you, as a feeling – you feel humiliated, and as a process – the entire process of humiliation. It appears that Lacey (2011) is focusing on the process of humiliation which interferes with the self-esteem of group identity.

Humiliation exists counter to honour and dignity (Linder, 2007). If we analyze honour and dignity within the roots of each group's identity, then the dynamics that Lacey (2011) describes become clear. Social identity theory posits that group identity is formed based on belonging that is generated through the positive view of the 'self' group, and concurrently the more negative perception of the 'other'. In order for group identity to be sustained the group must view itself as better than the 'other' which is a constructed perception of the enemy. Per Tajfel and Turner (1986), in order for a group to have positive group identity, it must perceive itself, its values, and causes as superior, and will create a perceived designated other, who is then viewed as inferior. Honour and dignity are thus a part of maintaining group self-esteem. In the case of Palestinians and Israelis, the roots of identity stretch into

history, as both Jewish and Arab cultures have an extended sense of time. As Lacey (2011) states, Israeli victimhood is rooted in the Holocaust, but also extends back to a history of Jewish suffering and existence in exile dating to 600BC. Humiliation is the result of Jewish passivity. Nationalist Israeli ideology, propelled by Zionism, perceives honour within the new Jewish archetype, the one who is strong and will fight back (Zerubavel, 2002). Palestinian victimhood is rooted in the 1948 *nakba*, but also extends into a history of Muslim conflict with Christians, and a perception that Israel represents the invasion of the West into the Middle East (Bickerton and Klausner, 2005). Humiliation is seated in a loss of honour that is tied to three different facets: Islamic ideals of a superior people to Christians and the West, family honour, and an attachment to the land. While for Israelis, restoring collective honor means fulfilling the image of the new Israeli archetype who is a fighter so as to prevent another Holocaust, and further, another cycle of exile, for Palestinians in Gaza, restoring honour means fighting for land, not allowing the West to invade, and protecting the family.

But what does this knowledge contribute to the resolution of the conflict? Lacey's (2011) argument concludes that humiliation is one factor which fuels the conflict. My commentary elaborates the restoration of honor and dignity as needs that will bring about positive group identity for both, thus hinting at one change that would bring about the de-escalation of the conflict (but realistically not its resolution). How do we transform these insights to active change? For social psychologists, the world of academia remains distinctly separate from the world of activism and policy implementation except in the realm of action research. Action research, advocated by Lewin in psychology starting in 1946, is different from traditional research methodologies, in that it focuses on fact finding to reach solutions for social change that are then tested for effectiveness (Schneider, Gruman, and Coutts, 2005). This approach, while maintaining some similarities with traditional methodologies, implies cycles of research in which fact-finding occurs both to implement social change, and again to evaluate and modify the initial social change that was put into practice. It therefore requires flexibility and transformation of the research design throughout the project. Action research is also grounded in an assumption that runs counter to traditional methods by challenging concepts of "objectivity". Rather, it acknowledges researcher bias. Unfortunately, this methodology remains in the periphery of social psychology.

Maybe it is social psychologist Martin-Baro (1990) who best elucidates the dilemma (in Fox, 1993, p. 234):

"An attempt to be scientifically neutral quickly becomes a form of collaboration with established powers . . . Objectivity is not the same as impartiality with regard to the processes that necessarily affect all of us. It is therefore more useful for psychosocial analysis for one to become conscious of one's involvements and interests rather than denying them in an attempt to exist on a fictitious higher plane, "beyond good and evil."

Social psychologists have already begun to adopt alternate research approaches, such as Moghaddam, Kelman, Bar-On, or Chaitin to name a few. While funding tends to go to those who use statistical methods and databases to provide 'objective' results in the form of numbers, we can certainly begin educating and exposing others across disciplines to different approaches by sharing our knowledge in broader circles, with those who know how to implement change: the activists, grass roots movements, politicians, the media, and policy makers. Our work continues to be published in scholarly journals that are read by other social psychologists, and more broadly in the field of academia among other humanities disciplines, but it does not reach the mainstream. We must therefore not only publish knowledge encouraging change, but we must learn to cooperate across disciplines with those who make it happen.

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