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# **Social Humiliation and Labor Migration**

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“In those days [1970s], most of the women in the red-light district were Dutch [...] If a woman from Amsterdam wanted to be a prostitute, she might go to The Hague; women from The Hague [...] came to Amsterdam. (Less of a scandal for the family; not so much shame)”;

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# Introduction

While many scholars explore the links between sociology, psychology and economy – resulting in a quickly growing literature on behavioral economics<sup>1</sup> – there are still very wide gaps in this regard, and many fields have not been investigated sufficiently. Until recent years, researchers have not incorporated a consideration of emotions into the tool kit of mainstream economic theory, with behavioral economics referring more to cognitive psychology than to the psychology of emotions. Meanwhile, since feelings may be valuable or useful (or, conversely, undesirable or harmful) it seems natural to inquire whether emotions – having them or avoiding them – may be the object of rational choice and, in consequence, influence economic behavior (Elster [30]).

In psychology, many schemes of thinking about emotions and their categorizations are available; we may distinguish, for example, between motivational states (such as hunger, craving or pain), basic emotions (such as happiness, fear or anger) and social – otherwise called self-conscious – emotions (such as pride, embarrassment, shame, humiliation or jealousy) (Adolphs [1]). While the effects of the first group of motivational states on economic behavior are widely acknowledged (Becker [8]), the consequences of the basic or social emotions have been, until recent years, somewhat neglected.

The influence of the group of social emotions on economic behavior seems to be especially interesting in view of the growing awareness of the importance of a social context in individual decisions, and the fact that the function of social emotions is explicitly to regulate social behavior (Adolphs [1]). The desire for approval and support from an individual's community, as well as fear of rejection or disdain, is likely to affect the (economic) decision-making process of an individual. However, the observations of sociologists and other social scientists on the nature of group interactions and social status have only been incorporated in the study of economic aspects of human life in recent years. Brennan and Petit state that “It is almost as if there were a conspiracy not to register or document the fact that we are, and always have been, an honour-hungry species” (Brennan and Petit [15], p.1).

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<sup>1</sup>See Lea [57] for an extensive survey of economic psychology.

Authors incorporating aspects of social status and social emotions in economic considerations usually adopt a game-theoretic approach (for example Orr [68] or Harel and Klement [42] who include and model the effects of shame) or standard considerations on the demand and supply, applied to such goods as pride (Brennan and Pettit [15]). However, a consideration of these emotions (or indices thereof) as direct arguments of a rational utility-maximizing individual's utility function is rare. Furthermore, very few contemporary scholars have studied the impact of the “negative” subset of such feelings on individual and social behavior in general. In particular, the links between humiliation and economic behavior have not been, to the best of our knowledge, explored in the received literature at all.<sup>2</sup> This stands in stark contrast both with the general agreement that there is more to economic decisions than *stricte* pecuniary considerations (Lea [57], Becker [8]), on the one hand, and specific empirical observations of frequent, everyday manifestations of negative feelings such as humiliation affecting day-to-day life of individuals (Miller [65]), on the other.

## Humiliation

The word humiliation, coming from the Latin *humilis* – low – literally means being “brought down” in some way.<sup>3</sup> However, a psychological description of what exactly this should imply is far from being unequivocal – and does not always match the “general” understanding of the term. The basic difficulty arises when distinguishing the emotion of humiliation from other similar social emotions – such as shame or embarrassment.

Few researchers have studied humiliation explicitly; most studies refer to related themes and other self-conscious emotions. Many psychologists bracket shame and humiliation together, and the notions of shame and humiliation are often used interchangeably in literature concerning the topic (for example by Lewis [58], Nathanson [66], Wurmser [89] following Lewis [58]). On the other hand, there is also a vast group of researchers who find important differences distinguishing the two emotions. Even in this case, however, there is no unanimity – as to what these differences are (Gilbert [34]).

According to the most commonly used understanding of the terms of shame and

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<sup>2</sup>The majority of publications relating to humiliation fall either in the domain of psychology *per se* – for example, in the analysis of clinical depression or formation of the self – or social psychology, or pertain to studies on violence, rape, crime, war, terror etc. (see Elison and Harter [29] or Lindner [59] for a survey). Although some aspects of this latter category could be also understood and described in terms of economics, the existing analyses have been conducted from historical, anthropological, political or other non-economic perspectives.

<sup>3</sup>Hartling *et al.* [44] provide an additional derivation – from the Latin *humus*, meaning soil; in this context, “to humiliate” may be understood as “to treat someone like dirt”.

humiliation, both of these experiences require an individual (himself) to interpret an event as shaming or humiliating, and both focus on harm to the self. Both shameful and humiliating events can cause an individual to react similarly: by feeling exposed, angry, or anxious. In case of humiliation, however, the responses may arouse an outwardly directed focus and hostility (revenge), while shame experiences typically result in an inwardly directed focus only (e.g. the desire to sink into the ground or hide) (Jackson [50], following Reyles [73]).

In one of the differentiating perspectives, Miller [65] sees humiliation (contrary to shame) as an emotion related to pretension deflation, and closely connected with honor. Miller's understanding of honor reverts to the classical concept – as in the Greek epics – but he argues this perception has been carried over time, and is still present in norms regulating modern-day life; both in case of “serious” humiliation, and “[...] humiliation with a small h: the humiliations of day-to-day interaction, little falls and the barely perceptible attacks on our self-esteem and self-respect we all face.” (Miller [65], p.133).

According to Miller, humiliation strikes when individuals are revealed to have had aspirations and beliefs that are beyond them: “If shame is the consequence of not living up to what one ought to, then humiliation is the consequence of trying to live up to what one has no right to.” (*ibidem*, p. 145). A somewhat different distinction, albeit also stressing the fact that shame is “justified” by those experiencing it – while humiliation is not – may be derived from Klein, who states that “people believe they deserve their shame; they do not believe they deserve their humiliation” (Klein [54], p.117).

Contrary to Miller's [65] perspective, some researchers underline the fact that people may be humiliated even without having any reputation or aspiration to be superior to others. Some views, such as that of Klein [54], focus on the perspective of social power, linking humiliation to the aggressive rather than anxious emotions. In this context, humiliation may involve more emphasis on the aspect of being forced into a degrading position by some kind of powerful forces (necessity) or others (Hartling and Luchetta [43]), and thus may involve the feeling of powerlessness. Klein [54] states that humiliation is what one feels when one is ridiculed, scorned, held in contempt, or otherwise disparaged. In this context, Hartling and Luchetta [43] define humiliation as “[...] the deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or *perceiving* oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down—in particular, one's identity has been demeaned or devalued.” (p. 264, emphasis ours). Underlining the role of personal opinions in the definition of humiliation seems crucial – individuals may not need a *sound* reason to feel humiliated; a perception may prove to be enough (Reyles [73]).

One may also distinguish two aspects of the internal experience of humiliation: the cumulative effect of the past humiliation, and the fear of humiliation (in general) –



which both affect an individual's attitude towards being humiliated. According to Klein [54], an individual doesn't have to be a victim of humiliation (in the past) do develop a desire to avoid it. On the contrary, individuals may learn to fear humiliation through simply witnessing humiliation or through participating in the humiliation of others. Klein also suggests that whatever an individual's past experience with humiliation, he will "do whatever he can" to avoid it. However, having humiliating experiences in the past enhances the fear of (future) humiliation.

Whatever the context, humiliation is always an emotion stemming from interpersonal dynamics, "inherently interactional" (Reyles [73]). The *relational* aspect of an individual's behavior is very important in the perception of humiliation (the internal process of negatively evaluating oneself is also accentuated, however). An individual may feel humiliation when he has not done "anything wrong" – i.e., there is no blame involved; emotions arise because an individual knows or believes that he has created a negative, unattractive image of himself in the eyes of the others (Gilbert [34]). The negative judgement of others is a factor that drives an individual to hide humiliation or to hide from humiliation. Furthermore, an individual will also have a strong incentive to make the others give up a negative judgement they have taken. The latter may take form of revenge. Therefore, Gilbert [34] distinguishes four basic features of the emotion of humiliation: a focus on the "other" as bad rather than the self; external rather than internal attributions of harmful events; a sense of injustice and unfairness; a burning desire for revenge.

An analysis of the multiplicity of views on humiliation and methods of differentiating it from other emotions leads to the conclusion that an absolute set of categories does not exist; furthermore, each individual may have his own perception of the meaning of the words "humiliation", "shame" or "embarrassment", differing from the scientific use (not to mention language differences). The understanding of humiliation we wish to adopt throughout this dissertation is motivated by the context which will be of predominant interest, i.e. in which it has been mentioned in research related to labor market choices (mainly in research dedicated to labor migration, e.g. Łukowski [62], Osipowicz [69]). The observations – in which individuals state, for example, they feel humiliated by working as house cleaners – suggest that in this case, a "mild" understanding of humiliation (which does not necessarily involve force, violence nor aggressive revenge, etc.), and such referring to occupation-generated social status (reputation) is the most appropriate. We will therefore wish to adopt the line of Miller [65] to specify the definition proposed by Hartling and Luchetta [43], and consider humiliation as the negative emotion related to being (or perceiving oneself as being) degraded or put down, appearing in the context of a failure of aspirations "too big for one's boots".

Throughout this dissertation, we will wish to underline the “interactional” aspect of humiliation, and refer to it as *social humiliation*. Following Fan and Stark [32], we assume that the feeling of social humiliation arises when an individual believes that others consider his activity (or position) humiliating or degrading.<sup>4</sup> It is not sufficient, however, that *anyone* considers an activity (or a position) shameful for an individual to feel humiliated; the opinions of some may be indifferent to the individual in question, and not lead to humiliation. We shall call the group of holders of “significant opinions” the individual’s reference group. We may wish to distinguish those whose opinions matter according to some well-defined characteristic and refer to the “reference group at origin” or to “the reference group at destination” (if we consider humiliation in the context of migration) and so on. What an individual “independently” thinks about the nature of his state may, of course, also be of importance. We could then consider an individual to constitute a separate single-person reference group for himself.<sup>5</sup>

Being a very complex emotion, humiliation is hard to operationalize. Since emotions are internal states, and thus difficult to observe, researchers often resort to self-reports as means of measurement (Robinson and Clore [74]). This is the case especially when dealing with feelings that do not have clearly definable physiological reactions (such as facial expressions for sadness or joy); the group of self-conscious emotions constitutes an example of expressions hard to operationalize (Adolphs [1]). Hartling and Luchetta [43] propose (and develop) a humiliation index scale they call the *Humiliation Inventory*, based on individual declarations. This self-report scale may serve as a measuring instrument for an individual’s level of humiliation. The *Humiliation Inventory* has two subscale components: the fear of (future) humiliation subscale, and the subscale assessing the effect of past humiliation (in accordance with Klein’s [54] distinction).

Both of the humiliation components proposed by Hartling and Luchetta [43] are based on individual responses to questions pertaining to an individual’s concern (denoted on a scale) with different situations potentially signifying humiliation. The questions posed include references to “others”, either directly (such as “How worried are you about being viewed by others as...”) or indirectly (“How much do you fear/have felt harmed by being scorned/bullied/put down/laughed at...” etc.). This means that these “others” are a crucial factor in determining the level of humiliation perceived by an individual. After all, it is only the opinion of those whom the individual “cares about” that matters to him.

Hartling and Luchetta [43] find that items with the highest factor loadings to the *Hu-*

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<sup>4</sup>In the chapters that follow, the term ‘social humiliation’ will be used interchangeably with ‘humiliation’.

<sup>5</sup>We will refer to this specific observation in section 3.1.

*humiliation Inventory* include being cruelly criticized, laughed at, put down, ridiculed and excluded. They also find that the two subscales are significantly correlated, which suggests that an individual's current fear of humiliation may be, to some extent, explained by one's past humiliation experiences.

## Humiliation and economics

We have stated that to date, the humiliation motive has not been present in economic discourse; why should it?

There is extensive psychological literature dealing with the choice of jobs by individuals (Lea [57]; for a survey, see Kline [55]). Clearly, not all people are able to choose all jobs; however, even unqualified workers may choose jobs with different work characteristics. Although there is no doubt that the rates of pay are an important factor determining the choice, there is also a wide set of other factors that play a role in determining the outcome – such as occupational status. In sociological literature it is argued that occupations are associated with social status, and that social status often differs significantly across occupations.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between economics and the social status of occupations (or lack thereof), although it has already been acknowledged by Adam Smith as far back as the 18th century, has not been widely addressed in economic literature to date – apart from work dealing with the compensating wage differential. The compensating wage differential captures the assertion that jobs that are unpleasant, or of low social status, or degrading, may be expected to have relatively high money wages (for an economic model, see for example Lucas [60]).

In view of Miller's [65] honor-based understanding of humiliation, performing occupations that are associated with low social status, and having unpleasant characteristics, is likely to lead to humiliation. Therefore, a link between humiliation and economic behavior – labor market decisions of individuals – exists. We may explore the relationships between humiliation and income and consumption, in order to explain who – and why – chooses work in humiliating activities.

There is more to labor-market choices than plain selection of an occupational alternative. In a global economy characterized by increasing mobility, a growing number of individuals consider different locations as possible arenas of their activities, and undertake career decisions in a broader context. Literature exploring the factors underling migration is extremely vast. Literature on the social status of migrants is also quite wide.

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<sup>6</sup>See for example Hausner and Warren [46].

Literature acknowledging that migrants perform humiliating activities abroad may be found easily. However, to the best of our knowledge, in the received literature there are no theories directly linking occupational choice, humiliation aspects and migration in the received literature (apart from the model introduced by Fan and Stark [32], which we wish to base on in this dissertation).

## The aim of the dissertation

In this dissertation, we will seek to fill in the theoretical gap between economics and psychology, described above, by adopting a utility-maximizing individual perspective to study the impact of humiliation on economic decisions of individuals. Based on the analysis of Klein [54], who suggests that *everyone* wishes to avoid humiliation, it is appropriate to assume that an individual's utility function, which determines his actions and choices, comprises a humiliation aspect. Our main focus will be on labor market behavior; we seek to verify how occupational choice and the selection of an arena for an individual's activities are affected by allowing humiliation considerations. The incorporation of an emotion component in the utility function will permit us to describe the mechanisms of allocation of labor to an occupation involving a degrading characteristic. The main aim of the dissertation is to extend this basic observation into an analysis of the occupational choice of individuals in an open economy setting, where migration is possible, and a detailed description of the related migratory phenomena in the context of humiliation.

In economies where international mobility is possible, immigrants are often found to be performing jobs which are, for various reasons, shunned by the natives of the receiving society (in other words – jobs, they would not wish to perform at home). The choice of the humiliation motive as the basic focus of our interest stems from the fact that although there is vast empirical evidence suggesting migrants perform activities they find degrading, scholars – conducting qualitative research – have not thoroughly explored this motive. The word “humiliating” comes up fairly frequently, but only as a description of work performed (this is the case, for example, with an analysis of emigration from Poland to Western European countries, provided by Łukowski [62] or Osipowicz [69]) and a source for concern. Although some humiliation considerations may be found in literature in the specific context of prostitution, in this dissertation we will only tackle the subject of “ordinary” employment, without addressing crime-related issues or extreme domains (torture, sadism or the like).<sup>7</sup> It is precisely in the context

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<sup>7</sup>By adopting a “non-extreme” perspective, we follow Miller [65], who stresses the occurrence of the emotion of humiliation in everyday situations.

of massive migration to work in low-skilled, physical, dirty-dull-dangerous occupations that the adjective “degrading” comes up the most often.

Piore [72], applying the theory of dual labor markets, provides a framework for an analysis of occupational choice of migrants originating from un-industrialized countries. The basic premise of Piore’s theory, which allows immigrants to perform (relatively) unattractive jobs (in terms of social status) on the host labor market, is the temporary character of a migrant’s stay abroad, combined with a wage-earning goal. Our aim is to broaden the framework of occupational choice within a dichotomous labor market setting. We will not explore Piore’s emphasis of the capitalist production requirements of industrialized economies context; rather, we will substitute it with extended behavioral economics considerations, with the aim of providing a more detailed answer to the question why migrants agree to perform abroad jobs they would not undertake at home.

The introduction of a single emotional motive – the desire to minimize humiliation resulting from performing degrading occupations – allows us to explain not only the occupational choice of migrants, but also various migratory characteristics, such as migration duration, or the level of assimilation efforts exerted. We contend that the analysis of migration incentives is incomplete without a consideration of the humiliation factor, and the incorporation of the proposed perspective yields an innovative view on migration characteristics, allowing a clarification of motives appearing in empirical studies. The proposed framework also allows to formulate predictions that could not be formulated on the base of existing migration theories. We seek to empirically verify such predictions.

The aim of the empirical part of this dissertation is not only to validate the developed theoretical model; we also propose a method of valuing (assigning a monetary value to) humiliation. This analysis, conducted in the migratory context, may prove informative in view of the need to better forecast migration flows, which economists and decision makers often face – for example, in the case of contemporary Poland.

## **The structure of the dissertation**

The flow of the dissertation is organized as follows.

The first (short) chapter is devoted to the presentation of a model of occupational choice, drawing on the literature of occupational status and social space, which encompasses the existence of a humiliation motive of human behavior (following Fan and Stark [32]). Humiliation is introduced as an argument of an individual’s utility function within a general equilibrium framework of two sectors of the labor market, of which one is perceived as degrading.

In the second chapter, an open economy consisting of two countries, between which migration is possible, is introduced into the model. First, the case of two equally developed countries (as in Fan and Stark [32]) is presented. This model builds a framework for explaining labor migration prompted by a desire to avoid social humiliation, between two identically developed countries – i.e. in the absence of a wage differential. Fan and Stark stress the importance of social humiliation considerations in determining the occurrence of migration and the choice of migration destination, but leave aside wage considerations. However, it is not the case that when social humiliation matters, wages do not; if an individual has the possibility to undertake equally humiliating jobs for different wages, he will choose the job that brings the higher pay. On the other hand, when presented with the choice of a job with a low pay that the reference group about whose opinion the individual cares considers non-humiliating (perhaps only as a result of the lack of knowledge), or with a socially humiliating job with a higher pay – the individual will not necessarily choose the job that confers the higher pay. The choice of a less lucrative occupation may even involve a decision to migrate to a less developed (poorer) country. Therefore, in the second part of the chapter, we relax the assumption of identicalness of the two countries considered. This novel extension allows for the analysis of the characteristics of migrant flows between two unequally developed countries, i.e. when both the social humiliation and wage differentials play a role in undertaking a migration decision. In other words, section 2.2 combines the “pure” social humiliation (as proposed by Fan and Stark [32]) and the neoclassical wage differential perspectives. The framework allows to demonstrate that the social humiliation factor may outweigh the wage differential factor when specific migration decisions are taken.

In the third chapter, additional extensions to the original model are proposed and explored. The first class of extensions is derived by introducing a dynamic setting. This framework allows the occurrence of return migration, and researching the duration of migration. The majority of the theoretical literature on migration flows considers the flows to be permanent, and migration decisions to be single-shot.<sup>8</sup> However, temporary migrations are in reality rather frequent, and so is, therefore, return (or circular) migration.

In section 3.1, the possibilities of return migration are analyzed in the social humiliation context both as a result of price level adjustments and a change in the perceived level of social humiliation. While the price level adjustments pertain to the differently developed countries framework, the case of return migration as a result of the change in the perceived level of social humiliation (for example, a shift in the asymmetry of information) may very well take place even if wage differentials do not exist. Section 3.1 thus

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<sup>8</sup>Notable exceptions in the literature on return migration and the duration of migration include Stark ([77], [78] and [79]), Stark and Galor [80], Stark *et al.* [81], Dustmann ([25] and [26])

serves to broaden the literature on the scope of possible motives of return and circular migration. The final part of the section provides, additionally, a dynamical framework with a continuous time variable, which allows the analysis of the optimal duration of migration and provides a novel set of factors determining the length of the stay abroad of an individual employed in a degrading occupation.

The second path of extending the Fan and Stark [32] model, presented in section 3.2, explores the assimilation behavior of migrants working in the degrading sector of the host economy. Akin to the relative deprivation considerations of Fan and Stark [31], and somewhat across the perspective adopted in other received literature, we show that given the humiliation context, non-assimilation may be a beneficial option for such migrants. The third extending path stems from allowing revisions of the reassertion to what extent an activity is humiliating, based on the proportion of individuals who are involved in such an activity. Section 3.3 broadens the received migration literature by providing additional insight on the role migrant networks may provide in the occupational choice abroad. Additional considerations on the consequences of adopting the social humiliation perspective to explore migrant's preferences conclude the chapter.

In the subsequent Chapter 4, implications derived from the theoretical framework presented in previous chapters are put to test. To this end, two distinct methodologies are employed. The first methodology relies on a "traditional" survey of migrant and non-migrant households, conducted in Poland by the Centre of Migration Research. With the use of the survey results, we seek to prove the existence of the humiliation considerations motive in migration, and verify claims pertaining to different migration characteristics in view of the presented theoretical model. However, only limited conclusions on the value of the costs of humiliation can be reached on the basis of this data source.

The second methodology used in the empirical chapter, applied in order to complement the first methodology, falls into the category of non-market valuation. The class of non-market valuation methods is employed for assigning monetary value to goods which do not have market prices – of which humiliation may be an example. To-date, this methodology has been applied primarily in valuing public goods and natural resources, as well as such goods as human health and life. To the best of our knowledge, this methodology has not been employed to value "social factors" present in economic considerations. Therefore, the usage of a contingent valuation experiment to value social humiliation, as proposed in section 4.2, provides an innovative approach in migratory research.

The final chapter provides conclusions.

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