8-28-1998

Trends. Kosovo and the United Nations: A Paean for Application of Psychological Research on Good Samaritanism

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp

Part of the International Relations Commons, Other Political Science Commons, and the Other Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol5/iss9/5

This Trends is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.
Although the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is beginning to employ a team of investigators, lawyers, and analysts who may—ultimately—identify, prosecute, and deter war crimes in Kosovo, observers might wonder what's taking so long and why the United Nations hasn't focused more emphatically on the Serbian military, paramilitary, and police attacks on ethnic Albanian civilians in recent weeks. Answers might include difficulties in identifying the behavioral referents of war crime, fears that more determined intervention might deleteriously affect humanitarian aid to the many internal refugees, fears that humanitarian aid personnel might be further intimidated and killed, concerns that equal time be spent on alleged ethnic Albanian war crimes against Serbian civilians, the need to appear even-handed, and even what might be termed the fatigue of war and atrocity perception.

However, concerned citizens of the world might surmise that there is a psychological calculus of when to get involved—i.e., of Samaritanism. And there is some classical psychological research on the topic. The research suggests the following: (1) pluralistic ignorance and diffusion of responsibility impede getting involved. The former denotes how people mislead themselves and others about what really is going on and how to interpret it. The latter denotes that, as more people become aware that something is going on, each person individually becomes less motivated to do anything about it. (2) Becoming aware that something untoward is going on creates emotional arousal. Emotional arousal often increases the longer the untoward situation continues, the closer (physically and psychologically) one is to the situation, and the more one empathizes with the seeming victims. Emotional arousal often decreases if one gets involved, gets others to get involved, believes the seeming victims do not need or deserve help, or departs (physically or psychologically) from the situation. (3) What an individual or group will do depends on iterations of the costs and rewards of getting involved and not getting involved. (4) The bottom line of involvement is the need to reduce emotional arousal, not some pure notion of doing good.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology