You Dissin Me?
Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics

Dr. Paul Saurette
School of Political Studies
University of Ottawa, Canada
Paul.Saurette@uottawa.ca

Abstract: Despite a growing awareness about the importance of emotions to global politics, the discipline of international relations theory is still working towards adequate theorizations and investigations of their role. This is particularly noticeable in the fact that there has been little sustained, scholarly examination of the effects of various emotions on the shape and orientation of the U.S. foreign policy reaction to 9/11. This essay seeks to begin to address both of these gaps by examining the role that dynamics of humiliation and counterhumiliation have played in contemporary global politics. In particular, it develops a theoretical understanding of humiliation and then applies this framework to explain how dynamics of humiliation have impacted post 9/11 American global policy. It concludes that we cannot fully understand the sources, and the effects, of post 9/11 contemporary politics (especially U.S. global policy) without taking into account dynamics of humiliation.

Author's bio: Paul Saurette is an associate professor at the School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada. His articles have appeared in a variety of journals including *Millennium*; *Political Theory*; *Philosophy and Social Criticism; Review of International Studies; International Journal of Peace Studies*; *Peace Review*; *Theory & Event* and others. He has also recently published *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

It follows that it was not contrary to the common practice of mankind, if we did accept an empire that was offered to us, and refused to give it up under the pressure of three of the strongest motives: fear, interest and honour.

~ Thucydides, 431 BC[1]

People go to war out of "fear, interest and honour"

~ Donald Kagan, 1996[2]

The war on terrorism will involve all three, but perhaps honour above all.

~Rich Lowry, National Review, Oct 2001[3]

Throughout the Cold War, a consensus existed within policy and academic circles that US global policy should be oriented by the first and second of Thucydides' strongest motives – but never the third. Interest, rationally calculated and analyzed, was to be the sine qua non of America's foreign policy criteria. Through the writings of Morgenthau and deterrence theory, fear too became synonymous with the rational calculation of interest and thus became an indispensable element to be considered. Within the Cold War paradigm, however, Thucydides third motive, honour, was to be virtually excluded. In fact, the distinction between a foreign policy based on rational interest (of which fear became an accepted part) and one based on concerns about honour, shame, humiliation and respect served as a fundamental basis for distinguishing the new world from the old.[4]

Recently, however, significant shifts in global politics and the academic context have cracked open this narrow dichotomy. Increasingly, events have seemed to highlight the importance of a much wider range of concerns. How can we, for example, make sense of the contemporary impact of the Danish 'cartoon incident' on global politics without some reference to the force of the emotive commitments related to honour, shame, humiliation and respect? Moreover, scholars using a wide variety of methodological perspectives have begun to examine the ways in which a wide variety of 'non-rational' and emotional factors are central to international relations. Popular commentators have also become increasingly interested in this area and have begun to use them to explain contemporary politics. In fact, were it not for the self-imposed avoidance of most questions of emotion in the post WWII discipline of International Relations, it might not strike us as very odd that Rich Lowry, a pundit writing for the right wing National Review, could without difficulty argue that

---

[1] Thucydides, *History Of The Peloponnesian War*, translated by Richard Crawley
[2] Donald Kagan quoting Thucydides in *On the Origin of War and the Preservation of Peace*, (New York: Anchor, 1996)
[3] Rich Lowry, "A Humiliation", *National Review Online*, October 5, 2001.
[4] I will discuss this in more detail below when I examine Edward Said's interpretation of Henry Kissinger's writings.

the war on terror should be prosecuted most importantly for reasons of honour, and draw upon two prestigious international relations theorist to support this view.

In many ways, then, studying the relevance of a variety of powerful emotions is more possible and relevant now than at any other time in the modern study of international relations. It is therefore surprising that little work has been done to systematically understand and account for the role that emotions and dynamics of humiliation – and the desire for respect – might play in contemporary global politics. It is especially notable that outside of the odd throw away comment by media pundits (about 9/11 being a psychological 'humiliation' of America), there has been almost no sustained interrogation of whether dynamics of humiliation might have influenced the shape and orientation of the U.S. reaction to 9/11.

This essay is an attempt to address this gap by taking advantage of the increasing theoretical diversity in the social sciences and the discipline of international relations. In particular, it seeks to contribute to our understanding of contemporary global politics in four distinct ways. At the most general level, its objective is to contribute to the growing literature that suggests that investigating a wide range of emotional commitments is crucial to understanding contemporary events and trends in global politics. Secondly, it seeks to highlight both the ways in which international relations theory has traditionally underplayed the importance of these aspects *and* the ways in which a significant group of theoretically and methodologically diverse approaches are now implicitly and explicitly examining these questions. Thirdly, it aims at developing a theoretical understanding of humiliation that can act as the basis from which to theorize and investigate its influence in global politics. Finally, the paper seeks to apply this framework to the US reaction to 9/11 in order to offer a preliminary theoretical interpretation about the role that dynamics of humiliation and respect have played in post 9/11 American global policy.

The essay will pursue these objectives in the following way. The essay begins by situating questions about emotion in IR theory, arguing that although the role of emotion and humiliation have been historically under-emphasized, the discipline of IRT shows signs of an increased sensitivity to the questions of emotions in general, and the role of humiliation in particular. This section concludes both that there is a need for a theory of the global politics of humiliation and that the methodological challenges such a project faces can be addressed. The second section then develops a preliminary theory of humiliation. With this theoretical framework in hand, the third and fourth sections turn to the case of the U.S. and 9/11. Given the theoretical focus of the paper and the methodological issues involved in investigating the role of emotions, these sections seeks to offer a plausible, theoretical,

interpretation in two ways. Section three shows that once we understand how humiliation functions, it is hard to imagine how 9/11 could *not* have created intense feelings of humiliation in a wide variety of decision making and influencing actors that were involved, to varying degrees, on the formation of US foreign policy. Section four then adds further plausibility to the claim that humiliation is an important part of the post 9/11 story by showing that postulating the existence and influence of humiliation dynamics makes certain events and policy decisions more comprehensible than they would be without an understanding of the influence of humiliation. This theoretical interpretation also, of course, implies a number of directions for future research (some of them much more empirical than this essay). As such, the essay ends with a conclusion that highlights some of the key arguments, conclusions and possibilities for future investigation.

1. Emotions, Humiliation and IRT

Theoretical Context

Traditionally, international relations theory has had an ambivalent view of the importance and place of emotions and emotional dynamics in global politics. Although much of post-WWII IRT has downplayed the role of emotions, many of the so-called 'founding theorists' of IRT held complex views about emotions. As we saw above, Thucydides clearly believes emotions such as a sense of honour were crucial for understanding inter-state politics. Similarly, while Hobbes is often reduced to a caricature in IRT, a careful consideration of his writings reveals that a remarkably broad conception of the 'passions' and a wide-ranging physiological theory about the interplay between instrumental reason and the emotions is actually the foundation to Hobbes' understanding of politics.[5]

Assumptions about the role of emotions have been crucial, but under-acknowledged, elements of much modern IRT theory as well. Several recent studies have shown that assumptions about the role and nature of emotions are both crucial to, and deeply under-theorized by, a wide

---

[5] See Richard Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics*, (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993), esp "On Prudence and Morality: Desires, Ends and Characters"; and Samantha Frost, "Faking It: Hobbes' Thinking-Bodies and the Ethics of Dissimulation", *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 30-57. Contrary to the common IR retelling of Hobbes' rational actors as if Hobbes' believe all individuals desire the thing (e.g. 'security'), Hobbes highlights the incredible diversity of end desires and emotions among individuals. On this reading, it is rational to join civil society under an authoritative leviathan not simply to satisfy the universal and undifferentiated desire for 'security' itself. Rather, the reason it is rational to join the leviathan is because it is the most effective way to ensure that subjects can continue to 'desire' and 'feel' as broadly and individually as possible.

variety of IRT perspectives. Neta Crawford, for example, has shown that implicit assumptions about the role of emotions have played – and continue to play - key roles in IR studies of the causes of war, patriotism, militarism, nationalism, and international cooperation.[6] The work of others support this contention historically as well by showing that the rich psychological theories of Freud and Spengler (which challenged the optimism of the belle époque rationalism and highlighted the role of darker drives and emotions in the human psyche) not only influenced general European attitudes about war and the shape of modern wars, but also deeply impacted the thought of many of the founders of the modern discipline of IR theory such as E.H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau, and John Herz.[7]

Several points are worth highlighting here. First, it is clear that many IR theorists have explicitly or implicitly believed that despite the methodological challenges of defining, investigating, and measuring the role of emotions, IRT needs to study the role and impact of emotions in international politics. Second, it is also clear that much of IRT has both under-examined and under-theorized the role and impact of emotions on global politics. Consider what happens to emotions in Morgenthau's theory. Emotions and desire are considered as key elements in Morgenthau's writings.[8] However, even Morgenthau's examination of emotions tends to subsume them into a framework that treats emotions through a lens of 'rationality' and 'irrationality' with a limited number of desires re-cast as relevant and 'rational' (e.g. desire for security and power – or in Thucydides language 'fear' and 'interest') and the rest (e.g. ideological extremism, honour, respect) dismissed as irrational.

This normative disavowal and descriptive over-simplification of emotions was reproduced in the heart of the American policy making community as well. It is well known that Edward Said's analysis of Henry Kissinger's writings on foreign policy reveals profoundly Orientalist tendencies at the core of Kissinger's approach.[9] What is less obvious, however, is that Said's analysis of Kissinger's approach also inadvertently highlights the degree to which Kissinger's conceptual framework paralleled the classical realist strategy of simultaneously relying on a theory of emotions and dismissing them as irrational and irrelevant for US policy. On Kissinger's telling, the Cold War world was characterized by two distinct types of foreign policy. On one hand, Kissinger sees the

---

[6] Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics", *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000), p. 120-122.
[7] See Christopher Coker, *War and the 20th Century: The Impact of War on the Modern Consciousness*, (London: Potomac Books, 1994); and Andrew Ross, *Affective States: Rethinking Passion and Global Politics,* Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2005.
[8] Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics", *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000), p. 121.
[9] The account that follows builds on Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage: 1979), p. 47-50.

developed, industrialized Western world as being deeply committed to rationalist, objectivist types of data recording and interpretation. This, Kissinger argues, leads to a rationally 'political' style of foreign policy in which diplomatic and strategic messages are easily sent and interpreted since everyone understands how to calculate the rational interests behind the posturing.

In contrast, Kissinger identified a very different model of conducting foreign policy – something he named the 'prophetic' model – which he mapped primarily onto the developing world. On Kissinger's telling, this model defines foreign policy not according to clear, objective rational interests but rather by opaque, internal, and irrational cultural desires and emotions. It is telling, moreover, that the key example used to highlight the difference between the two styles is Kissinger's assertion that it is utterly alien to the Western 'political' model to base any foreign policy decisions on the irrational desires for 'honour' and concerns about 'shame' or humiliation (which was precisely what he thinks characterizes 'Arab' foreign policy). In this context, if concerns about honour, shame, humiliation and respect were to be raised at all, they had to be translated into the neutral language of 'credibility'. One could push for intervention across the globe not because Soviet supported incursions were a blow to the honour of the US – but rather only if the lack of intervention would cause a loss of *strategic* credibility that would create a rationally justified *fear* of the failure of future deterrence.

In the discipline of IR, however, it was the behaviouralist turn in IRT that truly shut the door on the study of emotions as it profoundly strengthened the classical realist tendency to reject the legitimacy of 'emotions' other than fear/security and interest/power while also narrowing the forms of authorized scholarly investigation through intensified methodological discipline.[10] The effect on the study of emotions was clear. As Crawford puts it, "emotion virtually dropped from the radar screen of international relations theorists in the mid-twentieth century when the rational actor paradigm became dominant", which in turn meant that even those few IR scholars (such as Jervis and Janis) who sought to examine the impact of emotion tended to conceptualize emotions as anomalous limiting conditions that explained otherwise irrational exceptions to the norm.[11]

---

[10] See Robert Cox "Social Forces, State and World Orders" and Richard Ashley's "The Poverty of Neorealism" (both can be found in Robert Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) for two classic and powerful critiques of the behaviouralist faith as applied to IR theory.

[11] Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics", *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000), p. 122. See also Andrew Ross, *Affective States: Rethinking Passion and Global Politics,* Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2005; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*, (Princeton: PUP, 1976) and Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1981).

Recently, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of emotions across the sciences, social sciences and humanities. In the realm of politics and ethics, emotion has recently become an object of increasing attention as scholars with very different perspectives have increasingly re-examined the political and ethical implications of emotions.[12] Scholars in sociology have also increasingly renewed the study of emotions in ways that appreciate both the many cross-cultural similarities <u>and</u> the historically and culturally specific dimensions of virtually all types of emotions that have been studied.[13] Even historians have discovered a renewed appetite for examining the emotions anew.[14]

It is thus perhaps not surprising that this has begun to seep into the practice and study of international relations as well. Over the last several decades, the clear consensus about the rationalist grounds of 'normal' foreign policy no longer seems to be so quite clear cut – even from a realist perspective. With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of fears about renewed wars of nationalism, for example, it became less easy to remain quite as confident that the boxes of interest or fear were sufficient to conduct and understand global politics. Not surprisingly, this shift also began to appear in the theories used by a wide range of popular and academic observers. Interestingly, as interest and fear seemed unable to explain global events, notions of honour, respect, shame and humiliation began to implicitly emerge once again. At its most visceral level, many popular commentators began to take up an older political language as they spoke of blood-feuds, century old 'identity conflicts', and ancient hatreds to explain these conflicts.[15] Over the last decade or so, public intellectuals and academics have also begun to offer more nuanced theories that nonetheless reflect a similar interest. Perhaps most notably given the post 9/11 context, scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington began to outline a realist view of politics that not

---

[12] William Connolly has, for example, critically engaged the work of a variety of cutting edge neuroscientists (including Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux, v.S. Ramachandran and Francisco Varela) to reconsider the role of affect and emotion. See W.E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 2002); *Pluralism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) and *Why I am Not A Secularist*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Martha Nussbaum - an ethical and legal theorist with a very different approach than Connolly's – has similarly concluded that emotion plays a key role in contemporary debates about ethics and law. See *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
[13] Several examples of this sociological literature are J.M. Barbalet, ed., *Emotions and Sociology*; (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); J.M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); J. Turner and J. Spets, *The Sociology of Emotions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[14] See, for example, D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks.* Toronto: 2006; W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A framework for the history of emotion.* Cambridge: 2001; Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards." The American Historical Review 90.4 (1985), pp. 813-36; B. Rosenwein, "Worrying about emotions in history", *American Historical Review* 107:3 (2002), pp. 821-845.
[15] The most nuanced version of this thesis was perhaps embodied by Michael Ignatieff's *Blood and Belonging*, (Toronto : Viking Press, 1993).

only took seriously the importance of honour and humiliation to contemporary global politics (although they too reproduced Kissinger's highly orientalized perspective by highlighting it as an irrational preoccupation primarily found in 'Arabs' or 'Islam').[16]

The possibility that a wider swathe of emotional concerns than simply fear and interest might be crucial to the formation of Western foreign policy has also been forwarded by a wide range of scholars who operate with methodological, political and ethical commitments that are deeply opposed to those of Lewis and Huntington. Wendtian constructivism, for example, strives to provide a more nuanced account of the constructed and constructive role of beliefs and emotions even if, as some suggest, constructivism under-appreciates the visceral nature of emotions and too quickly reduces them to 'beliefs' as opposed to affective forces.[17] Perspectives we might broadly construe as 'critical identity studies' have also begun to examine more fully the role of emotions.[18] Indeed, these studies, with their explicit attention to the precise mechanisms and symbols by which construction of identity is accomplished offer the possibility of taking seriously the ways in which multiple layers of 'second nature' and emotion are essential to identities. As I have argued elsewhere, however, while a few critical IR theorists of identity have attempted to consider the role of emotion, much of this literature has focused on the symbolic and discursive techniques and tactics of identity creation and has not focused on the Deleuzian challenge of creating a critical ethology that would trace the emotional dimensions of the key social assemblages and structures that influence the shape and direction of global politics.[19]

Certain strains of critical feminist IR theory have also called more attention to the emotional realm. The work of a variety of critical feminists have produced a variety of stimulating, provocative and valuable insights about the types of concrete impacts that gendered emotional and identity based

---

[16] See Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage", *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990; Volume 266, No. 3, p. 47 – 60; and Samuel Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations", *Foreign Policy*, v. 72, n. 3, 1993 and *Clash of Civilizations*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). For Said's interpretation of this literature see his lecture Edward Said, *Edward Said in Lecture: The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations*, (Northampton, MA : Media Education Foundation, 1998).

[17] See Jonathan Mercer, "Rationality and Psychology in International Politics", *International Organization*, 59, (2005), p.97-98; and Andrew Ross, "Coming in from the Cold: Constructivism and Emotions", *European Journal of International Relations*, v12, no. 2, 2006, p. 197-222.

[18] This, of course, is a fast growing and difficult to define group. Some well known examples who explicitly examine foreign policy from this perspective might be David Campbell's *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Revised Edition, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and *National Deconstruction,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Iver Neuman's *Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and Roxanne Lynne Doty's *Imperial Encounters*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[19] Paul Saurette, "International Relations' Image of Thought: Collective Identity, Desire, and Deleuzian Ethology", *International Journal of Peace Studies,* v. 5, no. 1, Spring 2000.

commitments and performances can have on global politics.[20] These and other studies have called attention to a variety of masculine emotional investments and demands (for macho respect, for self-sufficient sovereignty, for domestic and personal relations of control, for national credibility, etc) and chronicled their role in the concrete practices of statecraft.

 If there are signs that there are pockets of IR theory that are increasingly able and willing to consider questions of emotion (Jenny Edkins' fascinating and compelling investigation into the emotional psychological fallout of 9/11[21] is one of the most recent examples), however, it remains the case that there has been relatively little systematic theorization and exploration of the role of emotions in international politics.[22] This is even true for those emotions, such as humiliation, which would seem to be the most relevant to contemporary global post 9/11 politics. There are few articles which examine the impact that humiliation has played in historical events,[23] even fewer studies which have attempted to examine the role of humiliation in relation to the United States[24], and

---

[20] See, for example, Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of the Defense Intellectuals." *Signs,* Winter, 1987, p. 687-718 and "War, Wimps and Women" in *Gendering War Talk*, edited by Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 227-246; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1989) and *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1993); Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Faking It: U.S. Foreign Policy in a Post-Phallic Era,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Joshua S Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (California: University of California Press, 2001).

[21] See Jenny Edkins, "Forget Trauma? Responses to 9/11", *International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2002, p. 243-256; and *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Robert Jay Lifton also has recently written on the role of trauma in the post 9/11 U.S. (in addition to his other writings noted below). See Lifton, "Americans as Survivors", *New England Journal of Medicine*. V. 352, June 2005, p. 2263-2265.

[22] This too is starting to change, however. See Jonathan Mercer's "Rationality and Psychology in International Politics", *International Organization*, 59, (2005), p. 77-105 and Andrew Ross' "Coming in from the Cold: Constructivism and Emotions", *European Journal of International Relations*, v12, no. 2, 2006, p. 197-222 for two very different attempts to begin the task of theorizing more explicitly and more broadly the role of emotion in international relations.

[23] There are a some sociological and psychological studies which examine and catalogue the specific impact of humiliation in certain conflicts – but none of these outline a robust theory of humiliation nor offer a broader consideration of its role in international politics. Within IR theory, there a few recent articles that touch on questions of humiliation but neither offer a robust theory of humiliation nor apply it to broader issues of IR theory. See Callahan, W., "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism", *Alternatives*, 2004, 29, 2, p. 199-218; Robert Harkavy, "Defeat, National Humiliation, and the Revenge Motif in International Politics", International Politics, 2000, 37, 3, p. 345-368

[24] The fascinating work of Blema Steinberg is one of the few sustained examinations of themes of shame and humiliation in foreign policy decision making. See, for example, "Shame and humiliation in the Cuban missile crisis: A psychoanalytic perspective", *Political Psychology*, V. 12, 1991, p. 653-690; "Psychoanalytic concepts in international politics: The role of shame and humiliation.", *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, V. 18, 1991, p. 65-85; and *Shame and Humiliation: Presidential Decision Making on Vietnam*. (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1996). Steinberg's rich studies do much to illuminate some of the emotional dynamics of Presidential decision-making and there is much to admire in her work. However, her psychoanalytic method focuses almost exclusively on the individual histories of the Presidents in question and uses a strong analytic lens of the narcissistic individual to frame her examinations. While revealing, this theoretical approach under-plays, in my opinion, the public nature of humiliation and the importance of examining the influence of humiliation dynamics beyond the President. Given the highly traumatic and intensely public nature of the humiliation surrounding 9/11, I believe that it is important for IRT to supplement Steinberg's more narrowly psycho-analytic perspective with my broader, more political, perspective.

virtually no scholarly attempts to systematically and critically examine the influence of humiliation in post 9/11 global politics[25]. As such, I believe that it is both valuable and possible to further build on some of the implicit and explicit work being done on emotions in global politics by examining the specific and important role that dynamics of humiliation can play.

Methodological Challenges

Investigating the role of humiliation in global politics is not, however, an easy task, and it is important to note a number of potential methodological challenges and solutions. For even if we do not accept the arid behaviouralist model of the social sciences, attempts to study and explore the influence of emotions and other psychological factors of inter-personal dynamics and interactions do face significant difficulties. It is not easy, even theoretically, to isolate specific emotions or other psychological considerations from one another. The emotional realm is, as it were, fuzzy. People are rarely self-conscious of the full slate of factors that are driving their thinking, their decision making and their actions. In particular, individuals rarely explicitly monitor the precise emotions they feel and are perhaps even less able to accurately analyze their impact. Moreover, even if they are able to monitor and accurately analyze the impact of their emotions, they often do not want to openly express their influence.

These difficulties are multiplied when we try to examine not only individual or inter-personal dynamics, but instead much more complex inter-group dynamics. For then we need to overcome not only the difficulties of understanding multiple individuals. We also need to consider the ways in which groups might also be said to experience and embody these emotional dynamics in ways that are more than simply the sum of its individual parts. And this situation is complicated even further when the situation is overtly political – and thus individuals and groups have many reasons not to

---

[25] After 9/11, some right wing pundits such as Rich Lowry exhorted the US to act aggressively in response to the perceived humiliation while others argued that US anti-war advocates should be shamed for not supporting an aggressive counter-attack in response to the national humiliation. See, for example, William Bennett, *Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terror*, (New York: Doubleday, 2002). However there is virtually no academic work on the role of humiliation in contemporary global politics nor any systematic scholarly work on its role in relation to 9/11. One recent article, K.M Fierke's recent "Whereof we can speak, thereof we must not be silent: trauma, political solipsism and war", *Review of International Studies*, 2004, 30, p. 471-491, touches on humiliation at points and ends the essay with several sentences which suggests that humiliation and trauma is relevant to understanding 9/11. As its main objective lies elsewhere, however, this article also does not offer a robust theory or examination of the role of humiliation. Robert Jay Lifton's insightful thinking on post 9/11 America such as "American Apocalypse", *The Nation*, Dec 22, 2003 and *Superpower Syndrome: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World*, (New York: Nation Books, 2003) similarly gestures towards the importance of humiliation and illuminates a variety of aspects of our post 9/11 context. However, his work does not systematically theorize the nature of humiliation nor delve into the details of how humiliation might have impacted various constituencies in the creation of U.S. policy.

reveal the real impact of certain emotional and psychological elements even if they were able to correctly analyze them in a group setting.

These challenges are real. However, I reject the fallacious, but often employed, logic that implicitly assumes that if a phenomenon is difficult to study according to the dominant norms of social scientific methodology (especially behaviouralism), there can be no value in exploring its influence on politics. In contrast, I believe that while it is may be difficult to precisely discern humiliation dynamics and accurately measure their influence, the fact that humiliation is difficult to measure does not mean that these dynamics are any less influential. Rather, it simply suggests that we might need to be more creative in our investigations and more flexible in our modes of evaluating the evidence.

Given these challenges, my investigations into the influence of humiliation in global politics have been guided by three broadly methodological and theoretical commitments. First, this study takes its starting point from recent philosophical and scientific work which highlight the complex ways that the brain, the body, and emotion are intrinsic to our political, ethical and moral comportment. William Connolly's recent work, for example, highlights the importance of these emotional and bodily dimensions to politics and decision-making. Building on the insights of recent neuroscience, Connolly's work suggests that we need to boldly broaden the way we think about how and why people make certain decisions and act in certain ways. According to Connolly, to understand and influence the actions and decisions of individuals and groups, we need not simply reconstruct a narrow and linear calculation (and note any deviations from the norm). Rather, to understand a decision or an action, we need to examine to thick and broad 'sensibility' of the participants.[26] From Connolly's perspective, a 'sensibility' is the rich assemblage of thoughts, feelings, affects, emotions, habits, principles, beliefs, etc, which together set the stage for how we act and decide. In Connolly's words, a sensibility is **"composed through a particular layering of affect into the materiality of thought. A sensibility, thereby, is a constellation of thought-imbued intensities and feelings. To work on an already established sensibility by tactical means, then, is to address some of these layers in relation to others."**[27]

The aim of my study is to understand the impact of feelings of, and reactions to, humiliation on this thick 'sensibility'. Some IR scholars (especially those who assume that the only acceptable model of social scientific theorization is to simplify into single variables) might dismiss the very idea

---

[26] William Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
[27] W.E. Connolly, "Brain Waves and Transcendental fields", *Radical Philosophy*, 94, March/April 1999, p. 27.

of a thick 'sensibility', and the attempt to explore the role of emotions, as impossibly fuzzy. It is not at all clear, however, that a certain degree of fuzziness is, in itself, always a bad thing. Some suggest, in fact, that we might sometimes need fuzzy, complex descriptive theories because we *are* fuzzy, complex creatures. This view has found strong proponents even in the field of natural science. Isabelle Stengers and Ilya Prigogine (a Nobel Prizewinner in chemistry and the founder of complexity theory), for example, suggest that the Newtonian model of simplification is not necessarily the best model for explaining all natural interactions.[28] Prigogine and Connolly thus argue that in addition to Newtonian-inspired models, the social sciences also need more complex theories.   This study therefore begins from the belief that it might be acceptable to sacrifice a little elegance and embrace a little experimental complexity in order to explore the role of humiliation in international politics.

Counter-balancing this openness to complexity, however, is the second commitment of this study: the belief that the most convincing account of humiliation will be one that strives to separate out the diverse layers of analysis so that we can outline, as precisely as possible, the different ways humiliation might have impacted a wide spectrum of participants. This second commitment implies two sub-points. On one hand, the study will need to offer a clear theory of the key characteristics and pre-requisite conditions of generic humiliation that in turn will generate specific claims about how dynamics of humiliation influenced specific events. On the other, the study will also need to try to parse out and explain the different ways that dynamics of humiliation impacted different constituencies involved in these events and actions.

The third and final broad commitment of this study is the belief that any study of the dynamics of humiliation will have to be creative and flexible in the sources of evidence it analyzes. For as discussed above, it is very unlikely that specific individuals and groups will explicitly realize and/or admit that dynamics and tactics of humiliation were important factors influencing their thinking, decision making and behaviours. We can thus hardly hope for key decision makers or interlocutors to happily and explicitly understand and reveal the impact that feelings and reactions to humiliation might have had on US post 9/11 politics. As such, the future research challenge will be to find phenomenon whose analysis and interpretation will offer us hints and suggestions that either give us more faith in our theoretical model and hypotheses – or render them less plausible. This is where we will need to be the most creative and flexible – for we will need to sift through and

---

[28] For a brief overview and application of some of these recent innovations, see William Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), especially chapter 3.

evaluate the opaque implications of the behaviours, policies, language, metaphors, tones, etc., of the individuals and groups involved. In this context, therefore, we need to push ourselves to be flexible, creative empiricists – willing, as a critical genealogist might say, to speculate on the dark nooks and crannies of the soul on the basis of glimpses, gestures, tones and actions. Trials are, after all, more often than not won or lost on the weight of circumstantial evidence rather than 100% certain eye-witness testimony.

In sum, this study is guided first by the idea that thought and action takes place within a thick sensibility in which emotion is not merely a limitation on rational decision making, but a key element of any decision and action; second, by the commitment to investigating, in detail, the ways in which specific individuals, groups and contexts would have plausibly been influenced by the dynamics of humiliation; and third, by the belief that flexible, creative and theoretically informed empirical research should inform the next step of the study of emotions in IRT.

2. You Dissin Me? The Dynamics of Humiliation

How do we put all this into practice? I will begin by laying out a theory of humiliation formulated in response to the methodological challenges and commitments outlined above. The theoretical question of this section is therefore the following: What is humiliation and how does it function as a social process?

Humiliation has a long and interesting history in western culture.[29] In contemporary western society, humiliation describes both a potent and painful emotional sensation and a technique of social control. Some theorists such as William Ian Miller argue that humiliation is one of the central modern modes of maintaining social order and hierarchy and suggest that it is becoming ever more prevalent.[30] But what is humiliation, exactly? Elsewhere I have analyzed a much wider set of

---

[29] See the introduction to Paul Saurette, *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), for some of this history. Other works that might serve as useful introductions to some of these themes are William Ian Miller's *Humiliation*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993); Bernard William's *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); a collection of Silvan Tomkins' writings in *Shame and its Sisters*, E.K. Sedgwick and A. Frank eds., (Durham, Duke University Press, 1995); Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity: : Disgust, Shame and the Law*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). None of these explore the implications for international relations, however.

[30] See the introduction to William Ian Miller, *Humiliation*, (Cornell: CUP, 1993). This also helps explains why others, such as Aviahai Margalit, consider humiliation as the central vice of our modern societies. See Aviahai Margalit's *The Decent Society*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) and the special issue of *Social Research* Vol 64, No. 1 (Spring 1997) devoted to discussing that book, especially Steven Lukes' article "Humiliation and the Politics of Identity", p. 36-52

examples of humiliation.[31] Here, however, I will outline a theory of humiliation through an analysis of a concrete, empirical example that has become a central issue in recent global politics: the humiliation of Muslim prisoners by the US since 9/11 at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.[32]

In 2004, the infamous Abu Ghraib photos and the resulting series of investigations revealed that US interrogators had regularly employed extreme interrogation tactics in Iraq, Guantanamo and Afghanistan. [33] It became clear, moreover, that US interrogators not only used levels of violence that were – or verged on – torture. They also routinely employed practices of deliberate humiliation. Prisoners were forced to strip and then stand naked, or march around naked. They were put into sexual poses and ridiculed in front of fellow prisoners and American guards. They were forced to simulate sex with one another, in front of female American guards, and were then photographed in these contexts. They were hooded, forced to stand for hours without moving, and forced to the ground. They were not only threatened by attack dogs, but also forced to bark like dogs, wear leashes, and grovel. More recently, the US based organization Human Rights Watch issues a report titled "US: Religious Humiliation of Muslim Detainees Widespread" which asserts that in "detention centers around the world", US policies such as the removal of all religious items, all clothing, and the forced shaving of facial and head hair were designed primarily "to inflict humiliation on detainees".[34]

Why do we call these acts humiliating? How is humiliation different than simple fear? The difference is that humiliation is an emotion and process that seeks to discipline the humiliated party's behaviour by attacking and lowering their own (and others') perceptions of whether they deserve *respect*. Consider the techniques of humiliation in Abu Ghraib. The main disciplinary effect of many of these techniques – being forced to be naked publicly, to stimulate sex acts, to be photographed doing so, to be forced to bark like dogs – does not stem from the physical pain or coldness that accompanies any of these practices. Rather, the disciplinary effect emerges because

---

[31] Introduction and epilogue to Paul Saurette, *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

[32] See Paul Saurette, *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) for a more detailed discussion.

[33] The description that follows is taken from the following accounts: Seymour Hersh's series of pieces in the *New Yorker*: "Torture at Abu Ghraib" May 10, 2004; "Chain of Command" May 17, 2004; "The Grey Zone" May 24, 2004; Mark Danner's two articles in the *New York Review of Books*, "Torture and Truth" June 10, 2004 and "The Logic of Torture" June 24, 2004; the *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the Treatment By the Coalition Forces of Prisoners of War and Other Protected Persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq During Arrest, Internment and Interrogation*, February 2004; US Major-General Taguba's *Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade* report, February 2003. For an overview of the report's findings about Rumsfeld's authorization see Josh White, "Abu Ghraib tactics were first used at Guantanamo", *Washington Post*, July 14, 2005, p. A01.

[34] Human Rights Watch press release, "US Religious Humiliation of Muslim Detainees Widespread", New York, May 19, 2005.

each of these practices works on specific cultural sensitivities about what it means to be an honourable, self-respecting subject in that culture. Forcing a Muslim man to stimulate sex acts with another man in front of a female American soldier works on the detainees' self-respect on multiple levels as it denies the ability of the detainee to perform those acts that his culture defines as being the determinative of honourable manliness.[35] For example, it reveals as false the ability to restrict sexual acts to the private realm. Indeed, it strips away the claim to have control of any aspect of the sexual act (partner, timing, place, etc) entirely and forces the prisoners to admit they cannot pretend to have autonomy over any of those things. Being forced to perform like a barking dog works on the idea that a man who is a dog is not even a man but is instead a sub-human not entitled to honour and respect. Forced shaving of facial hair (which is an important symbol of honour, masculinity and piety) challenges the inmates' ability to act and groom themselves in a way that signals their nature as upright and righteous Muslims. The disciplinary effects, therefore, are not primarily related to the experience or fear of physical pain. Rather, the intensely negative visceral reaction is related to the inability to perform certain practices (or the requirement to undertake others) which ensure that the subjects and those around them perceive them as honourable subjects who live up to their own self-image and are thus due respect from themselves and others.

These examples give us some preliminary insights into the nature of humiliation. First, the feeling of humiliation is deeply and closely linked to ideas about, and perceptions of, 'honour' and 'respect'. In fact, the feeling of humiliation can be defined as the intense – and intensely painful – sensation of having one's "dignity or self-respect lowered and depressed".[36] The feeling of humiliation is thus a social process that radically devalues one's self-respect (and others' respect of you) which in turn gives rise to an intense negative emotion. To humiliate someone, then, might be understood as the attempt to make the subject *feel* humiliated (i.e. low and less worthy) so that they then transform this feeling into some sort of semi-articulated sense that motivates them to obey and act in deference to the person or thing that humiliates. Humiliation, at core, is therefore a process of disrespecting (or perhaps more accurately, de-respecting as it involves a ripping away of respect). And given the contemporary importance of recognition and 'respect' not only in contemporary philosophy but also in contemporary popular culture and masculinity, it is not surprising that practical concern and conflict over the politics of disrespect – in its most popular form referred to as

---

[35] On the theoretical importance of performativity to subject formation, see Judith Butler's pioneering work *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).
[36] *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: OUP, 1989) under 'humiliate'.

the practice of 'dissin' – is rampant at all levels of contemporary society from the basketball court to the boardroom to the oval office.

Second, humiliation lowers the self-respect and dignity of someone in a very specific way: by stripping away and revealing as false the most prized self-perceptions and most valued bases of self-respect. As such, for humiliation to function, the humiliated party must have 'pretensions' (in a non-pejorative sense) to a higher value or position which are subsequently proved as false. In every case discussed above, the humiliated party presented themselves as deserving a certain position and respect – which was then forcefully denied. The forced shaving of the head and face is a classic example. Militaries have long understood that shaving heads is a key component of breaking down and humiliating pretensions to individuality of new recruits. Shaved heads not only make people look the same, it ridicules the very pretension to have a choice to be different. The humiliation of forced shaving is multiplied, moreover, in a culture which facial hair not only informally defines and signals one's individual identity but also formally signals one's 'upstandingness' and 'respectability'. Without the implicit valorization of individuality as the basis for self-respect or the explicit religious affirmation of certain hair patterns, forced shaving would not function to create a sense of humiliation. Humiliation thus requires the humiliatee to clearly value a certain self-perception as the basis of their self-respect and the humiliator to reveal that as false.

Third, the impact of humiliation is intensified if the unmasking of pretensions is made publicly known to a larger audience. There is no question that being forced to simulate sex acts in front of even one or two observers would have been intensely humiliating for the prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The force of that humiliation would have grown when witnessed by a group of observers (including females) and it would have intensified geometrically once pictures documenting the humiliation were taken (since they would raise the spectre that the humiliation would become public knowledge in the prisoners' peer group outside the prison). Thus, a key condition of humiliation is that the unmasking of pretensions happens under the gaze of a larger audience.

Fourth, in order for this public unmasking of pretensions to be forceful enough to *effectively* discipline individuals, there must has to be a recognized, common sense standard of judgment, including the broader audience. If there were no powerful cultural standards which (a) defined honourable manliness as heterosexual and autonomous and (b) outlined commonly shared conceptions of how these values must be performed (e.g. no public nudity – especially in front of women, no sexual acts between men), the tactics of humiliation would not function to lower the inmates' self-respect and perceptions of dignity. This means that if humiliation is to be deeply felt

and for it to function effectively as a disciplinary force, there needs to be a normative standard of judgment and aspiration that is deeply embedded and accepted (both instantly recognized and widely respected) by a given community. For only if both the 'humiliatee' and an observing (or potentially observing) public share an intense respect for a common sense standard – can the public revealing of sub-standard behaviour (or attitudes, etc) *immediately* inspire a deep emotion of humiliation that is powerful enough to transform their self-perceptions and behaviours.[37]

Fifth, this means that humiliation is a culturally and historically specific phenomenon insofar as the elements that trigger humiliation depend heavily on a specific cultural sensibility (the meanings, expectations, judgments, affective and emotional reactions disciplined and enabled by a culture).[38] Moreover, the basis of any specific individual's (or group's) perceptions of self-respect are also heavily influenced by one's subject position (e.g. the cultural, historical, class, race, gender, national, etc., context). Thus, even though we might feel that the common standards that define humiliation and respect feel natural, we must always remember that we need to ensure that the parties involved actually do share and experience these standards. As such, when we study humiliation we must always try to identify the particular bases of self-respect and triggers of humiliation and the ways they are similar and different between different constituencies.

Sixth, reactions to the experience of humiliation can range widely.[39] Sometimes a feeling of humiliation can effectively reinforce the common sense standards of judgment and discipline the individual into obeying the humiliating authority. Since humiliation (by its very definition) calls into question some of the most prized self-perceptions and feelings of self-respect and dignity, however, it can also inspire a reaction against the agent that is perceived to be trying to humiliate the individual or group. This can be particularly true in cases in which the humiliation meted out is directed against masculine pretensions to power, honor and 'respect' (the aggressive reaction against perceived attempts to humiliated can be heard clearly in the phrase that has become contemporary equivalent to the throwing down of the gauntlet that preceded duels: 'You dissin me?'). It should

---

[37] However, the humiliators themselves do not have to share these common standards as long as there are common standards shared by the humiliatees and another (even merely potential) group of observers.

[38] Charles Taylor's discussion of the cultural background of emotions, while sometimes a little intellectualist (insofar as he links it very closely to common meanings), is instructive here. On this see "Self-Interpreting Animals" and "The Concept of a Person" in *Philosophical Papers I*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) and "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" in *Philosophical Papers II*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985). It is telling, I think, that Taylor virtually always includes shame or humiliation as his primary example of peculiarly human emotions.

[39] For several psychological perspectives which help explain these range of emotions and responses, see Jane Price Tangney's interview with a Virginia non-profit: Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources of Fairfax Country available online at http://www.oarfairfax.org/News.htm, accessed March 13, 2003; Jane Price Tangney, Shame and Guilt, (New York: Guilford Press, 2002); Alisa Levine, "The Social Face of Shame and Humiliation.", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, v. 53, n. 2, 2005, p. 526-534.

thus not be surprising that humiliation can also inspire a variety of negative and unpredictable reactions. One might, for example, attempt to overthrow the agent of humiliation in an effort to disprove the legitimacy of the attempted humiliation and thus overturn the lowering of one's own dignity in the eyes of oneself and others (e.g. if someone questions your pretensions to manliness, you challenge them to a fight and re-assert your claim to masculinity by proving that you are stronger, tougher, more masculine). Or one might overtly rebel and challenge the common sense standards that underpin the assumed humiliation (e.g. someone questions your pretensions to manliness and in response you laugh at their macho He-man cartoon-figure performance). Or one might do nothing overt – but instead develop and nurture a deep simmering resentment that lurks just beneath the surface and that might explode against the agent of humiliation (or someone else) at some point in the future (e.g. someone questions your pretensions to masculinity, in response you grow to hate them and you cultivate yourself in such a way as to undermine them – or someone who is linked to, or reminds you of, them – years down the road).

Seventh, the above characteristics mean that as a social practice, there are at least two relatively distinct ways humiliation can be relevant to politics. On one hand, we can see autonomous and relatively undirected spirals of humiliation <u>dynamics</u> in which an actor feels humiliated, reacts to this humiliation, and in turn is reacted to by other actors, etc. When this is the case, understanding the feeling of humiliation and the reactions it helps shape becomes crucial for understanding the decisions, policies, and actions both parties take. We can no doubt generate many examples from our own personal experience to illustrate this. There are, however, also social practices of humiliation that are more consciously directed. We say that certain parties instrumentally use – either consciously or semi-consciously – what we might call <u>tactics of humiliation</u>. It seems clear that the abuses at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere fall into this category. For even if the policy-makers, interrogators, and MPs were not all fully capable of articulating that it was humiliation they were using, it is hard to believe that they didn't all intuitively sense that they were seeking to discipline the inmates by manipulating them using emotions that were not simply fear of pain. As such, as a social practice, humiliation can be relevant to understanding social interactions either (a) as a spiral <u>dynamic</u> of more or less unconscious reactions to feelings of humiliation or (b) as a <u>tactic</u> of humiliation that is (more or less) intentionally used as a means of altering behaviour. Moreover, it should be noted that employing tactics of humiliation often lead to spiral dynamics – just as spiral dynamics of humiliation often inspire those involved to increasingly use tactics of humiliation in their reactions.

In sum, humiliation is a complex and intensely emotional experience in which historically specific and culturally defined (though often naturalized) perceptions and definitions of self-worth, self-respect and dignity are stripped away and revealed as false and illegitimate affectations – thus creating a feeling of lowered self-respect (which, in turn, can inspire a willingness to obey the humiliating authority, or overt rebellion, or deep simmering resentment). As such, humiliation is a key emotion and a set of specific dynamics and tactics that are distinct from feelings of 'fear' and interest.

How is this relevant to international politics and especially post 9/11 US global policy? To investigate this further, the following two sections apply the above model of humiliation to the context surrounding 9/11 and attempts to assess the degree to which the conditions of humiliation were fulfilled and likely influential in the formation of the U.S. response to 9/11. Section 3 will outline some of the most fundamental and valued common sense standards and bases of self-respect operative in the various individuals, groups and dimensions relevant for the formation of post-9/11 US policy. In particular, I will examine the fundamental bases of self-respect of 3 main actors and contexts which can be reasonably assumed to have exercised some influence on the development of post-9/11 policy (the President and his senior advisors; the strategic community; and the popular domestic community) and will show how the attacks of 9/11 humiliated many, if not all, of these profound 'pretensions' by calling them into question. Section 4 will then argue that various dimensions of the US response to 9/11 seem to embody typical elements of the aggressive and hostile reactions to humiliation, which in turn suggests that it is plausible to conclude humiliation helped shape a variety of post-9/11 American policy choices.

3. The Humiliation Of 9/11

If humiliation is in large part the forcible and public stripping away of dearly held perceptions about the self which act as the basis of its self-respect and dignity, any plausible attempt to evaluate whether a sense of humiliation influenced policy decisions must start by identifying the key foundations of the subject's self respect both for the subject itself and for the common sense standards of judgment that the larger public would use to judge any potential humiliation. So, to begin, let's consider the key foundations for some of the key parties and contextual factors.

Senior Decision Makers: President Bush and his Senior Advisors

What might we say are some of the key foundations of Bush's self-respect as the President of the United States of America?   One way to answer this question would be to try to examine Bush's personality itself – consult biographical accounts and construct a portrait of his personality and values.[40] From this perspective, we might ask what bases of self-respect Bush's personality predisposed him to prize. Here, however, I want to ask a slightly different, and perhaps less opaque, question by focusing primarily on the bases of self-respect he likely would have given his position and public persona. In essence, I want to ask less 'what would George Bush the private individual likely feel' and more 'what are some of the fundamental bases of self-respect that Bush – as a figure with a certain official position and responsibilities and as a figure with a certain public persona on which his electability rested – would likely feel given his public position?

Let's consider first the fact that Bush occupies the Office of the President. What comes with this office? What are some of the characteristics that a self-respecting President must perform? And what are some of the elements that the American public commonly assumes are required for the President to retain his dignity and self-respect? While the precise bases of different presidents' self-respect vary (Kennedy's bases were certainly very different than Reagan's), one theme that is common to virtually all occupants of the office is the appearance of strength, resoluteness, determination, invulnerability and power – in sum, masculinity. In *The Wimp Factor: Gender Gaps, Holy Wars, and the Politics of Anxious Masculinity*, for example, psychologist John Ducat convincingly shows not only that the bases of much masculine self-respect is based on a deep phobia and disavowal of the feminine – but more specifically that modern American presidential politics have become fundamentally premised on the ability of office holders to prove that they are not wimps, wussies, mama's boys or sissies.[41]

If the public common sense standards that define recent presidential politics push its office holder to view the bases of self and public respect as heavily influenced by traditional standards of masculinity, this is doubly true of George W. Bush. For as Ducat's work highlights, Bush Jr. had a very personal connection to fears of being labelled a 'wimp'.[42] It was, after all, his father that had been decried as a 'wimp' on the cover of national magazines and many observers suggest that one of the key lessons Bush Jr. took from his father's defeat was the cost of being publicly perceived as a

---

[40] As the work of Blema Steinberg shows in reference to other Presidents, this can be a productive approach. Here, however, I want to focus on the more public factors of the broader social and political context.

[41] John Ducat, *The Wimp Factor*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 2004).

[42] John Ducat, in fact, notes that Bush Sr. was the inspiration for the title of his book. See his final response in his interview with Buzzflash magazine: "Stephen J. Ducat Dissects "Anxious Masculinity," Making Sense of America's Strutting, in a Psychoanalytic Kind of Way", *Buzzflash*, March 2, 2005, accessed 07.10.05 at http://www.buzzflash.com/interviews/05/03/int05011.html

'wimp'.[43] Given the general current Ducat outlines and Bush Jr.'s particular history, it would be odd for him not to have a heightened sensitivity to the possibility of being publicly disrespected or of having his masculine determination, resoluteness and strength questioned and humiliated in any way.[44]

Secondly, we might also say that Bush's electoral persona and character (which was central to both his presidential victories) was fundamentally premised on the idea that Bush was a particularly down home, good old boy. In contrast to his patrician father who was once mercilessly ridiculed after asking for a 'splash' of coffee, many people said they would vote for Bush Jr. because he was the kind of guy who you could down a cup o' joe with and talk about the sports section. Heck, this was a guy who once helped run the Texas Rangers and apparently wants to become the commissioner of Major League Baseball when he finishes up the Presidency. It is thus not surprising that this persona also became the fundamental basis for his post 9/11 Commander in Chief persona. Consider the metaphors Bush used early and often in the war on terror. Here too, Bush Jr. played the Marlboro man. The US wasn't going to 'surgically remove targets' with 'precision guided payloads'. No – in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the language of the clinical language of first Gulf war was replaced with John Wayne tropes.[45] It was the U.S. against "the thugs" and "the outlaws" and the U.S. was gonna get Saddam dead or alive. The world would learn not to mess with Texas because Bush was gonna "smoke em out from their caves". It is not surprising that this down home, common sense, of the people persona led easily into the language of good and evil, black and white. Real men don't worry about the analytic details, they decide with their gut. They don't worry about rules, they get stuff done. They don't take guff, and they don't make nice.

My claim is not that Bush Jr. is a cowboy who shoots from the hip and whose brashness brashness has been translated into foreign policy. Nor is my claim that Bush Jr. doesn't know the difference between a spaghetti western and the complicated and opaque world of global politics.

---

[43] For a brief overview of the 'wimp' re-branding problem George Bush Jr. faced see Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud*, (New York: Scribner, 2004), p. 191-194 and Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose, *Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America*, (New York: Random House, 2003).

[44] Indeed, it is telling that early in his campaign to win the Republican nomination in 2000, when he was still sometimes candid and unscripted with the Press corps, Bush revealed himself as quite in tune with the politics of respect, dis-respect and humiliation when he accused (somewhat playfully, it is true) one reporter of 'dissin' him – and warned the reporter that Bush might turn this around and "diss" the entire network in response (which he then did by freezing certain journalists out of questions if he thought they had humiliated him in previous questions or articles). See Aaron Lubarsky, Alexandra Pelosi directors, *Journeys with George*, Warner Home Video, 2004.

[45] The quotes that follow are simply several obvious examples taken from one speech alone – delivered at Mayport Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida in February 2003. Quoted excerpts from *The Scoop*, at http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0302/S00098.htm (accessed 07.11.05). However, one can find similar tropes and metaphors in many of his public speeches.

Rather, my claim is simply that in both the office he held and the public persona he employed, Bush's own self-perception and self-respect – as well as the perceptions and respect for him from significant portions of the broader public – were fundamentally based on deep expectations about resoluteness, determination, strength in the face of adversity, and an absolute unwillingness to turn the other cheek. In such a position, it would be hard not to be obsessed with questions of proper respect, credibility and the threat of humiliation.

Given this situation, it would also be virtually impossible for Bush not to experience the 9/11 attacks as a profound humiliation. Take the challenge it posed to the bases of respect of the Office of the President, for example. The attacks directly challenged the idea that the American President is the hyper-masculine Commander-in-Chief of the world – able to stand up with strength, determination, invulnerability and power without fear of reprisal or personal vulnerability. Several elements of the 9/11 attacks held the possibility of fundamentally undermining this implicit claim. First, the fact that both symbols of American power, the trade towers of New York's commercial might and the headquarters of Washington military power, were successfully attacked called into question American power and in particular, the invulnerability of the highest office of American political power. Secondly, 9/11 challenged the myth of omnipotence of American power and its ultimate office-holder. The widespread outrage over the failures of the American intelligence network that followed the 9/11 inquiries only underline the degree to which most Americans assume that the President is not only a commander in chief who does the best s/he can to react to danger – but a commander in chief who should be able to intuit threats before they fully emerge and pre-empt them.[46] Furthermore, the humiliation of 9/11 would have been particularly intense for one with Bush's specific public persona. For if Bush's persona was one of determination, common sense and clear resolute strength, the attacks seemed to challenge and humiliate all of these. It implicitly challenged the Republican faith that if you are tough enough, no one will dare mess with you. 9/11 either proved this faith to be radically naïve (humiliating in itself for the 'tough love' approach to defence) or, even worse, threatened to show that Bush and the Republicans, despite their efforts, hadn't been 'man enough' to deter and scare evil-doers. From this perspective, then, it would be almost impossible for Bush to avoid interpreting the attacks of 9/11 not only as a threat, but also as a deep humiliation.

---

[46] In fact, the centrality of the pre-emptive right to attack in Bush's new strategic doctrine and the renewed push for an ABM defense system might be seen as only further emphasizing the degree to which Bush, and many Americans, view the ability to Office of the President to assure absolute security as one of the profound ends – and thus bases of self-respect – of the Office of the President.

Foreign policy is not, of course, simply set by the President – key advisors play an important role in setting and evaluating the decision making agenda.   This is probably especially the case with Bush – for close observers have suggested that even though Bush has a relatively small number of advisors and ultimately is very decisive in making the decisions himself, he heavily relies upon his advisors to identify the issues, outline the options and analyze the pros/cons.[47] As such, the perceptions and sensitivities of his inner circle matter. In this article, there is not room for a detailed analysis of the individual personalities of, and the dynamics between, the members of Bush's inner circle.[48] However, I suspect that it is fair to say that important elements of the hyper-masculinist bases of self-respect discussed above were likely normalized within Bush's group of senior advisors.[49] In fact, the humiliation might have been felt even more intensely by certain members of the senior leadership team such as Cheney, Perle, and Rumsfeld – all of whom had participated in the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) and who thus would have seen 9/11 as a humiliating challenge to America's special right to project global power across the world.[50]

Strategic Community

It is important to remember that foreign policy is equally formulated within a strategic community that embodies a set of historic expectations, doctrines and often identities. My contention is that it is plausible to assume that given these expectations, doctrines and the resulting identities, the strategic community likely would have also experienced – and thus helped frame – 9/11 as a profound humiliation.

First, one might say that American strategic community has historically shared a series of explicit and implicit commitments which broadly parallel the masculinist bases discussed above. For example, whether embodied in the geo-political 'domino theory' of the Cold War or the game theory logic of deterrence, an obsession with 'credibility' has been at the core of post WWII US strategic

---

[47] On Bush's decision making style see Mike Allen and David S. Broder, "Bush's Leadership Style: Decisive or Simplistic?", *Washington Post*, August 30, 2004, p. A01.

[48] The dynamics within his inner circle is clearly a complex question, since the group is both large enough to give rise to significant diversity in the bases of self-respect at play and small enough to ensure that the diversity would not necessarily be smoothed out by the law of averages. As such, I will offer no more than a speculative analysis on this area.

[49] This is the case both (a) because their official role and self-understanding as being responsible for protecting the nation is quite similar to that of the President's. and (b) because as Paul Light, the director of the Center for Public Service at the Brookings Institution suggests, "George Bush tends to make decisions on the basis of hunch and intuition, and then pulls together groups that confirm his decisions…The only people who are invited to be on the team are people who agree with him." Quoted in Ron Hutcheson, "Message Control", *Detroit Free Press*, April 4, 2004, accessible online at http://www.freep.com/voices/sunday/ehutch4_20040404.htm (accessed 7.11.05).

[50] Donald Kagan, Gary Schmitt, Thomas Donnelly for Project for a New American Century, "Rebuilding America's Defenses", accessed online (7.10.05) at http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf

thinking.[51] And what is at the core of credibility? Ensuring that other countries respect US determination. In every action, the US needed to show determination, resoluteness, strength and unswerving leadership.

Secondly, it seems that the post-USSR condition of unipolarity has not relaxed or reduced the emphasis on the need to perform these characteristics but has, in fact, intensified it.[52] For now America needed not only show resoluteness towards one major enemy – but a vast number of new potential enemies (both of the state and non-state variety) that could not be controlled by nuclear deterrence. Moreover, if America was now the world's policeman – not only a prime mover among several powers – then any disrespect that was shown would be doubly insulting. Challenging the US was not only challenging a state. It was challenging the global authority. In sum, strategically, the US not only needed to be hyper-aware of challenges to its credibility from many more angles. As the policeman of the world, it was also due the double deference and intensified respect that a recognized authority deserved.

Finally, there is some work that has convincingly suggested that American strategic and foreign policy is influenced by a deep anxiety about the hegemonic male power of the US and has sought to respond to this anxiety by performing, both symbolically and materially, a hyper-masculinity. Cynthia Weber's work, most notably *Faking It: U.S. Hegemony in a 'Post-Phallic' Era* suggests that much of the US strategic posture towards Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, is made more comprehensible if viewed as a reaction to intense masculine and heterosexual insecurity.[53] This, in turn, suggests that there is something in the US strategic context which deeply values and embodies these core masculine values of resoluteness, determination, endurance and strength – bases of self- and other respect that might be highly relevant if called into question by other events and contexts.

From this perspective, nothing would seem more damaging to long term security than allowing someone to 'dis' American superiority. As such, policy makers did not necessarily need to share PNAC's strategic vision in order to feel strategically humiliated by 9/11. For even more

---

[51] For a recent article that highlights both the historic centrality (and problem) of credibility to U.S. strategic thinking and argues that it remains central to contemporary strategic planning (especially in light of Bush's renewed efforts towards a Ballistic Missile Defense system), see Robert Powell, "Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation and National Missile Defense", *International Security*, v. 17, n. 4, 2003, p. 86-118.

[52] For a critical but fair portrait of Bush's global strategy as one that positioned America as the world's policeman without peer and thus intensified the need to be viewed as hyper-interventionist, see G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition", *Foreign Affairs*, v. 81, n. 5, Sept/Oct 2002, p. 44-60.

[53] Cynthia Weber, *Faking It: U.S. Hegemony in a 'Post-Phallic' Era*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press; 1999).

traditional strategic perspectives might well have interpreted 9/11 as a dangerous humiliation of the US military and the American strategic persona. Considering that American strategic doctrine is interpreted and defined by individuals – many of whom worked in the Pentagon – we shouldn't under-estimate the feeling of humiliation (alongside rage, sorrow, fear, etc) that would have been caused by the fact that Al-Qaeda successfully attacked their professional home. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that even the concepts and categories of strategic thinking (which highlighted the importance of credibility, respect and strength as prerequisites for the successful defence of American interests at home and abroad) could easily have encouraged policy makers to experience 9/11 not merely as a rational change in context which heightened the possibility of future attack but also as an emotionally charged humiliation in the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the rest of the world.

It is also important to note, moreover, that the belief that strategic credibility required resolute determinedness, invulnerability and a heightened sensitivity to (and reaction against) perceived humiliations was strongly voiced by influential voices even before 9/11. Take, for example, a policy paper titled 'National Humiliation' that was published by Robert Kagan and William Kristol five months before 9/11 in the neo-conservative *Weekly Standard* and reprinted widely (for example, by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and the Project for a New American Century).[54] In it, Kagan (an influential policy hawk in several administrations, a co-founder of the PNAC, and a member of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace) and Kristol (an influential neo-conservative commentator and co-founder of the Weekly Standard and PNAC) proved to be incredibly sensitive to perceived moments of international humiliation. In particular, their interpretation of the Sino-American diplomatic scuffle over the return of a crew from a crashed U.S. surveillance aircraft asserted that the Chinese demand for an official policy from the U.S. was a blatant attempt to "inflict upon the United States a public international humiliation".[55] According to Kagan and Kristol, giving into this pressure and apologizing would be an incalculable mistake. In their words, apologizing put "the United States on the path to humiliation" and that "for a great power, not to mention the world's sole superpower, humiliation is not a matter to be taken lightly. It is not just a petty issue of 'face'."[56] They therefore excoriated Colin Powell's diplomatic statements of regret and sadly noted that "President Bush has revealed weakness. And he has revealed fear". This "American capitulation", they claimed, would both allow China to be more aggressive around Taiwan and would "also embolden others around the

---

[54] Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "National Humiliation", *Weekly Standard*, April 9, 2001, 11-15.
[55] Kagan and Kristol, "National Humiliation", p. 12.
[56] Kagan and Kristol, "National Humiliation", p. 14.

world" to challenge American interests. As such, they categorically opined: "this defeat and humiliation…must not stand".[57]

Several elements are important here. First, the stakes of humiliation are clearly and explicitly outlined by two very influential voices – suggesting that this sensitivity clearly existed in policy and strategic circles. Secondly, it shows that senior voices were not only able to experience and interpret foreign policy in terms of humiliation – but also to base foreign policy reactions on it. Thirdly, it reveals that Bush and his senior advisors may well have felt vulnerable to being portrayed as weak – which would have increased both their sensitivity to perceived humiliations and their need to react forcefully in reaction to future perceived humiliations. In sum, the shape of the strategic community makes plausible the idea that 9/11 would have been experienced strategically not only as a context of heightened vulnerability, but also as a context in which the U.S. strategic capability had been deeply humiliated.

Popular Domestic Community

Finally, if foreign policy is set by the President, senior advisors and strategists who experience and frame the issue through a given strategic lens, these policy makers also operate in a context of public and national expectations, emotions, and judgments. While there has been much debate in IRT about the relevance of domestic factors on the creation of foreign policy, most commentators do allow that public and national expectations, emotions and judgments can have a significant influence on foreign policy in certain cases.[58] Moreover, given the fact that 9/11 was such an overwhelmingly public and traumatic event that it was and that, if Richard Clarke and others are to believed, the Bush administration had a decided predilection to privilege political calculations in many policy decisions, it is hard to believe that the Bush administration's reaction to 9/11 was not at least partially influenced by the popular context.

In this sense, then, it is important to attempt to analyze whether an American 'popular consciousness' (for all its diversity, contradictions and multiple personalities) might have

---

[57] Kagan and Kristol, "National Humiliation", p. 14.

[58] A classic summary of the role of domestic sources of foreign policy can be found in Eugene Wittkopf and James McCormick's *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy*, fourth edition, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). For the argument that there was a complex give and take between the Bush administration and public opinion around the Iraq war (as well as around the response to 9/11), see Douglas Foyle, "Leading the Public to War? The Influence *of* American Public Opinion on the Bush Administration's Decision to Go to War in Iraq", *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, v. 16, n. 3, 2004, p. 269-294. Even Robert Gilpin has been moved to examine the role of domestic constituencies (as well as important groups among Bush's senior administration) to explain the shape of post 9/11 U.S. foreign policy. Robert Gilpin, "War is Too Important to Be Left to Ideological Amateurs", *International Relations*, v. 19, n. 1, 2005, p. 5-18.

experienced 9/11 as a profound humiliation. Are there some widely held internal assumptions about 'America' and what it means to be American that are so powerful that they are experienced as key foundations for American national self respect?[59] With appropriate qualifiers, I would argue that there are some widely (but obviously not universally) held assumptions about what it means to be American – and that these assumptions and self-understandings become particularly solidified in times of crisis. Moreover, I would further suggest that many of these centre on notions of masculinity – strong, invulnerable, determined, and resolute – and thus create a very high standard for national self-respect. The fact that one of the most oft-cited claims following 9/11 was the idea that the U.S. had never been subject to a significant foreign attack underlines the degree to which large segments of the public identified with a conception of America as the Invulnerable. Moreover, I think it is fair to say that this popular self-perception of America the Invulnerable had also been fused with conceptions about the American dream and American exceptionalism. Why is one proud to be American? Because America is the new world, the world of possibility and promise, free of the wars of the 'old world'. But also because America embodies a can-do frontier attitude of a country literally constructed in 200 years out of pure nature.[60] And what is a significant component of the frontier attitude? Strong masculinity. The cowboy who deals out rough justice when required. The self-sufficient, autonomous pioneer who has earned the right to protect the homestead against raiding marauders. Though he doesn't necessarily identify the above elements as the cause, in many ways Robert Jay Lifton gathers together and expresses the resulting identity when he suggests that a significant element of American public consciousness is defined by a 'super-power syndrome' that believes not only that it is omnipotent – but that it is entitled to expect respect, deference and in fact receive special 'dispensation' for its actions.[61] If this is the case, then as a nation, the American popular consciousness seems primed to interpret any lack of proper respect for America's masculinity as a profound humiliation. Other public opinion polling data also seems to support this as they identify significant trends towards the re-assertion of traditional, masculine values and attitudes in large portions of the American public (and not just among men).[62] For this, in turn,

---

[59] Outlining a theoretical approach that could do justice to the diversity and tension of something we might call a popular consciousness or identity that would serve as the basis of an analysis of humiliation is a project in and of itself – and thus is far beyond the scope of the paper. That said, for the purposes of this paper, I want to sketch out some examples that make plausible the notion that such an analysis is possible and needed.

[60] On the widespread nature of this self-perception – and its role in helping create the Right's ideological resonance in contemporary America see Adrian Wooldridge and John Micklethwait, *The Right Nation*, (New York: Penguin, 2004).

[61] On this see both "American Apocalypse", *The Nation*, Dec 22, 2003 and *Superpower Syndrome: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World*, (New York: Nation Books, 2003).

[62] One relevant indicator might be the work of Michael Adams – a pollster who has been tracking the evolution of values in both the US and Canada for the last 15 years. One of his particularly startling findings is that while acceptance of the

suggests that it is plausible to suspect that many of these citizens would also view the nation through similar lenses of respect and authority and be similarly primed to view any challenge to that authority as an intense humiliation.

In this context, it once again seems likely to assume that significant portions of the America public (especially those constituencies that made up Bush's base) felt a strong sense of humiliation as 9/11 challenged these basic assumptions about the nature and respected status of America in at least two major ways. First, the attack challenged the deep assumptions about invulnerability and revealed them as over-confident and arrogant. Far from being exceptional, the US was revealed simply as one nation among many that was at risk of terrorist attack. I suspect, however, that many also felt that the US had been fundamentally disrespected by the attacks – a humiliation to its national masculinity that required a clear response to make sure that 'they' respected us. For what could be more humiliating than the fact that a no face, no visible power, and no body to call to account had symbolically emasculated and challenged – slapped in the face in the most public and devastating way – the entire United States? And the fact that they did it without technology, without state power, using nothing more devastating than box cutters to turn the very tools of everyday US commercial life into missiles capable of evading every defence, only rubbed salt into the humiliation.

I believe we can hear echoes of an aggressive reaction against this humiliation if we listen to the crowd's chants and Bush's responses to them at his first visit to the site of the fallen trade towers.[63] In the back and forth between Bush and the crowd, there is not only the sorrow, anger and patriotism of a group determined to make their country safe again. We can also hear the overtones of a deep anger which strains to reassert national pride and self-respect in the face of this humiliation. For what was it exactly that Bush thanked the rescue workers for? Not merely their hard work and their exceptional self-sacrifice. He also made a point of thanking them for "making the nation proud".

In doing so, Bush instinctively tapped into and expressed a deep desire to rebel against and overturn the humiliation of 9/11. For it is not coincidence that the crowd responded to Bush's invocation of pride with a chant of 'USA, USA, USA, USA'. Nor is it unsurprising that Bush, in turn, replied that "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked

patriarchal model of hyper-masculine authority is falling in many modern countries (including Canada), it seems to be experiencing a significant resurgence in the United States. According to Adams' research, while the number of Canadians who agreed with the statement "the father of the family must be the master in his own home" fell from 26% in 1992, to 20% in 1996, to 18% in 2000, in the United States the number grew from 42% to 44% to 49% in those same years. See Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada, and the Myth of Converging Values*, (Toronto: Penguin, 2003), p. 51.

[63] Transcript available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/#, accessed Febuary 14, 2005.

these buildings down will hear all of us soon." For these phrases speak not only to sorrow and anger nor only to a desire to punish the responsible. For key to this emotional speech is not simply the *receiving* of retribution – but the *witnessing* of retribution. What is key is not merely that punishment will be meted out, but that the humiliated nation, the humiliating terrorists, and the viewing world public will all be witness to a counter-humiliation that not only visits just retribution on the terrorists, but that also allows the pride and self-respect of the American nation to be publicly reasserted and regained.

4. A Global Policy of Counter-Humiliation?

How might this interpretation of the depth and breadth of feelings of humiliation in the aftermath of 9/11 impact how we understand recent global politics – and specifically American policy? I believe that it helps us understand a number of strategic and tactical choices that remain somewhat puzzling without an understanding of the existence and nature of humiliation.

At the most macro level, I believe understanding the strategic dynamic as one of humiliation and counter-humiliation does help illuminate the overall dynamic of US – Middle East relations. It is a truism – but no less valid for that – that many religious and political groups in the Middle East explicitly interpret and understand U.S policy towards Palestine and the Middle East as a humiliation of Islam.[64] In this context, it would seem plausible to believe that a feeling/sense of being humiliated is an important part of the story that explains not only the motivations of the al-Queda attacks – but also why their cause has resonated in various populations across the Middle East (which include groups that are largely secular). For what could be a more symbolically potent repayment of the U.S. presence in the Middle East than a humiliating attack on two of the most significant symbols of U.S. military and commercial power? Though it hardly needs to be said, *understanding* the role of humiliation in this can never be viewed as a *justification* or *legitimation* of the attack.[65] But it does show that a theory of humiliation is required for understanding it.

Understanding the role of humiliation also helps us understand several elements of the US response as well. For example, it helps explain why the attack on the world trade towers was almost

---

[64] This is certainly the opinion of the Shiley Telhami, professor at the University of Maryland and a senior fellow of the Brookings Institute. See his short piece "History and Humiliation" in *Thinking Peace*, accessible at www.thinkingpeace.com/pages/articles/arts109.html accessed 5.25.05.

[65] In fact, a critical understanding of the humiliation/counter-humiliation dynamic suggests that humiliation is almost never solved permanently by counter-humiliations – and this leads a critical perspective on humiliation to critique the strategies and tactics of both sides of a humiliation/counter-humiliation spiral.

immediately cast as a 'war on terror' rather than viewed through the lens of a criminal attack. Given that the perpetrator was not a state and al-Qaeda does not seem to have been significantly state sponsored, in theory there were many responses possible, even for a hawkish administration. Once we understand the experience and dynamic of humiliation, however, the immediate turn to a 'war' on terror is quite understandable. For if 9/11 is interpreted as a gauntlet thrown down, a palpable disrespecting of American identity, then respect must be reasserted by wresting it from a vanquished, counter-humiliated opponent. A legal approach was precluded not merely because of doubts about the efficacy, the legalities, etc. A legal approach would have been insufficient even if a much more efficient international system existed, because of its very nature. Courts provide justice – but they rarely provide effective counter-humiliation. And they never allow the victim to publicly highlight their re-respected status.

Humiliation also helps us to understand why the attack was almost immediately viewed through the lens of a 'clash of civilization' and was translated into the language of good and evil with Bush's accompanying analogies to the crusades. Can we explain the resonance of the language of the clash of civilizations in the larger population and the willingness to use and accept the language of evil simply by the Bush's religious views? Or might we say that part of the reason this language resonated so widely is because it spoke to the emotional depth of the wound of national humiliation, a feeling that was shared well beyond the percentage of the population that identified themselves as deeply and fundamentally religious?

Finally, understanding the role of humiliation also helps us to understand the administration's choice of strategic targets – particularly the decision to quickly and irrationally redeploy U.S. resources away from the search for bin Laden and towards the invasion of Iraq. If the defining objective of US post 9/11 policy had been to completely reduce the security risk and vulnerability of the U.S., one would think that capturing bin Laden and completely destroying the Taliban and Mujahadeen network that had been the source of so much of the al-Qaeda network would have been the central tactical and strategic goal. And yet, the U.S. quickly shifted focus away from Afghanistan towards Iraq – and in doing so, allowed bin Laden and important elements of the al-Qaeda network to escape.

The role of humiliation might help us understand this switch in two ways. First, humiliation can be reversed through counter-humiliation only if the counter-humiliation is clearly and publicly meted out. With bin Laden still at large, a stand in was required – not merely to divert the attention of the public or to satisfy some public need for accountability, but also because the public

humiliation of a symbolic figure was required to allow the rebuilding of American pride. For this purpose, Iraq worked perfectly, since Hussein was a very public figure who had not only humiliated Bush Sr. by outlasting him, but also by consistently thumbing his nose diplomatically and rhetorically in the decade that followed the first Gulf war. Considering the breadth and depth of feelings of humiliation following 9/11, it no longer seems so overly-simplistic and infantile to suggest that at some level, feelings of humiliation and a desire to counter-humiliate might have played a partial role in influencing the selection of Iraq as a target but also in convincing Bush and his administration to stick to their guns in spite of intense international pressure and a lack of significant international support. At the very least, it seems reasonable to suggest that a desire to counter-humiliate might have dissuaded the administration from conducting – or taking seriously – realistic risk calculations that highlighted the serious strategic risks of an invasion of Iraq. It might even be the case that one of the reasons that much of the U.S. public believed that Hussein was linked to al-Qaeda (despite clear indicators to the contrary) was because they intuitively understood the unspoken parallel – that both al-Qaeda and Hussein had tried to humiliate the U.S. and therefore deserved counter-humiliation. While each of these strategic choices is also explained by many other factors aside from humiliation, I suspect that each of them would also be made more comprehensible when we consider the impact of humiliation as well.

An analysis of the impact of humiliation also brings into new light a number of specific military tactics that the US has used in its war on terror as well. Understanding the role of humiliation, for example, highlights that the U.S. 'shock and awe' strategy tactic in Iraq functioned not only to ensure tactical victory, but also to globally and publicly reassert the pure, raw hegemonic power of America (the cartoon-like nature of the moniker 'shock and awe' alone seems to speak to this), thus undoing the humiliation of 9/11. The role of humiliation also helps to explain both why the US administration disallowed the publication of pictures of returning US caskets and angrily denounced Al-Jezeera's images of dead US soldiers even as the same administration triumphantly distributed humiliating pictures of the dead and captured Hussein. For both sets of pictures played similar roles of humiliation, only for different sides. Pictures of caskets and dead American soldiers not only brought the 'cost' of the war home for the US public – it also humiliated the US's image of invulnerability and dominance by revealing the US military as only human. Similarly, distributing pictures of the Husseins – who had demanded to be viewed as Gods – served U.S. purposes by revealing the Husseins as humiliated scourge that had been forced to adopt disguises, hide and dies be captured like rats without ceremony or pomp. Recently, for example, this tactical use of

humiliation was once again used by the Marines when they released video footage of a high ranking al-Queda fugitive and leader (al-Zarqawi) and mocked his inability to use an American machine gun without aid from his subordinates.[66] Moreover, it is not clear that the use of these tactics are simply coincidental. For apparently, a policy paper that advocates the use of shaming techniques has been circulating in the Pentagon for some time.[67]

Understanding the dynamics of humiliation also help us to understand the willingness of the U.S. military to employ brutal tactics of humiliation at Abu Ghraib in 2003 and 2004.[68] For as is now well known, Abu Ghraib was only the most public instance of the tactics of extreme humiliation that the U.S. military have employed throughout the world in their war on terror.[69] Moreover, it is now similarly clear that these tactics resulted not merely from Rumsfeld's aggressive cultural transformation of military intelligence protocols, but were personally and explicitly authorized by senior policy makers including Rumsfeld himself.[70] Yet it also seems that the interrogators and guards did not simply 'follow the book' – they also improvised and employed new and unauthorized techniques of humiliation.

Why these soldiers? Why these techniques of humiliation? That is a story that will take much more investigation to tell. However, my suspicion is that any answer will be incomplete without some understanding of the dynamics of humiliation. For whether these incidents were re-enactments of techniques of humiliation that are often used in domestic prisons; whether they were personal attempts to undo the humiliation of 9/11 by counter-humiliating Iraqi prisoners who 'stood in' for the al-Qaeda operatives who were not to be found; or whether Abu Ghraib was an instinctive micro re-enactment of the larger strategy of Islamic counter-humiliation in the Middle East, it seems hard to believe that widespread patterns of humiliation emerged in this campaign in a far more visible way than in other recent conflicts.

5. Conclusion

---

[66] See "Now Playing in Iraq: Zarqawi Outakes", *Washington Post*, May 5, 2006, P. A14
[67] C.J. Chivers, "Not All See Video Mockery of Zarqawi as Good Strategy", *New York Times*, May 6, 2006. Waller's own views on this can be found in the paper itself that is published on his website: J.M. Waller, "Ridicule: An instrument in the war on terrorism", Public Diplomacy White Paper No. 7; accessed May 25, 2006 at http://www.iwp.edu/news/newsID.258/news_detail.asp
[68] See the sources listed in footnote 35.
[69] See, for example, Human Rights Watch's press release, "US Religious Humiliation" as well as Amnesty International's "2005 Annual Report" (focused more on international issues) and "Threat and Humiliation" (focused more on domestic practices).
[70] See the sources listed in footnote 33.

This essay began with a number of aims: to show that the role of emotions are crucial, if under-examined, factors in global politics and that they can be examined in a reasonable way by the discipline of International Relations; to demonstrate this by developing a theoretical account of dynamics of humiliation and the role that it can play in global politics; and to use this account to offer a richer analysis of post 9/11 global politics – especially with reference to U.S. policy. In relation to the first objective, this essay has shown that IRT has historically relied on an implicit and under-theorized account of emotions. In contrast, this paper argued that it is both methodologically possible and theoretically valuable to develop a more explicit and robust understanding of their role. In relation to the second objective, this article developed a framework for understanding how humiliation functions and outlined seven key characteristics of humiliation that we can use to identify when humiliation has likely occurred and to interpret its influence on subsequent actions and events. And in relation to the third, this essay has shown both that it is highly plausible to suggest that dynamics and emotions of humiliation were profoundly experienced by a variety of participants shaping U.S. foreign policy and that subsequent U.S. actions seem to have been influenced by these emotions since they have often reproduced certain classic humiliation reaction patterns.

The results of this investigation do, however, leave us with a variety of other questions and tasks as well. At the very least, for example, they suggest that existing versions of IRT need to more clearly and fully outline the role they accord to emotions in global politics. In addition to this theoretical task, this essay also highlights the value of pursuing further empirical work on humiliation itself. There are clearly many avenues for this kind of investigation that emerge from the theoretical perspective outlined in this paper – ranging from interviewing relevant participants (from soldiers upwards to policy makers) about their emotional states and reactions; to the systematic and detailed textual analysis of relevant actors' speeches, briefing notes, and memoirs; to detailed interpretations of popular cultural phenomenon in the aftermath of 9/11.

Perhaps the most important questions raised, however, are policy oriented ones. How might leaders better understand the impact of strong and negative emotions such as humiliation on them and in their constituencies? And how might they attempt to address and mitigate the dangerous impacts these emotions can have? These are questions that need significantly more examination.[71] At minimum, however, it is clear that the solution cannot be to simply ignore the role of emotions or to pretend that we are rational actors whose decisions and actions are only exceptionally influenced

---

[71] For one researcher who is attempting to develop positive solutions in a highly practical and affirmative tone, see the work of Evelin Lindner, founder of *Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies* at http://www.humiliationstudies.org/.

by emotional dynamics. For not only does that perspective underplay the findings of most up to date neuroscience and psychology. It also blithely ignores the fact that it is often the 'exceptional' circumstances such as 9/11 that define the shape of the 'normal' for years to come.[72]

---

[72] On the idea of the norm and the exception, see Georgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) and *State of Exception*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) who develops the notion through an engagement with Carl Schmitt. For several applications to IR, see Jenny Edkins, "Sovereign Power, Zones of Indistinction and the Camp", *Alternatives*, v. 25, 2000, n. 1, p. 3-26; John Measor and Benjamin Muller, "Securitizing the Global Norm of Identity", paper presented at *Global Norms Under Siege*, 20 May 2005, Queen's University Belfast (available at http://www.qub.ac.uk/polproj/reneg/global_norms-papers/Measor&Muller_HomoSacer.pdf); Sergei Prozorov "X/Xs: Toward a General Theory of the Exception", *Alternatives*, v. 30, n.1, 2005, p. 81-112; RBJ Walker "War, Terror, Judgement" in Bulent Gokay and RBJ Walker eds, *September 11, 2001: War, Terror and Judgement*, (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 62-83 and "International, Imperial, Exceptional", paper presented at the International Studies Association conference, Hawaii, March 2005.