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A journey through words and concepts in a landscape of applied evil

I feel humble standing here in front of so many scholars in ***Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies***. I work voluntarily in a small human rights organization, mainly with the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. I have no formal education in human rights, but have gathered some experience from people who have suffered violations of human rights. Also, I have some ideas on patterns in such violation. I would like to lead you on a path going from word to word through a landscape of evil, using words and phrases like:

- dignity and humiliation
- the Lord syndrome and the banality of servility
- conscience

The name ***Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies*** takes us to the core of Human Rights. I quote from the preamble of *The International Covenants of Human Rights*:

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person, ...

On the one hand, we have *dignity and equal and inalienable rights*, on the other hand violations of these - good and evil. '*Barbarous acts*', '*Consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights*', etc. Many words are used. '*Humiliation*' is a good one.

We turn to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, articles 3 to 5. On the one hand, article 3, which opens with the word '*everyone*':

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

On the other hand articles 4 and 5, which open with the words 'no one':

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Slavery or servitude, relationships with superiors and inferiors, as well as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment - they are all covered by the word 'Humiliation'. The word 'torture' finds its definition in the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*:

For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as ...

When someone's human rights are violated, like the right to employment, education, social security, family and family life, shelter, health, standard of living, opinion, organization, etc., the person suffers. The sum of pains and suffering is an indicator of how severe the violations are.

The professional Human Rights Worker

To implement human rights we need to have professional human rights workers who work with professional human rights institutions. Norwegian universities do not educate general practitioners of human rights. Norway has a broad set of human rights laws, comparable to the health and welfare laws. Under the health and welfare laws, we find elaborate public funded structures, which match health and welfare problems of any kind that anyone may have, in any area. Under the human rights laws, we find nothing of the kind, nothing to match the ambition to make "*the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world*". In a city like Trondheim, we find no public office for human rights. We find no guidelines to diagnose a person's human rights' situation. We find no inspectorate to report to. We find

no strategy to meet the ambitions. We find no strategy for how to replace armies and arms' production with implementation of human rights.

The Banality of Servility (Case 08/12)

I work with 3 almost identical cases, from 2 different countries: In all these cases a high ranking police officer points to or picks up an attractive young woman to be his mistress, for use whenever he calls for her - the first officer after watching her on TV, the second after her active involvement in an election campaign, and the third from arbitrary detention after a political demonstration. All 3 women had a secondary level school background. In my report on the third one, I wrote:

***Remark** how Woman X slavishly obeys all orders; to report to the police, to be available for rape, to have abortion, to have limited movement, ... We see a woman leaves the custody with bindings as strong as any prison wall, as any foot-chain, be the old ones made of iron or the modern electronic ones.*

Several questions raise:

- *How unique is this phenomenon?*
- *What are the causes?*

How unique? With experience from other asylum cases, we find others similar to this one. Traditional promises of marriage in mind: "Wilt thou love, honour and obey him, in all circumstances, and forsaking all others. Keep thyself only unto him, as long as ye both shall live?" Think of the tradition with Bride Robbery; When a man has taken a girl to his bed, she is his capture and his property. Think of different slave cultures, with absolute obedience. Think of the many religious cultures, with the husband as God's vicar in the home, the religious leader as God's vicar in the sect, the demand of absolute submission. The phenomenon is far from unique, it is common.

*On her observation of Adolf Eichman and other executers of holocaust, Hannah Arendts used the phrase **Banality of Evil**, describing unreflected obedience, loyalty and duty. Here we see a related variant, **Banality of Servility**.*

... In relation to power, obedience is a deed. Or, to quote negative decisions: "It is a duty to leave the country voluntarily."

The Lord Syndrome

What are the causes? Or better yet: What is at the other end of the bond? What are the mechanisms? Servility is seldom a singularity. It is at the one end of some sort of relation, often a demanded quality, demanded from a person or a smaller or larger structure. The Universal Declaration, article 1, first sentence, reads:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Relations with demanded or forced servility in the one end are not symmetric. They show neither freedom nor equality of dignity and rights. I do believe that all relationships, symmetric or asymmetric, have an inbuilt potential to be destabilized by a dominant part growing more and more dominant. The weaker part's servility is instrumental to the dominant part's development and maintenance of absolute power.

Two words:

- Dominant, related to Latin: *Dominus – Lord*
- Hierarchy, related to Greek: *Hieros – Sacred* and *archos – ruler*

At the other end of such bonds we find what I will call **The Lord Syndrome**. The term matches traditions of someone acting as God's Vicar - Monarchy by the grace of God, the Fuehrer principle, fascism, the mafia boss as God Father, etc.

I have worked with this concept for some time. To begin with, it was partly for fun, observing an asylum administration in action which had well developed symptoms of being:

- almighty
- infallible
- all-knowing
- who's ways are inscrutable
- and demanding servility from their clients

I use the words *symptoms* and *syndrome* in order to put the label of sickness primarily on the dominant violator and not on the victims.

A friend of mine used as a picture the idea of clapping with only one hand. It is when we see the Lord syndrome together with the Banality of Servility, that we see both hands and their relative value and understand the dynamics between the two. At the same time we can see the contour of a law of gravity, that the stronger part will tend to get stronger and the weaker part weaker.

.. he gave his begotten son .. (John 3.16)

Case 154/00 is from Nigeria. On his dying bed, the father told his son the reason for his fortune and success. He was member of a secret cult. He then warned his son and asked him to flee. The cult had ordered him to sacrifice his son. The sacrifice had been decided. When the father died, uncles would have to bring the sacrifice. The son twice escaped this fraternity before he fled to Norway to seek asylum.

At first, it sounded unbelievable. However, the motive should be known. I found the same motive in the Norwegian fairytale "*The Follower*" by Asbjørnsen and Moe. We also find it in the *Bible, Genesis 1, chapter 22, "God tries Abraham"*:

2. And He said, "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, yea, Isaac, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you.

We find it in the New Testament, John 3.16, - *The New Pact*:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We also find it in the Muslim celebration of *Eid-al-Adha*, here in quotation from Wikipedia:

When Isma'el was about 13 (Ibrahim being 99), Allah decided to test their faith in public. Ibrahim had a recurring dream, in which God was commanding him to offer his

son in a sacrifice – an unimaginable act – sacrificing his son, which God had granted him after many years of prayer.

Although Ibrahim was ready to sacrifice his dearest for Allah’s sake, he could not just go and drag his son to the place of sacrifice without his consent. Isma’el had to be consulted as to whether he was willing to give up his life as fulfillment to God’s command. This consultation would be a major test of Isma’el’s maturity in faith, love and commitment for Allah, willingness to obey his father and sacrifice his own life for the sake of Allah.

Ibrahim presented the matter to his son and asked for his opinion about the dreams of slaughtering him. Isma’el did not show any hesitation or reservation even for a moment. He said, “Father, do what you have been commanded. You will find me, Insha’Allah, to be very patient.”

Judaism, Christianity and Islam - all 3 have this same ideal of absolute commitment to a pact with God. It’s no wonder that dominant parts in relationships tend to develop a Lord’s role. That is in the nature or sickness of being dominant.

The most controversial sentence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is found in article 18:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and

Because of this, the freedom to change religion or belief, several states declined to vote in favour of the declaration.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not limit this concept of freedom to religion, but presents it as a general principle, like in article 20:

- 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*
- 2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

Similarly:

.. the right to work, to free choice of employment .. Art 23
.. the right to freedom of opinion and expression .. Art 19

.. the right to marry and to found a family .. only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses .. (and) to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution Art 16

.. the right to a nationality.. (and) the right to change his nationality Art 15

.. the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country Art 13

.. the right to seek and to enjoy... asylum Art 14

War lords

The largest, and perhaps ugliest, arenas for sacrificing sons are wars. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was agreed upon in 1948. In 1966 the UN General Assembly unanimously agreed upon the international Covenants for Human Rights. In article 8 of the Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, we find an interesting exemption from the freedom principle:

1. *No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited.*
2. *No one shall be held in servitude.*
3.
 - a. *No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour*
 - b. *...*
 - c. *For the purpose of this paragraph the term "forced or compulsory labour" shall not include:*
 - i. *...*
 - ii. *Any service of military character ...*

This is the most unlucky statement that I have so far encountered in a human rights instrument. Instead of targeting the banality of evil, it stimulates it.

The banality of evil

Having a well-organized army, militia, mafia or secret service is not a question of good and evil, it is a question of loyalty and effectiveness. It is held together by a network of bonds of

loyalty, discipline and control, servility to one's superiors, lordship over inferiors, brotherhood and brother's guardianship to one's equals.

It is not one's job to separate evil from good. This is a fundamental violation of one's inherent dignity. This constitutes the banality of evil.

Some hierarchical structures are created to be evil – that is to say, to humiliate and violate human dignity and human rights. Other hierarchical structures simply develop that way as by a force like gravity, or an inevitable negative spiral.

Consciousness and conscience

In the Universal Declaration, article 18 uses the word *conscience*:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, ...

In article 1, the second sentence stands:

They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Interestingly enough, neither thought, nor reason, nor religion, are seen as separate quantities, but are paired with conscience. *Conscience* is a key word for the understanding of the declaration, at least as we speak of the same conscience.

I will provide an example from World War II in Norway, involving Vidkun Quisling's political program. By the grace of the Fuehrer and the Reichskommissar, his ambition was to build a fascistic, corporate state, which was to be ruled by the Fuehrer principle. His strategy was to begin with the youth and control their upbringers - teachers, parents, youth leaders and their organizations. He failed. It ended up in a spectacular action of non-violence. Teachers refused to sign declarations of loyalty. More than 1000 were arrested, and more than 500 were taken to camps in Finnmark for more than a half year. The state church, university and others demonstrated solidarity with the teachers. Quisling's government did not manage to control neither the professional organizations nor the NGOs.

I quote from the declaration of loyalty the teachers were ordered to sign:

On honor and conscience I declare ... that I bind myself to in all my activities in the school positively and actively to work to create understanding among my students for the new vision for life and society that is expressed in the National Unity's program and in our new national Governments measures and decisions.

The teachers' answered with a declaration to be:

... faithful to the teacher's call and to my conscience.

Both declarations refer to conscience, but it is far from the same conscience.

The first question is: Who owns your conscience?

The second: What is the Universal Declaration's concept of conscience?

We turn to the preamble, second paragraph:

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Together with articles 1 and 18, this defines conscience in the context of human rights.

Active conscience demands consciousness. It demands awareness. It demands action. When human dignity and human rights are violated, conscience should be activated in order to restore human dignity and human rights.

When conscience and loyalty are related to something other than human dignity and human rights, we see the banality of evil.

.. the free and full development of his personality ..

Conscience is a key concept and is mentioned thrice in the Universal Declaration. A second instance is: *The free/full development of his personality*. The two belong together. Active conscience is an integral part of the human rights personality.

I quote article 22:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 26.2:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3 times is used the word *shall*.

And article 29.1:

Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

The articles 22 and 29.1 are written with a certain pedagogical insight. To understand one's role in society, one needs to be in interaction with society. To train conscience, one needs to face situations in which conscience is challenged. To develop a democracy as defined by the Universal Declaration, is more than organizing elections.

A strategy for the implementation of human rights

I quote from the preamble of the Universal Declaration:

Now therefore

The General Assembly,

Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every

organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, ...

This is a marching order. This is a strategy: “– shall strive by teaching and education –”.

We write 2012, 64 years after the marching order was given. The question is why educational systems so far have not taken this challenge, to educate to human dignity, human rights and democracy?

The answer may be a complex one:

- that the assignment has not reached the schools yet
- that it has not been fairly understood
- that it does not match a hierarchical school tradition
- that governments actually don't want this challenge

This brings us to the next question: **How can we change this?**

That is our great challenge.