

Humiliation, Social Justice and Recognitive Communities¹: Thinking about the Asylum-Migration-Community Nexus in the Context of HDHS

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Smith (2006) and Lindner (2006) argue: that globalisation brings with it the issue of resources and resource based conflicts; that there has been an increase in rights and a decrease in the political autonomy of nation states; and the growing cosmopolitan condition brings with it risks and uncertainty's. Increased global dependency involves displacement and resentment. Humiliation can be described for Smith (2006) using the term 'social displacement' in fact humiliation emerges by "outrageous displacement", and that displacement leads to conquest, relegation or exclusionary forms of humiliation.

Based upon almost 20 years of work with forced migrants in the UK this paper focuses upon:

- i) the search for dignity, justice and belonging as a counter to humiliation and liminality by asylum seekers in the UK. *Dislocation/forced displacement is deeply humiliating and gives rise to feelings of 'we are not at home & we are not at home on this planet' [Evelin Lindner 5th December talk, Columbia University, Teachers College];*
- ii) the methodological approaches that can inform social policy on these matters, including participatory, performative and visual methods. *Relational, subjective/reflexive, participatory & arts based methods; I-thou relations.*
- iii) performative praxis and the work of the HDHS global network in reducing humiliation and upholding dignity– *towards social justice via: research, education, interventions.*

Moreover, I shall argue that there is an urgent need for dialogue and debate towards the possibilities for a radical democratic future based upon principles of recognition, respect,

¹ As Ziller (2004) notes sociologists have struggled with definitions of community. She prefers to use a set of definitions provided by Peter Willmot (1989) that are also mirrored in Bauman's text on Community and Raymond Williams's definition of 'community'. Ziller (2004) points out that the word 'community' refers to people who have things in common. What they have in common can be categorised as territory, interests and/or attachments. The core tension at the heart of analysis of community, is as Bauman identifies, the relationship between freedom and security, that is to say individualism, a focus on the self and self-interests (liberalism) vis a vis collectivism and a focus on the common good (communitarianism). "There is a price to be paid for the privilege of 'being in a community'..The price can be paid in the currency of freedom, variously called 'autonomy', 'right to self-assertion', 'right to be yourself'. Whatever you choose, you gain some and lose some. Missing community means missing security; gaining community, if it happens, would soon mean missing freedom"(Bauman 2001:4).

justice, dignity and redistribution. What is very clear in any examination of the literature is that migration, in the context of globalization and later modernity, is on the increase and so is the emergence of trans national identities and communities. The asylum-migration-community nexus is the complex relationship between migration, asylum and communities/community formation.

Community is defined as a multi-dimensional concept referring to a sense of; place, space, belonging, and the togetherness of elective communities bound by shared interests or identity. As well as the intersection or combination of all three aspects. Deeply implicated in experiencing, defining and understanding community are relational dynamics; community involves the connections between people. We live our lives relationally and this involves networks of social relations (O'Neill 2010). Smith (2001) cites what de Tocqueville called "habits of the heart" in his definition of community; that in the interaction between people something else emerges. "Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed, only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another" (de Tocqueville 1994:515 cited in Smith 2001:9). Buber defines this as the encounter (Begegnung) in which relation (Beziehung) occurs. "We can only grow and develop, according to Buber, once we have learned to live in relation to others, to recognise the possibilities of the space between us. The fundamental means is dialogue. 'All real living is meeting' he once wrote..In the stillness of this 'in-between world' they may encounter what cannot yet be put into words" (Smith, 2001:14).

1. The search for dignity, justice and belonging as a counter to humiliation and liminality experienced by asylum seekers in the UK.

As Smith (2006) Linder (2006) and a vast amount of empirical research has shown the processes of dislocation, of forced displacement are deeply humiliating told in the fragments of narratives from those who experienced expulsion or who were compelled to make the difficult and arduous journey's in search of safety, peace, and freedom.

The literature in refugee and migration studies to show the treatment of migrants who seek safety in the UK and Europe from war, danger, poverty and unfreedom are defined as risky and dangerous, as outsiders and disposable. This constitutes what Adorno would define as identitarian thinking accompanied by an empty and cold forgetting of the circumstances that led to the refugee convention, and the development of international human rights.

Asylum seekers and especially refused asylum seekers are constituted as deviant objects and the states response is to treat them as deviant bodies through law and order policies that seek to prevent access to the nation in the first place by strengthening borders, increasing legislation to make it harder and harder to gain the right to remain,

albeit indefinitely. Then, to keep them under continued surveillance and containment in the extreme margins of the society (under circumstances of what Agamban calls 'bare life') in holding centres, prisons, detention centres and camps and eventually to return / deport those who are refused access.

Borrowing from John Lowman (2000), asylum seekers, especially the refused become a disposable population; their very disposability created through the discourses of abjection. Defined as outsider, not welcome, marked by stigma and prejudice they are where possible kept marginalised, beyond citizenship and inclusion. Regressive refugee policy and laws that instantiate ever tighter border controls distances States from their involvement in the production of refugees and it is instead the asylum seeker or the refused asylum seeker who has broken the law and who bears responsibility for their 'deviance' in seeking a place of safety in the first place.

Asylum-Migration- Community Nexus

The asylum-migration-community nexus acknowledges the existence of communities (of interest, belonging, location and imagined) and includes the complex inter-relationship between asylum and migration with experiences of community formation and belonging (both here –in exile, and there –in 'home countries', countries of origin). The concept of community is problematised (it is after all a highly contentious and contingent concept) and it is also defined in multiple ways through the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in research with communities that includes understandings of 'community' through related terms such as diaspora, post national communities, contingent communities and transnational communities. Yar's (2003) recognitive theory of community and Nancy's (1991, 2000) concept of the "inoperative community" and "being singular plural" is called into focus when discussing the asylum-migration-community nexus.

As Ziller (2004) notes it would appear that our understandings of 'community' has shifted away from 'solid' communities based on shared identifications of social class, shared space, social norms and mores towards more contingent communities based upon diversity, mobility – both temporal and spatial, and are less and less tied to place.

Recognitive Theory of Community

In a move beyond communitarianism (both left and right versions) drawing upon Honneth's work Yar sees community as the "common ground that emerges from the intersubjectively actualised struggle for recognition....of community as a ground for an ethical and political life" (2003:114) (see Chapter Two O'Neil 2010 *Asylum, Migration and Community Policy Press*). Yar argues that if we understand community as a social struggle for recognition this reconciles autonomy with solidarity. What this means is

that an account of community built upon a theory of recognition “can satisfy the demands of establishing solidarity, preserving singularity (or difference), and keeping open a space for critique” (2003:125).

2. Methodological Approaches- arts based approaches & participatory action research - together we are more than the sum of our parts – inclusion, participation, valuing all voices, community based/sustainable interventions – making connections and making a difference.

I have argued elsewhere (2004, 2009) that re-presenting social research through art forms can create multivocal, dialogical texts and can make visible “emotional structures and inner experiences” (Kuzmics 1997, 9) that may “move” audiences through what can be described as “sensuous knowing” or mimesis (Taussig 1993). Methodologies that incorporate the voices and images of “refugees” and “asylum seekers” through scholarly/civic research as participatory research not only can serve to enlighten and raise our awareness of certain issues, but could also produce critical reflexive texts that may help to mobilize social change. Thus critical, participatory and arts based research with migrants could produce work that is both critical, interpretive and may impact on policy; and can be defined within the rubric of public scholarship.

PAR is, as defined as interventionist, action oriented and interpretive and based upon principles of inclusion, participation, valuing all voices, mutual recognition and links to social justice, which in turn may foster recognition and ‘understanding’.

Such methodological approaches are important for creating spaces for dialogue and ‘understanding’ what Buber calls I-thou relations and Witkin subjective-reflexive relationships. Fals Borda – symmetrical relations Such methodologies, and I include appreciative enquiry, are vital for more integrated horizontal and vertical processes of inclusion, for opening and keeping open spaces for critical discourse, for facilitating a politics of inclusion, a radical democratic pluralism and a radical democratic imaginary. Central to this project is the importance of the relational and psycho-social dimensions of our research and practice, the sensuous, performative dynamics of praxis, the importance of innovative and inter-disciplinary methodologies.

3. The work of the HDHS Global Network in reducing humiliation and upholding dignity

Previous work in this area highlights the profound importance of ‘understanding’ experiences of humiliation and mis-recognition experienced by those in the asylum-migration nexus and the importance of fostering human dignity and social justice globally and locally.

How can we address the processes of ‘othering’ humiliation and subjugation experienced by people situated in the asylum-migration nexus?

How can we foster processes of social justice that includes mutual recognition, dignity and egalization in our institutions, policies and practices towards people seeking safety and refuge?

The work of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HDHS) global network offers a way forward towards the promotion of social justice and cultural citizenship for all. HDHS is an example of a recognitive community, working towards a radical democratic imaginary through performative praxis, using participatory means constituted by recognition and respect for people seeking asylum, refugees, belonging.

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A core concept is the notion of unity in diversity. This is a fundamental principle for the network. The HDHS as a network and organisation is built *on a threefold vision*:

1. Research that increases understanding of the nature of the humiliation dynamic, destructive outcomes resulting from humiliating strategies and tactics, and factors contributing to its use in international affairs.
2. Education of both children and adults that both increase understanding of the negative consequences of humiliation and generate support of alternative approaches that promote human dignity.
3. Interventions that promote the use of appreciative and affirming approaches in interpersonal, intergroup and not least in international relations so as to promote an increased sense of global community.

Conclusion

Francois Matarasso (2005) writes that “Democracy should not be mistaken for a natural outcome of development. It needs to be created, supported and protected.” And, “given its function as a creator of meanings and a carrier of values, culture is a powerful force within any strong democracy” (2005:4). The cultural arena is a crucial component of democratic life and every citizen has the right to participate. And as Matarasso states cultural diversity is the norm of human experience. Cultural citizenship and rights, recognition and redistribution are centrally implicated in the radical imagining of ‘decent democracy’ that seeks to foster processes of dignity and egalization in the institutions, policies and practices towards people seeking safety, people located in the asylum-migration-community nexus. For Lindner and Hartling ‘The dynamics of humiliation hinder reality testing’ and to promote and uphold dignity/dignism and unity

in diversity, relational cultural theory is the way forward.

<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/videos.php>

Currently Britain and Europe are on the road to becoming “committed to asylum without the possibility for entry” and it is vital that “by facing our global responsibilities towards the displaced, we begin the process of changing for the better a world which creates the misery of growing refugee movements” (Kushner and Knox 1999:417).

See

Lindner, E. (2004). *Humiliation in a Globalizing World: Does Humiliation Become the Most Disruptive Force?* New York, NY: Paper prepared for the "Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict," November 18-19, 2004, at Columbia University.

Lindner, E (2006) *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict* Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Security

O’Neill, M. (2010) *Asylum, Migration and Community* Bristol: Policy Press

Smith, D (2006) *Globalization: the hidden agenda* Cambridge: Polity

In the spirit of the latter I would like to share a film with you circa 9 minutes made in collaboration with 10 women asylum seekers, the regional refugee forum North East, Purple Rose Stockton and Prof Jan Haaken, Film maker and Emeritus Professor of Psychology, Portland State University. The project ‘Women’s lives well-being and community’ is part of a bigger project on *Race, Crime and Justice* in the North East of England.