“Humiliation” as Positions in Narratives: Implications for Policy Development

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When the Darfur father is forced to witness the rape of his daughter by the Janjaweed, the result is abject humiliation for him, as well as for her. The sexual violation was bad enough, but forced to be witnessed by his daughter, and her tormentors, as a witness to the rape was tantamount to being forced to participate himself in the violation, against all moral and legal taboos. And for her, the torture was not only the physical pain, but being "made low" by exposing her privates to the public gaze, including her father. Their humiliations were no doubt different in texture (she, humiliated, by being raped in public, and he humiliated by being unable to fulfill his role as father, protecting his daughter's innocence), but the structure of it, from a narrative perspective, is the same: they are both narratives in which a victim: a) suffers from actions of an Other(s) intended to inflict harm; b) is forced by those actions to participate in the violation of core moral standards;[1]and c) is forced to suffer, and violate these norms in a public space where their suffering, as well as their (forced) participation in the violation of core moral standards, is witnessed by Others. Together these three components are critical to the production of humiliation. And all three components are core to the resulting narratives of revenge.

Revenge narratives, in turn, have the following features: victims a) recount their innocent suffering resulting from intentional actions of Others; b) review/reveal the immorality of those actions; c) contrast that immorality with the moral code that should guide action; d) promise that the moral injustice will be punished/righted through counter violence; e) reasserting that the avenger/victim refuses to remain victimized. These narratives of course constitute the Other as victimizer, deserving of the counter violence.

[1] These cultural standards pertain to appropriate/moral behavior for a given contexts; the more culturally general the standard, the more likely it is will be a frequently used method for humiliation. But given the diversity of cultural norms, there is likely also wide variation of what would constitute a violation of core values.

Narratives of humiliation and revenge reveal and constitute the "positions" that persons occupy in the social/relational space. Harre and Moghaddam (2003) has defined a "position" as the moral location assigned by self (or others) to persons in the narrative. This moral location is, in turn, a function of the attributes/descriptors/traits assigned by self (or others), the roles that characters play, including the nature of intentions attributed, as well as the plot line which provides the causal structure for (good or bad) outcomes. Positions can thus be good or evil, and everything in between; gradations of good or evil of course depend on the cultural norms/frames that folks use to exalt or denigrate people. In a narrative of humiliation, the victim position is constituted by the ultimate helplessness of the victim, (the lack of agency, overall, despite efforts), the intention of the Other to harm and denigrate the victim in front of Others, as well as the imperviousness of the Others who witness the victimization and do nothing. There may be subplots within the humiliation narrative which describe efforts on the part of the victims to stop the victimizers or efforts to move the witnesses to get involved and participate by protecting the victim.

Harre & van Langenhove (1999) and Cobb (2000, 2002, 2003) have argued that legitimate social positions in discourse, in narrative, are the means by which legitimacy is both constructed and contested. In other words, positions are what is at stake in the struggle over meaning. And conflicts are struggles over meaning, which suggests that the positions in narratives are the location of the conflict itself. This is not to say that material resources are not also the source of and location for conflicts, but rather to note that resource allocation conflicts are almost always complicated by struggles over legitimacy, for appropriate moral positions in narrative.

Recent research by McCabe, Rigdon, & Smith (2003) shows that it is the attribution of positive intention to others that sets up the conditions for collaboration; this research proves that even within game theoretic analysis, collaborative allocation of resources is *not* a function of attributes of the resources themselves but rather a function of the way that parties story (perceive) the intentions of self and Other. This new finding in game theoretic analysis backs up longstanding work in relational approaches to conflict analysis and resolution.[2] This attention to narrative, and the positions constructed within narrative, provides an alternative to the view of humiliation as emotion.[3] Without denying the important role of emotion, this narrative perspective enables a focus on the form and content of the symbolic dimensions of humiliation which provide the foundation for revenge, and the ensuing cycles of humiliation. And this narrative frame can be applied to multiple "emotions" enabling us to distinguish core features, which may have, I will argue later, implications for policy formation.

Consider "shame" for example. Excellent research on shame has described the complexity of this experience, its multiple levels, etc.[4] A narrative view of this emotion would suggest it also is often told from a position of "victim" but in this case: a) the speaker suffers as a consequence of his/her own actions; b) these actions violated cultural/moral norms; c) others witnessed (or are imagined to have witnessed) the violation of cultural norms; and perhaps d) the speaker suffers from others witnessing that the speaker him/herself witnessed their witnessing---knowing that the Others know that the speaker knows they know etc. However, the key difference is that there is an

[2] See Burton (1997) for a good description of conflict as a function of needs for recognition and identity, for example.
[3] I am not arguing here that humiliation is not an emotion, but rather it is also a narrative, with narrative features.
[4] See Retzinger & Scheff (1996).

internal attribution of responsibility, rather than an externalization, as there is with humiliation. For this reason, narratives of revenge are not an outgrowth of narratives of shame, unless they are directed at self. However, the ethnic and religious conflicts that cover the globe are fueled by stories of humiliation (Volkan's "chosen trauma") which are the basis for stories of revenge ("chosen glories"). It is narratives of humiliation that are the source of cycles of violence, not narratives of shame---the former externalizes while the latter internalizes the cause of the suffering.

From this perspective, it could be argued that the transformation of narratives of humiliation to narratives of shame would be an important step toward breaking cycles of violence, in the context of identity-based conflicts, for it would involve the movement from externalization to internalization of responsibility. But this would require a significant evolution in the relationships *within* victim groups, as well as *between* groups that perceive themselves as victims of each other, in the case of reciprocal violence. There are clearly many circumstances where violence is not reciprocal and in these cases, it would not be therapeutic to support the evolution toward narratives of shame----victims should not be encouraged to internalize responsibility for their own suffering. But often, with a bigger optic, violence is often reciprocal within a larger frame, and therefore, in a narrative that sets up a larger view, it is possible to set up the narrative for violence to be framed as reciprocal, for responsibility to be *both* externalized *and* internalized. And it is precisely this kind of moral complexity that is needed for the relational development necessary for conflict transformation, if not resolution.

Consider the example of Northern Ireland;[5] both sides have told stories about victimizing the Other side, and in the process, breaching some of the moral tenets core to their own side. So while the "hurting stalemate" hypothesis suggests that folks stop violence when they hurt too much, (ripeness theory), narrative analysis would suggest that in the telling of stories of reciprocal violation there is movement toward reciprocal responsibility and revelation of common moral frameworks for evaluating action.

While this may be theoretically possible, it is extremely complicated in practice, given existing policy frameworks, legal doctrines, and criminal codes. For example, the Spanish government cannot in any way tell a story in which they are victims of, and victimizers of, Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA). They remain resolute that the government has worked to gain control over ETA criminals. And conversely, ETA is unlikely to tell a narrative that they have acted in ways that are contrary to their own moral values by engaging in "terrorist" activities. According to ETA, they are behaving morally. However, neither the Spanish government nor ETA is telling, at this point, narratives of humiliation. While both are claiming that the other inflicted suffering intentionally, neither has claimed that the Other forced them to violate their own cultural norms or moral values. Instead, we only see narratives of revenge----stories about the necessity for violence, for the redemption of honor. It could be argued that these narratives of revenge are the historical artifacts of humiliation narratives which once roamed the relational

[5] A narrative perspective does not measure power asymmetries by assessing relative strength of force or economic power or social capital; rather it examines the presence or absence of each side's ability to tell their stories and have them circulated to wider audiences. So the Palestinians have not had power symmetry with Israel in any material sense, but they have had narrative power---their story has been widely circulated and elaborated by other nations, including Arab nations. However, we could argue that terrorism is generally the result of a narrative of humiliation that does not have a hearing with those that are positioned in the narrative as "victimizer," where the victimizer has the capacity to be impervious. See Watzlawick et all (1967) for an excellent discussion of "imperviousness" as relational practice. So having narrative power does not imply that the Other (those that are positioned as victimizers in the narrative) will respond, or explain, or react.

landscape. However, it is likely that humiliation narratives have a very short life, and quickly tip into revenge narratives. And in the process, we lose the information about the experience of what it was like to be forced to violate your own moral frameworks, and to be witnessed by others that you were "brought low" ----Others who participated by laughing at your suffering, or others who simply knew of your suffering and did nothing but looked the other way. A narrative assessment of identity-based conflicts in the world today would likely reveal very few humiliation narratives,[6] and fewer still shame narratives.[7] But the world is full of narratives of revenge which fuel the cycles of violence that characterize intractable conflicts. The paucity of humiliation narratives is predictable because victims are "made low" again in the recounting of their humiliation, so the resulting revenge narrative, externally focused on Other's violation of moral code, elides the victim's forced participation in the violation of their own morality.

So far, I have argued that narratives of humiliation set up positions in discourse for self/Other, and these positions are the locations for the struggle over meaning and legitimacy. They enact the conflict, they fuel the conflict. And they are the location for the transformation of humiliation narratives into tragic narratives that highlight the painful ironies, impossible paradoxes, and internalized responsibility. I have also noted that this transformation is extremely complicated, given the constraints on storytelling (legal etc), which restrict the way people can position self/Other as they are often forced to deny any/all internalization of responsibility. There need to be public spaces/forums

[6] The fact that the Enola Gay is on exhibit in a museum in the US is evidence that the US does not have a narrative of humiliation about using nuclear weapons on civilians in WWII. In fact the use of the bomb is still framed as a necessity.

[7] Germany's story about their role in the extermination of the Jews is a narrative of shame. But at a local level, there still is considerable narrative "work" that speakers do to distance themselves, personally, from the knowledge about the camps, or their agreement with what was done. See Scheff's excellent analysis of the German case in his book **Bloody Revenge** (1996) in which links the historical conditions for the rise of the Nazi party and Hitler, to the humiliation from WWI.

where the remnants of humiliation narratives can be recaptured from the revenge narratives that elide the way victims are "made low" and then can be transformed into narratives of shame/tragedy, for it is only by telling the stories that they can be materialized and transformed. However, most policy for assessing and responding to conflicts, foreign and domestic, are formulated on game theoretic assumptions that presume rational actors that maximize their gain.[8] And we have only to do a cursory examination of the number of failed policies (where there is no effective 'regulation" of the Others) or broken peace agreements to see that the assumptions which undergird the polices are flawed---people are not rational actors, but rather narrating beings that are caught in the web of stories that they cannot control, and cannot remake. Effective policy should be policy that reflects this "reality" and provides forums where humiliation narratives can be told, and in the telling, transformed.

Toward a Theory of Policy Development as Narrative Process: Revealing (Constructing) Humiliation

Forester (1999) has argued, convincingly argued that policy development is the process of negotiating consensus, and in the process, relationships between conflicting groups can be remade. Nino (1996), drawing on Dewey, has made a similar argument that conflicts, as a function of competing goals, can be negotiated via multi-stakeholder processes in which there is a focus on interests, not positions, as well as an opportunity to

[8] Human needs theory is another foundation for policy, and leads inevitably to the link between conflict and economic development. Recently I attended a forum on the Sudanese conflict, where a representative from the World Bank detailed economic plan for reducing the disparity between north and south Sudan. While this assumption that unmet human needs are responsible for the

"brainstorm" solutions. While these "consensus-driven" approaches to policy formation do focus on process, not outcome, and do assume the participation of multiple and competing voices, it has, as does the negotiation model that undergirds it, a couple of very problematic assumptions: a) persons can "separate the people from the problem"---that they can sit at the "negotiating table" with their Others, able to distinguish the Others from the problems. This is clearly not the case in instances where humiliation narratives are the foundation for repeated rounds of violence----the Others ARE the problem----their very existence is testimony to immorality and they are the incarnation of evil. And the passive witnesses that permitted the violation clearly cannot be trusted, so there is no source of support or help. The victim in a humiliation narrative is alone. For these reasons, it is very difficult to open dialogue or negotiations to reach consensus in the context of humiliation narratives. Second, the assumption that interests are pre-formed, that persons know and can articulate their interests is problematic, as Winship (2004) has pointed out in a recent paper.[9] He argues that policymakers' preferences may simply be unfinished or unformed and advocates the metaphor of "puzzling" as a framework for describing/forecasting how policymakers create patterns out of portions of a larger scene. He notes that not all the pieces may be present, they may be from competing puzzles, and there may never be a finished puzzle, a completed product, but rather an ongoing process of seeking patterns, fits, coherences.

Winship draws on Richardson's *Practical Reasoning about Final Ends* for a definition/perspective on "coherence" which refers to the "achievement of a situation in which multiple and conflicting ends are in fact compatible" (Winship, 2004 p. 7).

[9] See Winship's (2004) article "Policy Analysis as Puzzle-Solving: Managing Conflicting Policy Ends." (Unpublished. Copy on file with author.)

Circling back to narrative processes, "coherence" refers to the integration of the plots, character roles, and themes of a narrative. If we "retrofit" policy formation with a narrative lens, coherent policies are those that manifest this integration[10] which enable the appearance of BOTH externalization and internalization of responsibility. Winship, using the metaphor of "puzzling" is arguing that coherence is something that emerges out of the process of puzzling itself, out of seeing what the pieces are, and imagining how they might fit together toward the creation of "coherent whole" (p.9). And in turn, this process requires that we "recognize whether specific pieces fit together or not" (p.10). Policy development can thus be seen as a narrative process in which portions of narrative are puzzled together, toward the creation of coherent wholes where conflicting ends can become compatible. This requires the transformation of narratives themselves, such that there can be a conjoint story, as a basis for effective joint action. What we need is a process of policy development, as Forester has suggested, that helps us "puzzle" narratives until a conjoint story emerges.

This, in turn, requires the creation of a story of "what happened" (the past) that both/all parties can tell; it demands the transformation of humiliation narratives which rely on linear causal logics (externalizing responsibility) to circular logics (internalizing responsibility). The result is an ironic narrative that describes how parties struggled to reduce violence/immorality, only to inadvertently create the very conditions for more of the same.[11] The result is a narrative that contains dual positions for parties, as victims, and as agents as well. This ironic narrative is foundational to any discussion of the future,

[10] See Roe (????) for an excellent presentation of narrative policy analysis. He examines several cases of policy conflicts as narrative conflicts. However, he does not provide recommendations for how policy itself can be formulated as narrative process.
[11] Note that at the core of this narrative is the attribution of positive intent for both parties.

of shared possibilities, or of potential outcomes., for coherent stories of the past stabilize any discussion of the present or the future, precisely because narrative itself, by nature, demands the past, as precursor to present and future. In other words, policy formation, in context where humiliation narratives reign *requires* the creation of this foundational ironic narrative. So the question is, how can policy processes be structured/organized to provide the opportunity for this foundational narrative to be "puzzled" together?

Policy Process as Forum for Narrative Transformation

One strategy would be the adaptation of forums, a la Truth and Reconciliation forums, where stories of humiliation can be constructed and witnessed.[12] This process could allow for the storytelling process, in public places, framed not as a legal forum, for the collection of "facts," but rather framed as a social/cultural forum for discovering complex histories. Not only would the stories of suffering be moving, but they would also create the suffering not only as symmetrical but as interwoven, or interdependent. It would be important for there to be categories of persons providing their testimony ---- including community members, elected officials, government representatives, and organizational/institutional representatives from NGOs, schools and churches. Stories from all of these sectors would no doubt *multiply* the puzzle pieces that need to be on the "table" for consideration, generating the complexity that is the antidote to humiliation

[12] I am assuming that many of the stories that appear are not stories of humiliation but rather stories of victimization that lack reference to the fact that the persons themselves were forced to violate their own moral/cultural norms, in front of passive others. To recount being "made low" is itself shameful, so these stories are not likely to appear without some support for their materialization.

narratives and providing the pieces essential to the ironic narrative which both externalizes and internalizes responsibility.

This sounds like a good idea but who is the "witness," given that the Witnesses to a victim's humiliation often participate passively in the violation if only because they did not intervene in the first place? This could essentially contaminate the entire category of "witness" itself. Who is the agent that collects these stories? Who positions the table on which the puzzle pieces are laid? One resource would be the UN. At present this body is constituted as a decision-making body, and its missions that are preliminary to policy discussions are "fact-finding" in nature. However, the UN could play a role in convening the representatives that comprise the parties to violent conflict and "host" the forums where stories of suffering are documented via the words and faces of those that have suffered. These forums could be temporally limited in nature, and televised by national and international broadcasting companies. While this seems like a possible idea, it brings with it a host of problems, not the least of which would be how to define these forums in relation to the international legal institutions which seek to prosecute human rights violations. Another issue would be what criteria are used to select the victims who testify? Yet another problem would be to train the witnesses in narrative dynamics so that the features of the stories can be fully explored, rather than simply assuming that typical prosecutorial questions would be used to help elaborate the tales of suffering.

However, for each of these problems, there are potential solutions. So the practical viability of this policy process should not be the first issue; the central issue is the theoretical frame for the creation/formation of policy that a) allowing for wide (multi-sector) participation; b) recapture and reveal the narratives that undergird cycles of

violence (humiliation narratives); c) set up the puzzle pieces of the conjoint histories in a manner that constructs the ironic narrative, attributing positive intention to all. This would lead to a foreign policy that makes the foreign familiar and the familiar foreign.[13] It would change the "positions" we construct for self and Other, and open the way for new relationships, based on moral complexity (internalized and externalized responsibility). While this may seem, at this point, impractical and unlikely, we cannot move forward without imagining a future which could be different, without developing possible strategies for new ways of navigating. From this perspective, this paper offers itself as a puzzle piece and is intended to contribute to curiosity.

[13] It would challenge the current US policies that have lead to the war in Iraq, or formed the basis for the policy on North Korea. We, the US, would have to challenge our own policies that have given birth to new humiliation narratives

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