

Systems of Humiliation and Compassion in Destructive Conflicts

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Abstract:

Humiliations of many sorts can drive nations to war, oppressed groups to rebel and so-called suicide bombers to kill. One sort of humiliation that is common to many destructive conflicts occurs where a “high power” group, such as a nation’s central government, seeks to manufacture artificially a sense of humiliation in the “low power” group as a technique for disciplinary control. Such politically charged techniques are designed to exploit the social psychological sensitivities of group members, generating a sense of their inferiority, worthlessness and diminished self-esteem. In this dignilogue, I argue that systems of humiliation define the dynamics of certain ‘slow burning’ conflicts. Yet, some conflict actors see through the attempted manipulations, opting instead to exhibit acts of compassion for vulnerable people. This is illustrated in the “everyday” practices of rescuers who risk their lives to save those who are targeted by militants. Extending this theme, I propose that certain compassion-practices are centrally placed in the field of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution comprises patterns of compassion-practices that honor the dignity of all people.

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