

# I

## A Global Imperative

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### The Unveiling of Empathy

In her powerful autobiography, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story*, Ghada Karmi (2002) tells a moving story about her confrontation with difference. Karmi describes what caused her family to leave Jerusalem when she was a child; the family's experience in their new home, the Golders Green area of London, England, where they were exiled; and their attempts to fit into English society. Karmi's mother never quite assimilated into the new culture because the mother's spirit remained in Palestine—rooted to the very spot where she had grown up. Anguished by exile and leaving and contained by a failure to grasp “what it would be like to live by someone else's light,” to use Isaiah Berlin's (1991, p. 11) phrase, the mother tried to replicate Palestinian social customs in a London household.

In explaining aspects of her culture, Karmi (2002) writes that Palestinians “had no tradition of going somewhere in order to see what it was like, or simply to get away from our routine, everyday setting” (p. 263). Karmi also reveals that “our mother had little interest in places which had no relation to what was familiar to her, like many Arabs, her concept of enjoyment was being with other people, not gazing at historical monuments which she scornfully referred to as ‘piles of stones’” (p. 263).

When Karmi's mother had a chance to visit Spain, her view of the world shifted dramatically, however. Karmi (2002) writes,

The only exception to this position she ever encountered in her life was when once, long after we were grown up, our father took her to southern Spain. There, agog at the splendid Islamic buildings of Cordova and Granada, where she could see the grand legacy of Spain's Arab past, she felt the thrill that piles of stones would impart. "What colour, what lightness!" she enthused. How marvelous the Arabs were. (p. 263)

Karmi's mother's narrative reveals a great deal about empathy and why and how stories give humans good reasons for ordering their lives "this way" and not "that way." And when humans order their lives "this way" and not "that way," whatever THE way is, the very act of ordering can foster a mine/thine split that erodes empathy and creates conflict and anguish in the world. The cold war period, which ended in 1989, was emblematic of a "mine/thine" bifurcated global split. The 21st century, however, ushered in the age of warm globalization that was supposed to unite humans into one grand and harmonious global community following the breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991.

Promises—both explicit and implicit—that swords would be beaten into biblical ploughshares and that humans would study conflict and no longer engage in war abounded. But there were also strong indications that the road to a new world order would have tracks of America all over it. Ironically, Fukuyama (1995) optimistically declared "the end of history" and the "legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government" (p. xi). Today, the "flat world" that Thomas L. Friedman (2005) argues is unfolding before our eyes is also one of anguish, distress, turmoil, and inequality. Throughout the world, in many spaces and places, from Bangkok to Beirut, from Chile to China and from Detroit to Dubai, we find that humans' confrontation with difference too often results in violence and conflict.

## **A World in Conflict**

On September 11, 2001, nineteen members of Al-Qaeda destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City, killing 3,000 people. The aftermath of 9/11, Chalmers Johnson (2004) writes in *The Sorrows of Empire*, "more or less spelled the end of globalization" (p. 257).

In 2004, filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the great-great-grand-nephew of artist Vincent van Gogh, was killed in the streets of Amsterdam in broad daylight, because his film, *Submission*, supposedly contained anti-Islamic images and views and because the film posed a threat to assassin Mohammed Bouyeri, a second-generation Dutchman from Morocco.

In one tiny town in northern Italy, Sabrina Varroni, a Muslim woman, was fined 80 euros (about \$100 in 2004) for appearing twice in public wearing a veil that completely covered her face. Her punishment was greeted by cheers from some and scorn by others (Fisher, 2004, p. A3).

On October 27, 2005, in towns and cities, French-Arab and French-African youths rioted, burning cars, businesses, and public buildings (Carreyrou, 2005; Smith, 2004). And in 2006, Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad that created outrage in Muslim countries (Fattah, 2006; Rose, 2006).

Following publication of the cartoons, Muslims in the Middle East demonstrated in Beriut, Damascus, Tehran, and other places, and much robust discussion ensued over issues of first amendment rights, democracy, freedom of religion, and reciprocal obligations to others.

In 2008, war between Palestinians and Israelis raged on, and insurgents in Iraq continued their battle against American occupation of Iraq. Are these acts isolated and aberrant? What happened to the new world order with its promises of positive social, technological, and cultural changes? And whose and what narratives are unfolding at this moment of great cultural confrontation worldwide? Has the profound transformation of cultures from industrial to information societies and from totalitarianism to other “isms” also transformed the spirit of people and compelled them to be more empathetic toward one another—both near and far?

At a time of crucial cultural, economic, and social change, it is imperative to understand how the practice of empathy influences human affairs. This book argues that studying the nature and zones of empathy is a good way of understanding our complex and various world. I will show that much is at stake culturally, economically, and geopolitically when we fail to refashion the world along the lines of empathy. In the 21st century, when the world is being threatened by the possibility of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups gaining access to nuclear weapons, now, more than ever, it behooves us to examine empathy—a significant tool for humanity.

Along the way, I explain under what conditions empathy has succeeded and under what conditions it has failed across a range of topics and situations, including hot contestations over global immigration, the undermining of empathy during the Iraq war, and the role of media in galvanizing empathy toward others. This book is not about solutions to every topic discussed, and by necessity, some issues are not covered. But as we shall see, it is about the interplay among urgent human variables that argue for an empathic imperative. Both explicitly and implicitly, I argue that a major way for human beings to live well and address the myriad of problems that confront us is to

replace ugly, messy, and mean conflict with empathetic fluency and understanding. And this leads to the second argument of the book: Empathetic literacy can be crucial in addressing intercultural issues. Otherwise, we run the risk of descending into a world of chaos. Should we risk a day of no return?

We owe it to succeeding generations to understand the role of empathy in human relations—both the local and the global—in the 21st century, break it down into manageable units, and propose solutions. Examining the role of empathy is more significant now than ever before because of the compression of time and space and because in this new age, humans are increasingly drawn together spatially and structurally via film, politics, Internet, worldwide television, iPods, iTunes, blogs, chat rooms, dating Web sites, and other forms of media and technology.

### **Hume's Concentric Circles**

Jagdish Bhagwati (2004), in his book, *In Defense of Globalization*, declares that “thanks to television, we have . . . the paradox of the philosopher David Hume’s concentric circles of reducing loyalty and empathy” (p. 18). The concept of concentric circles of empathy is that human beings love and are loyal to their families first, and then their loyalty diminishes as they move from the center to the periphery. “Each of us,” in Bhagwati’s view, “feels diminishing empathy as we go from our nuclear family to the extended family, to our local community, to our state or county (say, Lancashire or Louisiana), to our nation, to our geographical region (say, Europe or the Americas), and then to the world” (p. 18). Thinkers as far back as the Stoics have posited a doctrine of the relationship between the near and the distant. Stoics called this mode of thinking and behaving *oikeiosis*, that is, the notion that we prefer those closest to ourselves than those farthest away.

Bhagwati (2004) also claims further that “what the Internet and CNN have done is to take Hume’s outermost circle and turn it into the inner most. No longer can we snore while the other half of humanity suffers plague and pestilence and the continuing misery of extreme poverty. Television has disturbed our sleep perhaps short of a fitful fever but certainly arousing our finest instincts” (p. 19). But has it? Have human beings finally turned Hume’s and Stoics’ outermost concentric circles into the innermost? If yes, then this certainly would be a beautiful triumph for humankind and should be met with jubilee by all. And, if yes, have we finally begun to bind our goodwill to the goodwill of others far beyond kith and kin and brought to the foreground sweeter possibilities for diminishing conflict and preventing further

human carnage in such places as Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, the Middle East, Congo, Bosnia, and East Timor?

Bhagwati (2004) maintains that despite our feelings of anguish for the downtrodden, our intellectual training is impoverished and in need of fixing. And he devotes 265 careful pages to an explication of the benefits of globalization (not empathy) that detractors of globalization have somehow overlooked. But this is where our purposes diverge—at the water's edge.

## **Outline of the Book**

This book is a story of the salience and substance of empathy and how it is being played out in the 21st century. Of course, the connection between empathy, understanding, and behavior is not new or original but has ancient origins, as I will detail in Chapter 2. Nor is the idea of studying the concept, nature, and uses of empathy new—since scholars have covered such dimensions as the aesthetic, the moral, the therapeutic, and the medical previously. Classic works such as E. B. Titchener's (1909) *A Textbook of Psychology*, E. Stein's (1964) *On the Problems of Empathy*, Tom Kitwood's (1990) *Concern for Others*, Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer's (1990) *Empathy and Its Development*, and Arne Johan Vetlesen's (1994) *Perception, Empathy, and Judgment*, and all have contributed to our understanding of the concept of empathy and the commanding role that it plays in human interaction.

Although such compendiums offer keen glimpses into and understandings of the DNA and functions of empathy, I wish to examine empathy for an entirely different purpose. I have selected empathy as an object of analysis because I wanted to know the extent to which human beings are indeed practicing empathy at this critical juncture in history—the juncture of globalization.

This book offers some answers through an analysis of global empathy today, economics, history, and culture. In this chapter, I set the stage on which empathy lives today, define empathy, outline key components of empathy, and raise the question of why empathy matters. The opening chapter follows with an examination of some ancient and modern promoters of empathy, from Buddha to the Stoics to John Stuart Mill. It looks at the beginning of human beings' attempts to move outside village life and embrace the world of the other.

The historical, precursory journey provides a better understanding of when intercultural empathy entered human consciousness. The chapter also helps us grasp the concept of empathy as a discipline of diversity that informs our world today. Chapter 3 examines the hotly contested war in Iraq and the war on terror. The chapter demonstrates how the linguistic and

ideological DNA of President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretaries Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld, and other leaders framed and, to a great extent, overshadowed the human capacity to empathize with the very people whom they had chosen to liberate—the Iraqis. Readers see how politicians' use of powerful metaphors, groupthink, and the language of virtue and vice intersect with the ideology of democracy to retard the moral resources of humanity.

Drawing on Islamic-Arab-Africa immigration tensions in Europe and the waves of immigrants from Mexico to the United States, Chapter 4 examines challenges to the core values of Western culture and raises such questions as the following: How does immigration shape our national and international conversation about empathy? Has a confrontation with difference at the level of changing demographics helped to deplete our commitment to fair play and harmony? Altered both the salience and substance of empathy?

Looking at the world from the perspective of visual images, Chapter 5 explains circulations, diffusions, and patterns that both promote and retard universal empathy. Storytelling and techniques of television, newspapers, and broadcasting are used to illustrate how the choices we make about others influence how we see them—both instrumentally and symbolically. Chapter 6 explicates the extent to which acts of kindness strengthen human responses and, by extension, cultivate the moral imagination. The recent series of natural catastrophes, whether tsunamis, earthquakes, or hurricanes, provide a striking laboratory for an examination of the concrete humanizing imprints of empathy. The chapter also examines the interplay between charity and justice—raising the question of whether charity is a substitute for justice. That is, whether powerful human beings are really working to change structures so that charity becomes unnecessary or whether they are working for their own spiritual health.

Chapter 7 wrestles with economic disparities of world income and how they implicate the role of empathy in human relations. Although poverty is very challenging and has many tentacles, the chapter nevertheless grapples with the standard issue of who gets what in a borderless global economy and the nonempathetic cost to millions of impoverished citizens. The chapter also raises the following question: To what extent do discourses and practices of a rich global (superclass) trouble the workings of empathy?

The closing chapter of the book focuses on the grammar of empathy and examines factors influencing intercultural competence with an eye toward practical approaches to inferring the feelings and thoughts of others. It also identifies and discusses some of the options and issues we have in handling the challenges of an increasingly global society—one that relies very heavily on shared empathy.

I cannot think of a more significant variable that warrants human understanding than empathy in the 21st century because it is the bedrock of global intercultural relations.

## **Significance of Empathy**

Of all the sentiments that have the potential to alter what we do interculturally, none are more important than empathy or sympathy. Although both sympathy and empathy are crucial in human understanding, above all, empathy is the crucible of intercultural relations. Empathy helps us to understand people whose values, views, and behavior are different from our own. Feeling sorrow for individuals who lose their homes in a hurricane, grieving for children affected by cholera in India, feeling joy over a high school drama team winning a national contest, and cheering when the villain in a motion picture is wounded are among the ways that we express empathy. A feeling of pleasure or distress, then, is not limited to those closest to us. It extends to strangers, animals, and fictional characters in our favorite novel.

Empathy is the moral glue that holds civil society together; unless humans have robust habits of mind and reciprocal behavior that lead to empathy, society as we know it will crumble. Humans are united by the powers and possibilities of empathy. In his book, *Concern for Others*, Tom Kitwood (1990; qtd. in Vetlesen, 1994, p. 9) gives one of the clearest and most concise reasons why empathy matters: “our countless small and unreflective actions towards each other, and the patterns of living and relating which each human being gradually creates. It is here that we are systematically respected or discounted, accepted or rejected, enhanced or diminished in our personal being” (p. 149).

Novelist Alexander McCall Smith’s (2004) curious and persistent sleuth, Isabel Dalhousie, provides additional good reasons for why empathy matters in human relations. Losing emotional control after a series of attempts to get her daughter, Cat, to see that her boyfriend, Toby, was really up to no good, Dalhousie finally tells her daughter that her boyfriend, Toby, was being unfaithful to her. Upon realizing what her loose and wayward tongue had done, Dalhousie “stopped horrified by what she had said. She had not meant to say it—she knew it was wrong—and yet it had come out, as if spoken by somebody else. Immediately she felt miserable, thinking: *So are wrongs committed just like that, without thinking.* The doing of wrong was not a hard thing, preceded by careful thought: it was a casual thing, done so easily. That was Hannah Arendt’s insight, was it not? The pure banality of evil. Only good is heroic” (p. 172). What is the nature of the heroic and not so heroic as regards empathy in the 21st century? And what is the meaning of this complex term, *empathy*?

## **The Meaning of Empathy**

Empathy is a difficult concept to grasp. That is the great historical and philosophical fact that we must face at the outset. The term we call *empathy* was first coined in the mid-19th century by Robert Vischer (1994), who aligned it with the psychological theory of art. Vischer and others attributed it not to its present usage of feeling for and with others but, more aesthetically, to art. Their observations revealed that a strong empathy must obtain between performer and listener/reader in order for the latter to understand, “feel,” or “experience” the aesthetic object, whether a poem, a play, a jazz composition, or a novel. This was a way of experiencing human feelings through the act of transference, that is, by transferring aesthetic feelings to oneself in an involuntary way.

In the all-important realm of philosophy in 19th-century Germany, Kant and Hegel saw *Einfühlung* (empathy) as a vehicle for the “expression of feelings and emotions” (*Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 2003, p. 2). By the mid-1900s, empathy was no longer thought of as merely a feeling for an aesthetic object but rather had evolved into the rubric of *empathy*, a term coined by American psychologist Tichener (1909) as a translation of the German *Einfühlung*.

Part of the difficulty in defining empathy lies in the complex nature of the concept. Another difficulty is that there is “no complete agreement on the purpose of empathy . . . in the literature,” as Ridley and Lingle (1996, p. 23) observe. In one sense, empathy means other-regarding and the “generation of concern for the well-being of recipients” (p. 23). In another sense, empathy is not necessarily other-regarding and may serve unkind as well as kind purposes, as Phillipe Fontaine (2001) observes. He argues, for instance, that the “world’s greatest scoundrels have been exquisitely and unerringly attuned to grasping the significance of the unconscious or unspoken affective communications of others” and that they “have used that knowledge to achieve base aims” (p. 2). The term *empathy*, as it will be employed here, is the ability “imaginatively” to enter into and participate in the world of the cultural Other cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally.

Having posited this working definition, I also recognize the capaciousness of the term because, as John Holzwarth (2004) points out, “If we can enter imaginatively into the mind of one who suffers, why can we not do the same with one who causes suffering?” (p. 2). Holzwarth’s notion is significant for what it reveals about the very nature and uses of empathy: “When we discover in ourselves the emotional capacity to engage the experiences of another, we realize that this capacity can apply almost anywhere” (p. 2).



Despite the fact that the concept does not “appear” to have “natural limits,” my purpose is to understand some of the core purposes and practices of intercultural empathy today, ever mindful of both the benefits and burdens of the concept and their implications for human affairs. My goal is to understand the nature and zones of empathy and under what conditions empathetic practices succeed and under what conditions they fail. Furthermore, my purpose is to understand how empathy can be cultivated in order for humans to reach their full potential. If “we are close to the edge in life, always, at every moment,” as Smith (2004) reminds us in his novel, *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, then we should open the door to “a world of broader possibilities” (pp. 12, 27). Concern for another’s welfare, other-regarding behavior, attentiveness, gaining access to other’s experiences, the communication of feeling, empathic skill, and “heightened psychic kinship” all just might incline us more toward a production of empathy.

The many practical uses of empathy have never been analyzed properly, probably because of its complex history. It is a vast subject, and an introduction of this nature can only outline those benefits and costs. But several aspects of empathy cannot easily be overlooked in human relations. These are other-regarding behavior, imaginative participation, understanding, and affect sharing. One of the aims of this book is to illustrate the role, processes, and practices involved in generating empathy, both other and non-other-regarding forms, if need be.

## **Imagining the Feelings of Others**

Let us focus for a moment on what is meant by “imagining the feelings of others.” The phrase means that we understand the behavior of others better when we are able to enter their world and “see it” through their eyes. If we accept the proposition that people’s behavior and words can be interpreted as intelligible responses to the natural conditions in which they find themselves and seek to understand, we are better equipped to deal with diversity. Of course, attempting to “see through the eyes of others” does not mean that we can duplicate others’ actual feelings but rather that we can suspend judgment and seek to enter their minds and feelings through “imaginative participation,” which I will develop more fully later.

One argument of this book is that virtuous empathy is a necessary condition for highly desirable human outcomes. Underlying my argument about “desirable human outcomes” is an assumption that Kant (1991) advances in his book, *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Rather than arguing whose “ought”

is worthier than someone else's "ought," I agree with Kant that in the moral realm of things, respect for dignity is owed all humans regardless of their standing in the community.

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant (1991) wrote,

Humanity itself is a dignity; for a man cannot be used merely as a means by any man . . . but must always be used at the same time as an end. It is just in this that his dignity (personality) consists . . . so neither can he act contrary to the equally necessary self-esteem of others . . . he is under obligation to acknowledge, in a practical way, the dignity of humanity in every other man. (p. 255)

Robbing human beings of their dignity is dramatically revealed in the Amritsar massacre that occurred in India in 1919, when troops under British General Dyer ordered his soldiers to fire into a "peaceful Indian protest" (Glover, 2000, p. 23). Dyer's men killed between 500 and 1,000 individuals and wounded a similar number.

After the dust had settled and people observed the carnage, powerful questions emerged: "How could this have happened?" "How could General Dyer have ordered this atrocity?" Glover (2000) provides powerful insight into why the atrocity occurred: Indians' "protective dignity had . . . already been violated" (p. 24). Everyday, in countless ways, Indians had to salute and "salaam" when they met British authorities; they had to dismount when a British officer approached and even "lie down, rub their noses in the dust and grovel" (Glover, 2000, p. 23). Glover's point is that British authorities had routinized, made common, and added huge doses of ordinary acts to their repertoire of vile behavior. Therefore, when the moment of massacre happened, the British soldiers were merely carrying out "business-as-usual" modes of thinking and acting. Because the soldiers' everyday behavior had become ordinary, mercy in the form of thinking and feeling simply did not enter into their worldview. Weren't these acts supposed to occur? What dignity was owed Indians?

The notion of the "dignity of humanity in every other man" or woman, then, plays a key role in establishing notions of what I mean by "desirable human outcomes." And I also mean by the term what Glover (2000) had in mind when he wrote, "Our inclination to show . . . respect, and our disgust at someone's humiliation, is a powerful restraint on barbarism" (p. 22). The idea of desirable human outcomes is one of the most important arguments in virtuous empathy's favor because empathetic humans "care about the miseries and happiness of others, and perhaps (feel) a degree of identification with them" (Glover, 2000, p. 22). Showing respect for someone's dignity symbolizes that person's "moral standing" in the community.

“Dignity of humanity in every other person” both curtails barbarism and leaves us free to act against what E. O. Wilson (1998) calls “unfettered selfishness.” Globalization and the compression of time and space have made us ever more mindful of cultural empathy.

## **The Concept of Cultural Empathy**

Empathy as an explanatory concept for understanding why people behave as they do with certain consequences can be pursued only so far. However, like Italian philosopher Giambista Vico and German poet and critic Johann Gottfried Herder, I believe that although cultures differ in historical content, customs, traditions, attitudes, beliefs, and practices, humans are endowed with faculties that make them capable of understanding others across time and space. The notion of “imaginative placement” or “feeling one’s way into” another constitutes the essence of what I mean by empathy.

In 16th-century Germany, Herder called attention to the human potential of “imaginative insight,” but it was Vico who helped us understand the importance of empathy in human affairs and as a basis for understanding the cognitions, feelings, and behaviors of others—in a word, a panoply of content that undergirds cultural empathy. Vico had in mind an imaginative process that allows one “aspirationally, to leave one’s own world and enter into the world of the other” (Holzwarth, 2004, p. 10). In Vico’s (1968) “new science,” he had in mind humans’ ability to understand visions and values of others across time and space, that is, of humans who lived long ago. He envisioned that succeeding generations would be able to understand the folkways and customs of prior cultures even if the latter were different from the former. As one of Vico’s chief interpreters, Berlin (1991) notes that Vico’s “deepest belief was that what men have made, other men can understand” (p. 60).

Furthermore, according to Vico,

If anything is meant by the term human, there must be enough that is common to all such beings for it to be possible, by a sufficient effort of imagination, to grasp what the world must have looked like to creatures, remote in time of space, who practiced such rites and used such words, and created such works of art as the natural means of self-expression involved in the attempt to understand and interpret their worlds to themselves. (Berlin, 1991, p. 60)

Fundamental to Vico’s implied notion of empathy (implied because Vico does not use the term *empathy*) is the concept of “a sufficient effort of

imagination,” which I am appropriating because the term has explanatory power. The imaginative process or “*fantasia*” extends beyond self-knowledge, although it is a beginning point to using such empirical evidence as religion, economic factors, language, art, mythology, philosophy, gestures, looks, aspirations, and the like to understand humans both near and far.

In his remarkable book, *Bury the Chains*, Hochschild (2005) identifies empathy as the key reason why White abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson, John Newton, William Wilberforce, and others succeeded in ending slavery in the British empire. Said Hochschild, the abolitionists “mastered one challenge that still faces anyone who cares about social and economic justice, drawing connections between the near and the distant” (pp. 5–6). At the time, this was a new, enterprising force in history! Because the abolitionists were able to make “Britons understand what lay behind the sugar they ate, the tobacco they smoked, [and] the coffee they drank, they changed the world in dynamic and elegant ways” (p. 6).

Part of empathy’s work, then, is to knit together human and cultural elements of both the near and the distant, so that we will care about other people even if they are an ocean away. This book is about such caring. And the materials out of which the complex concept of empathy is crafted are discussed next.

Some of my arguments about the nature of empathy can be found in the writings of Herder, who is more direct in his employment of the term *empathy*. Herder seems to have in mind an understanding of difference. The key to understanding other humans, he posits, is a kind of “imaginative inquiry.” In his work, Herder actually uses the word *Einfühlen*, which translates from German to mean “empathy.” Herder argues,

The whole living painting of mode of life, habits, needs, peculiarities of land and climate, would have to *be added* or to have *preceded*: one would have first to *empathize* with the nation, in order to feel a single one of its *inclinations* or *actions all together* . . . to *imagine* everything in its fullness . . . go into the age, into the clime, the whole history, feel yourself into everything—only now are on the way towards understanding. (Holzwarth, 2004, p. 13)

## **The Meaning of Cultural Empathy**

In his work, Herder proposes an interesting theory about the meaning of cultural empathy, and it is worth noting several things about his writings on empathy. First, certain historical and cultural factors—evidence—provide the content out of which empathy is constructed. In a word, the totality of human beings, including their life ways, customs, and habits of mind, all fall

within the purview of empathy and can be used to further human understanding. By yoking together both physical and social factors, Herder provides a unified agenda. This means that a Beethoven symphony as well as the myths and stories of African griots can be used to construct empathy.

Second, “imaginative placement” is critical. One must be able to “see” through the eyes of others, creating both a subject and an object-oriented focus that can shift, depending on whether the lens of cultural empathy is reflecting one as subject or object. Vital to both Herder’s and Vico’s idea of imaginative placement is the reciprocal relationship between two interacting individuals, even if one is not physically present. This process, in a practical and tender way, also goes to the heart of both empathy and identification. Gilroy (2000), one of the most important writers on the concept of identity, says that “identity is a critical reflection upon who we are and what we want” (p. 99). This reflection upon who and what we are, according to Herder, provides us with a perspective necessary for understanding why people think and behave as they do.

Finally, the notion of feeling is insinuated in the concept of empathy. “To feel yourself into everything” implies emotional participation in another person’s experience. The connection between empathy and feeling is seen as a “bridge to civility,” to use Sheldon H. Berman’s (1998) term. Ronald Milo maintains that “a lack of concern (or adequate concern) for the interests or welfare of others . . . constitute(s) the essence of immorality” (qtd. in Vetlesen, 1994, pp. 222, 223). He argues that “the truly wicked person is *deliberately* uninterested in avoiding moral wrongdoing, he believes that what he does is wrong, he does it nonetheless, indeed does it willingly” (p. 222). My purpose here is not to debate the pros and cons of morality and immorality; rather, my mission is to drive home the point that feeling is an important component of empathy. Some scholars also argue that empathy can be divided into stages. And I focus on this aspect next to demonstrate the vitality of the concept for understanding global human affairs.

## **Stages of Empathy**

Drawing on Husserlian intersubjectivity, Depraz (2001, p. 172) argues that “lived empathy” has “four different and complementary stages”:

1. A passive association of my lived body with your lived body
2. An imaginative self-transposal in your psychic states
3. An interpretative understanding of yourself as being an alien to me
4. An ethical responsibility toward yourself as a person (enjoying and suffering)

The first type of empathy is passive and serves to recognize the Other as a moving, breathing, and living human being. This means that when we first encounter Nicholas Walker, a young Wall Street protégé and friend of Little Mark Johnson Jr., we do not perceive his body as merely an object or physical thing but rather as a lived body like our own. Depraz notes that “empathy is grounded in a much more passive and primal experience lying in both our lived bodies” (p. 172). Although this stage is primal, it is significant in promoting human consciousness because it allows us to identify the Other as belonging to the human species.

Even though this stage is passive, there is a clear connection between one sentient being and another. Thompson (2001) believes that this sort of empathy is manifest in an “immediate pairing or coupling of the bodies of self and other in action” (p. 17). By coupling, Depraz (2001) means “an associative process through which my lived-body and your lived-body experience a similar functioning of our tactile, auditory, visual, proprioceptive body-style of our embodied behavior in the world and of our affective and active kinaesthetic habits and acts” (pp. 172–173).

Thus, one body experiences similar feelings, seeing, hearing, touching, and body movements as another lived body. As a result, we see the other as an embodied subject of human experience. This embodied experience extends to “fields of sensations,” to use Thompson’s (2001) term, that help human beings identify and observe such matters in others as Idell’s passing away; Aunt Velma’s gusto; Uncle Ray’s health and sickness; Tamarek’s liveliness and beauty; Melvin’s charitable spirit; Alvin’s steadfastness; Loyce’s irreverent humor; Porter’s sacrifice; Michael’s soul; Catherine, Gin, and Boo’s devotion; and Dr. Jack’s robustness and energy. Stein refers to these fields of sensations as “sensual empathy” or “sensing-in” (Thompson, 2001, p. 17). It is important to observe that empathy can remain at the first level—the emergence of experience, “where it remains tacit and prereflective, a matter of passive association.” However, for empathy to do its best work and create a more humane world, with less conflict, cruelty, and misery, more is required.

The second level of empathy, according to Depraz (2001), occurs when one moves from perceiving “global resemblance of our body-style” to being able spontaneously to transpose oneself into the self of the other. This stage clearly relates to Vico’s and Berlin’s notion of “imaginative placement” or “learning what it is like to live by someone else’s light.” In this regard, one feels empathy when one is able to call up mental states that are similar to the mental states of the other. Depraz’s claim that one must be able to “recall similar experiences” is at odds with my idea of imaginative placement, because I argue that true empathy relies heavily on being able to understand mental states that the other might not have experienced firsthand.

For example, little Adonis and big Keon might be able to think “as if” they understand how rich people behave even though they are not rich. What is critical for my purposes, however, is the notion that humans have the capacity to “transpose” others’ feelings into their own. In Smith’s (2004) novel, *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, the main character, Isabel Dalhousie, is full of empathy and human understanding. When Isabel witnesses the death of a young man who fell from the upper section of a concert hall in Edinburgh, Scotland, she said, upon seeing the young man on a stretcher,

To be so beautiful . . . and now the end. She closed her eyes. She felt raw inside, empty. This poor young man, loved by somebody somewhere, whose world would end this evening . . . when the cruel news was broached. All that love invested in a future that would not materialize ended in a second, in a fall from the gods. (p. 9)

In this example, Isabel collapses the first two stages of Depraz’s conception of empathy. First, she clearly involuntarily (passively) noticed (visual) the young man’s body and felt human sensations (“raw inside, empty”), before moving to the second stage of imaginatively entering the world of the young man’s family. This is empathy in a pure form. Isabel’s “intersubjectivity of consciousness” demanded that she move to the second stage, to a concrete articulation of empathy, making her intimately aware of what should be the viewpoint of the young man’s family upon discovering his body.

Isabel’s humaneness also contains other ingredients of Stage 2 empathy, and it is the fact that she moves from her own “first-person point of view” (Thompson, 2001, p. 19) toward empathic openness, to a “second-person point of view.” In Thompson’s (2001) words, “It is through empathy as the experience of oneself as an other for the alter-ego that one gains a viewpoint of one’s own embodied being beyond the first-person singular perspective” (p. 19). Following Husserl, Depraz (2001) sums up the work of Stage 2 empathy insightfully: “I am here and I imagine I am going there to the place where you are just now; conversely, you are here (the *there* where I am going to) and you imagine you are going there, to the place where I am (*my here*)” (p. 173). The message is that at Stage 2, we are exchanging psychic states with the Other—whether person to person or removed in geographic space.

The third step involves understanding and communication. At this stage, one expresses (verbal or not) and interprets others’ views, which lead to understanding (and also misunderstanding). This stage involves a human’s ability to explain, predict, and describe the sentiments of others.

In the example of Isabel, one sees clearly the impact of interpretation on human empathy. She moved beyond her consciousness and interpreted what

the family would surely think and feel upon seeing the dead man's body. Isabel saw him as a being loved by someone and that the world of the family would literally fold in upon hearing of the young man's death. Embedded within Isabel's modes of interpretation is a moral disposition of respect and kindness. We also take from Isabel's interpretation the notion that she also cares about the kind of person she is; otherwise, why the morally resonant human understanding toward people whom she did not know?

The final stage of empathy that Depraz (2001) offers is ethical responsibility. And although she does not offer a full-blown elaboration of what is meant by ethics in all of its permutations, Depraz does suggest that ethics involves "affection and considering the other as having emotions: suffering, enjoying" (p. 173). In this respect, Depraz's fourth stage is in line with other accounts of empathy that privilege emotions. Harry Stack Sullivan (1945), Carl Rogers (1951, 1975), and Heinz Kohut (1997) all argue that empathy is a complex of emotions and feelings. It should be noted that these men were especially interested in ways that empathy could serve the relationship between therapist and client—hence their belief that the successful therapist is one who involves himself or herself in the emotional world of the patient by developing a special kind of empathy.

Although one can imaginatively enter the world of another and might not consciously pause (while doing so) and say, "I am in Stage 1 or 2 empathy," a central key to feeling empathy is an attitude of attentiveness.

### **An Attitude of Attentiveness**

In *Bury the Chains*, Hochschild (2005) tells a gripping story of how and why slavery commanded Thomas Clarkson's attention, and the narrative has a major bearing on this book. According to Hochschild, in 1784, Clarkson competed for an essay prize at Cambridge University and chose the papers of a slave merchant for his research investigation. While sorting through the papers, young Clarkson "found himself overwhelmed with horror." He said, "In the day-time I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief . . . I always slept with a candle in my room, that I might rise out of bed and put down such thoughts as might occur to me in the night . . . conceiving that no arguments of any moment should be lost in so great a cause" (p. 88).

Clarkson's essay won first prize, but his life would never be the same again because the evils of slavery had gained his attention. More to the point, he had experienced one of the critical parts of empathy, a feature that commonsensically precedes all else—an ability to tune in to people, problems, and



situations that demand empathy and grasp essential components, using a question such as, “What’s wrong here?”

After marshaling his evidence and after winning the essay prize, Clarkson later reflected on the subject of slavery and its evil. His feelings grew in intensity to the point where in June 1785, he literally sat down by the side of a road as he journeyed home after having received the prize: “Coming in sight of Wades Mill in Hertfordshire, I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end” (Hochschild, 2005, p. 89). This single moment transformed Clarkson’s thought and feelings. And as Hochschild (2005) points out, the poignant moment of awakening held echoes of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. Like Saul’s radical conversion to Paul, Clarkson’s attentiveness energized his soul, and he began to “see” the world from the perspective of the slave.

Now, several features of empathic attentiveness are relevant here. First, as Tony Alessandra (<http://www.Alessandra.com>) observes, “Attentiveness means that [one] is open to outside stimuli, your perception or, if the stimuli, are subtler, entering your intuition” (p. 1). Because we select, organize, and interpret the stimuli we receive through our senses into a meaningful picture of the world around us, the perception process is the basis of our communication with others.

This is also what Depraz (2001) means by “imaginative self-transposal.” However, as Singer (1987) indicates, “We experience everything in the world not as it is—but only as the world comes to us through our sensory receptors” (p. 9). In other words, we each construct our own reality. Thus, Liesl’s reality may not be the same as Makenzie’s.

In terms of empathy and perception, the key is that humans who feel for others are able to interpret reality or incoming data from the perspective of the other. In the case of Clarkson, upon first reading and processing the data of slavery, his psychological state, values, culture, and many other factors arranged themselves such that he immediately recognized that something was “out of kilter,” other than what it should have been in the area of human rights. This leads to a second aspect of attentiveness: *access to others’* feelings. Attentiveness in the right order and in the proper frame leads to adjusting our world to the world of the other. In the words of Hochschild (2005), “If there is a single moment at which the antislavery movement became inevitable, it was the day in June 1785 when Thomas Clarkson sat down by the side of the road at Wades Mill” (p. 89).

Hochschild (2005) notes further, however, that had there been no Clarkson, there still would have been an antislavery movement in Britain. By

implication, Hochschild is suggesting that another piece of stimuli would have claimed someone else's attention and launched an antislavery movement. Part of the reason for this is that matters of attentiveness are part of human equipment for first making sense of stimuli and then using it for instrumental and noble purposes—and sometimes evil purposes.

### **Space, Place, Time, and Memory**

An ability to empathize with others has roots in historical reality and is also tied to memory. Tuan (1977) notes that “all that we are we owe to the past” (p. 197). Our experiences, actions, attachments to home, family, and nation leave traces that we refer to as historical memory. Whatever we have filled our time with constitutes our past, and at any moment, these things can be “rescued,” “called up,” or “flashed to the surface,” during an intercultural communication exchange and subsequently alter how we interact with others. And here I mean the way in which political and cultural history have yoked together human encounters out of which the art of interpreting others is constructed.

From our past, we develop a personal intellectual history that serves as a cultural storage bin for the interpretation of ideas and events. Into this bin we place knowledge of our ancestors, the old family home, a monument to a common hero, a picture album, a stroll down a country lane, the memory of sights and sounds and smells, and myriad other things. At any point in our relationship with others, we can use cultural data to embellish an argument, offer an example, clarify a point, or make ourselves accessible or inaccessible to others—depending on our proclivity toward empathy and its enmeshment with others. Our historical memory changes depending on whether our memory invites joy, pain, or indifference.

It is worth noting as well that histories of suffering born of sharp divisions among ethnic groups' ideas and theories can spring up and naturalize or normalize how the other is viewed. My point in this section is to highlight the fact that the unfolding of past actions can contribute to a situation in which empathetic moral resources are diminished when humans use history to justify ruthlessness.

In *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*, Gourevitch (1998) notes the powerful hold that memory has on humans: “We are, each of us, functions of how we imagine ourselves and of how others imagine us, and, looking back, there are these discrete tracks of memory” (p. 71). “Discrete tracks of memory” can be derailed if human responses to others are weakened. Glover (2000) observes that one way of

diminishing bonds of friendship is to assign others to “some other, stigmatized group” (p. 35). In some instances, as Glover writes, the “excluding classification may be ideological”; however, in other instances, it can grow from the everyday interactions of people, according to where they are in time and space. In Rwanda, for example, where genocide was committed against the Tutsis by the Hutus, more than 800,000 people were killed. But what set of circumstances caused the Hutus to override human empathy for the Tutsis and eventuate in such horrific deeds?

Gourevitch (1998) describes how the two ethnic groups lived together prior to the 1991 season of genocide. In many instances, according to Gourevitch, when “pressed for how they had lived during the long periods between bouts of violence,” Tutsis survivors told many stories: “household stories, village stories, funny stories, or stories of annoyance, stories of school, work, church, a wedding, a funeral, a trip, a party, or a feud,” but the answer was always opaque: “in normal times we lived normally” (pp. 71–72).

### **The Case of Yugoslavia**

It is this sense of normality of time and place—the crushingly particulars repeated day after day and over a span of time—that can serve as an incubation site for exploitative politicians. As Glover (2000) notes, “Tribal conflicts rarely just ‘break out’ . . . people are pushed into the trap by politicians” (p. 123). He notes, for example, that Josip Broz Tito’s Yugoslavia fell apart during the country’s independence from Russia because Slobodan Milosevic exploited the idea of when the republics were formed. Despite Tito’s efforts to ensure that power was distributed equally among the different nationalities, Milosevic saw a weakness and used it to his rhetorical and political advantage. After Tito’s death in 1980, the fragile republics began to unravel, starting with the Serbian minority, which felt threatened by the Kosovo majority.

When Albanians in Kosovo demonstrated in 1981 in support of independence from Serbia, the ideas had powerful and deadly impacts on the attitudes and expectations of the Kosovo population. Furthermore, stories “of rape and of being forced to move” circulated at a time when Milosevic was ready to stitch strands of nationalism into cultural grievances. He undermined the old empathetic feelings, which had enabled people of many faiths and nationalities to live together in reasonable harmony during Tito’s reign.

Milosevic cunningly appealed to soil and the idea of separate relationship of both the land and the environment. This was, for Milosevic, the key to awakening a species of solidarity and national consciousness that

disturbed the status of empathy in the former Yugoslavia. A confining relationship between land and nature would transcend the wellsprings of human kindness with an unprecedented power to mobilize Serbians. Milosevic admonished his compatriots:

You should stay here. This is your land. These are your houses. . . . Your meadows and gardens. Your memories. You shouldn't abandon your land just because it's difficult to live, because you are pressured by injustice and degradation. It was never part of the Serbian and Montenegrin character to give up in the face of obstacles, to demobilize when it's time to fight. . . . You should stay here for the sake of your ancestors and descendants. Otherwise your ancestors would be defiled and descendants disappointed. But I don't suggest that you stay, endure, and tolerate a situation you're not satisfied with. In the contrary, you should change it. (qtd. in Glover, 2000, p. 125)

Whether these appeals to territory, manhood, ancestors, culture, and the "organicity of nature" were the only reasons for the ethnic conflict that ultimately came in the 1990s can be contested. What is more significant for my purposes, however, is that rootedness, place, and identity can and often are used as vehicles for trumping other-regarding characteristics. Because empathy often is intimately tied to space and place, Milosevic helped the Serbians elevate claims of soil, roots, and territory on a grand scale. In a sense, he tapped into the people's sense of place and memories that isolated the relationships that Serbians had had with Croats and Bosnians.

As Tuan (1977) notes in *Space and Place*, "To strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible. . . . Our own past, then, consists of bits and pieces" (p. 187). The "bits and pieces" that Milosevic used caused Serbs to look backward to what Serbs had done together—apart from the Croats: relatives living and dying, people tending their gardens and meadows, and living with honor and integrity.

A resilient hallmark of empathy is its capacity to unite the near and the far. In this instance, Milosevic helped the Serbs to evoke memories of the past as a bridge to the future—a future as it had been, possibly.

Absent from Milosevic's evocations are attitudes toward time and space that included Croats. There were no efforts to construct a relationship based on a shared humanity and a common citizenship, although Yugoslavs had lived together relatively harmoniously for years. Milosevic understood that his discourse was consistent with the basic tenets of empathy. As J. Q. Wilson (1993) observes, "As a rule, we strive harder to protect our own children than somebody else's, that parents seem to make more sacrifices for their children than children make for their parents" (p. 42). This helps to explain Milosevic's cultural practice of pushing the idea that "likes attract

likes” and redefining Croats as strangers, foreigners, and enemies. This explanation is consistent with binary notions of inclusion versus exclusion and kin versus nonkin behaviors. The human capacity for empathy with those closest to one in culture, values, beliefs, and folkways becomes even more complex when weighed against the way people respond to their spatiotemporal world.

“The experience of time and space is largely subconscious,” as Tuan (1977) reminds us, making it easier in some quarters of the globe for well-intentioned ethnic groups to be bamboozled by the political elixir of politicians of Milosevic’s ilk.

But Milosevic had one more trump card to play, one that increased in intensity when fused with elements of soil and ancestry: fear. Following his ancestry/soil speech, Milosevic extended his reach beyond Yugoslavia to other places such as Montenegro. Milosevic forced out the incumbent, took over the Serbian presidency, and participated in the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. There, fusing identity with fear and just the proper mix of appeals to courage, forbearance, and memory, he told the gathering, “The Kosovo heroism does not allow us to forget that, at one time, we were brave and dignified and one of the few who went into battle undefeated” (qtd. in Glover, 2000, p. 125).

These attempts to ground identity in courage and strength make a lack of empathy appear to be natural rather than a social phenomenon rooted in language and power. By emphasizing the relationship between time and dwelling places, Milosevic closed kinship bonds between Croats and Serbians; a main consequence of this was a production of anxieties over the boundaries and limits of human dignity. Manliness coupled with history and time became the main devices in Milosevic’s mind. And the fact that he could galvanize similar feelings in other Serbs is testament to the human disposition to defend home and hearth. In his rhetoric, Milosevic spoke of the hope of a transformation of the moral will of the Serbs. If taken seriously by the Serbs, his words would lead to an act of warfare! And, of course, his implicit intentions materialized because his words “weakened the human responses” of the Serbs. And war came. As Glover (2000) reminds us, “People slide by degrees into doing things they would not do if given a clear choice at the beginning” (p. 35).

My point is that place overlaid by awful meaning can lead humans to inflict pain on others, denigrate them, and become cruel. If one doubts the role of place in constructing meaning, then consider Werner Heisenberg’s and Niels Bohr’s answer to the age-old fundamental question, “What is a place?” when they visited Kronberg Castle in Denmark. Bohr said to Heisenberg,

Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one can imagine that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. . . . None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here . . . but "once we know that, Kronberg becomes quite a different castle for us!" (qtd. in Tuan, 1977, p. 4)

Once we know that people respond to time, space, and memory in complicated ways, we also know that our capacity for being decent persons can be changed—based on the nature and quality of history and the environment. And on myths and legends.

### **Myths and Legends**

Conventional wisdom is right in focusing on myths and legends as a precipitating cause of the lack of empathy. The archetype for this notion is how Westerners have dealt with diversity, especially during the 16th century—and later—when Portuguese and other explorers first came into contact with indigenous peoples in Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific. Myths, according to some widely accepted definitions, are stories that attempt to explain why the world is the way that it is. Myths hold that prototypical stories are passed on from generation to generation and are spread by oral tradition. I examine under this definition both the myths that people create to explain their existence and also the narratives that Westerners have circulated to justify their exploitation of indigenous peoples under the rubric of "progress" and the "march of civilization."

Myths, for my purposes, are assertions that serve as a basis for the promotion of what Blake (1979) refers to as cultural warrants. Blake explains that cultural warrants are basically beliefs, laws, and customs that allow people within a given culture to justify their communicative actions and behaviors. Such warrants are found in traditions, religious texts, traditional values, constitutions, important decisions by judicial bodies such as the Supreme Court, and the general norms that guide the relationship between children and parents, the young and old, and authority figures and subordinates.

Of course, myths are not warrants. But I argue that myths are the *substance* out of which warrants are constructed. They become the frame for viewing the other, and humans rely very heavily on warrants to finish the work of myth construction. My focus on myths and legends is not intended to compete with traditional definitions of such terms. I argue that myths and legends work their effects on humans through the process of both persuasion and force. The processes involved in the construction of cross-cultural myths

serve as rhetorical vehicles to support atrocities in distant and far-removed cultures. It was the inability of Westerners to picture other cultures as like themselves that largely helped to create mythmaking.

As a cultural warrant, the Bible in a country that is influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition is a powerful source upon which an argument can be predicated. Cultural warrants are powerful tools we use to justify our myths and actions. Cultural warrants provide the cover. They, therefore, represent, in a nutshell, “knowledge” of ourselves and about others that are derived from our ways of seeing the other disturbingly. Although myths are not the only reasons why empathy breaks down in a confrontation with difference, I argue that a tendency to breed contempt for others occurs because people overemphasize difference and underuse sameness.

A historical example of how myths can be used to view the other in a well-constructed manner can be found in Dutch descriptions of the Khoikhoi of the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. Because most visitors to the Cape failed to see the indigenous Africans as humans and were repelled by the customs and habits of the Khoikhoi, first came the descriptive rhetorical foundation for the construction of a degraded human being. The Khoikhoi wore animal skins that were coated with “stinking grease” and the “entrails of animals around their necks” (Fagan, 1984, p. 28). Fagan (1984) writes that the expression “They are very priggish in their eating” was a common reaction, a description applied to “pagan” peoples in many parts of the world. They seemed to “eat everything that we find loathsome” (p. 29).

This type of descriptive segmentation was not likely to serve the interests of empathy within the structure of White/Black relations. The ideology of the loathsome Khoikhoi also extended to their language, which heightened the belief that Europeans were superior to the Khoikhoi, who had a “strange click language and primitive way of life” and seemed to represent “the nadir of humankind, the most barbarous of all humans” (p. 29).

Thus, the Khoikhoi were condemned simply for being who they were and for exhibiting cultural habits that were different from the cultural habits of Europeans. And the Europeans became very adept at painting concrete, vivid pictures to justify the fact that the Khoikhoi were ancient in their “savage” behavior. Because difference ran so deeply in Europeans at the time, it was almost impossible for them to eliminate from their mythmaking an image of Khoikhoi as nonprimitive.

The practice of negative description and the circulation of myths by the Europeans of the Khoikhoi erased from history notions of a Khoikhoi cultural heritage of noble genes or language or physiognomy. Descriptions of the magnitude described here were ultimately social killing. The myths grew, were embellished, and became detached from the geographic space that the

Khoikhoi occupied. In such myths, we also receive a glimpse of precisely how and why it is difficult for human empathy to survive in the midst of such common and recurring myths of depravity. There was no diversity of opinion, and there were no counterarguments and behavior to still the human quality of mastering the techniques of “mine” and “thine.” One wonders what would have been the response of Europeans had the Khoikhoi at least had some recognizable resemblance to Europeans? And had the Khoikhoi placed the same premium on property held by the former? In relation to encounters that human beings had with the cultural other even earlier? I turn now to ancient and modern promoters of empathy, which should give us a more complex understanding of the interplay between the concept and human relations. When did our ideas about empathy derive across space and time? What set of circumstances and predispositions animated humans to become empathetic toward nonkin? And what lessons can be learned from the emergence of caring about others—both near and far?