

FOREWORD

This important book by Deepak Tripathi is about the role of humiliation in international politics, specifically in relation to West Asia. Humiliation is a complex and powerful emotion. My experience from many discussions of trauma, violence, and the harm and hurt of the past to body, soul, and spirit reveals two recurrent syndromes—one in the victim, the other in the perpetrator.

Humiliation causes trauma in the victim, an individual, community, or nation-state. Overwhelming thoughts dominate the victim consciously or subconsciously: innocence (it happened for no reason located in me); shame (I have been humiliated and stigmatized); fear (the perpetrator may do it again); hatred (I hate the offender for making me suffer so much); retaliation (make him or her suffer at least to the extent that I have suffered); entitlement (I am offended and entitled to be treated with care); and moral credit (I can draw upon my trauma as assertion of being right).

The humiliator experiences the mirror image of the victim's reactions: legitimacy (violence is bad, but I had good reasons); guilt (I have done something unmentionable and basically wrong); fear (one day the victim will come back and do the same to me); hatred (I hate the victim for what he or she might do in retaliation); and deterrence (I must prevent any retaliation by the victim).

Reconciliation requires coming to grips with such emotions. The victim's humiliation is one such emotion, but we are dealing with a wider phenomenon of an escalating and vicious cycle of violence. This book does not suggest how to end a cycle of violence or turn it into a virtuous phenomenon that leads to a positive future, as happened following World War II. Here the theme is how violence causes behavior that affects societies and their relationships beyond those actually hurt. Trauma becomes part of culture, embedded in monuments and transmitted from one generation to the next.

Deepak Tripathi's book focuses on the Middle East, where antagonists are locked in a deadly embrace. Readers will have no difficulty identifying the dynamic between humiliator and humiliated in Middle East history. The traumas have names—the Shoah (Holocaust) for Jews and the Nakba (Disaster) for Palestinians.

We will get nowhere comparing the levels of horror in these traumas. Traumas are not comparable, for they are intensely subjective, individually and collectively. There is, of course, a major difference between the trauma suffered by the Jews and that suffered by the Palestinians. The Jews were humiliated by Europeans and Germans, not only Nazis, because acts of omission also count. The Palestinians were, and continue to be, humiliated by Jews turned Israelis.

Let us revisit for a moment the then-secret Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), the Balfour Declaration (1917), and the U.S. recognition of Israel by President Harry S. Truman in 1948—all included among the appendixes in this book. The Sykes-Picot Agreement says little about “an independent Arab state or a confederation of Arab states” (the concept is mentioned in a single sentence); its vocabulary is ambiguous (“recognize and protect” and “suzerainty”). It says much, however, about the lack of independence and British-French privileges that were later known as the four colonies, two for each. Russia and Japan were informed about the agreement, meaning they were in it.

The Balfour Declaration addressed to Lord Rothschild introduces an entity not defined by international law—“a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine—but with two important conditions: “that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine” or “the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.” There is something prescient and laudable in these conditions, but the document as a whole leaves the United Kingdom open to considerable blame for countless omissions and failures to enforce the conditions. Humiliation rises not only from what is done but also from what is not done.

Before President Truman signed the proclamation recognizing the state of Israel, it had to be edited away from the Balfour Declaration. “The new Jewish state,” which sounded like a national home for the Jewish people, became “the new state of Israel,” not explicitly linked to Jews. This only added to Anglo-American responsibility.

As Deepak Tripathi points out, “Honor, humiliation, and promises drive behavior.” What is humiliation? It occurs when one is not taken seriously as a party to be respected but regarded instead as a nonentity. When the 1978 Camp David Accords between Israel's prime minister Menachem Begin and Egypt's president

Anwar Sadat were signed, Palestinians were reduced to refugees; they were not even seated at the table. Yet, through their past and current labors, they had carried that table on their backs. Maybe the ultimate humiliation is not being defeated or exploited but being ignored as an unworthy victim.

History makes unexpected turns. After some kind of catharsis, with the Soviet Union vanquished and Communism declared dead by its promoters, Russia has risen again from the ashes of a humiliated and fallen empire. And after so many false departures, Palestine, hitherto a humiliated entity, is recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and assumes a degree of dignity. Then came the General Assembly's overwhelming vote in November 2012 to recognize Palestine as a non-member state.

It is worth considering Arab humiliation under three empires—the Ottomans (actually the Byzantines before that), the West in the form of the Italy-England-France triumvirate, and again the West in the sense of the U.S.-Israel duo. The 1915–1916 uprisings triggered by the fake promises of the Sykes-Picot deal and the Nasser-Gaddafi revolts against England and Italy decades later were two mighty, but in the end unsuccessful, efforts to gain dignity. These efforts were followed by dictatorships engineered by the United States and Israel with the aim of making the world safe for the Jewish nation. It was humiliating for the Arab peoples to be reduced to nonentities, subject to the whims of dictators and those holding the marionette strings.

Then, out of the blue, in December 2010, came the Arab Spring, which promised dignity again, although the jury is still out on that phenomenon. That the Arabs have been humiliated much too much is undeniable, but the humiliators pretend that they are not aware of it. Let us look at Iran. The joint CIA-MI6 effort to overthrow legally elected prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and install the shah was an act of humiliation committed upon the Iranian people by treating their hard-won democracy as something that did not merit respect. And look at the state of affairs today. Iran, in turn, has become a source of fear for Israel and the West.

Deepak Tripathi is very well read and has much to say about Alexander the Great that is relevant to this discussion. Tripathi reminds us how Alexander met his end, having come close to what is now Afghanistan—the country where empires went to die some millennia later. A consistent lesson through history is that those who humiliate have to face their own moment of humiliation one day. The simple way to avoid that moment is to abstain from aggressive warfare. Defensive war is a possibility, but not offensive warfare. It is a tragedy that this lesson escaped Alexander, the Roman Caesar, and Emperor Julian the Apostate then; it also escapes the mighty today.

Tripathi further discusses Niccolò Machiavelli and his poor advice to princes—advice elevated to wisdom by Western statecraft. To consolidate a conquest, devastate the conquered, or set up an oligarchy extracting tribute, Machiavelli wrote, employ direct and structural violence. Countless princes-to-be have followed Machiavellian methods, only to harvest what they have sown. For the humiliated, revenge is often the best way out. If the ruler who devastated or exploited is unavailable for revenge, then humiliation can be exacted on somebody else. The lesson is worth remembering, always.

From George W. Bush to Barack Obama, we have seen the controversial Guantánamo Bay detention center, prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, special forces operations, bombings by drones, and extrajudicial executions. These acts of master humiliators are amply documented in Deepak Tripathi's book. It should be read widely. The author's knowledge from close observation should be shared and alternatives considered.

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