Shame and Shaming in Twentieth-Century History

Shame has been central to recent interest in the emotions across disciplines. The complex, shifting nature of shame and the ethical and methodological problems it presents make it simultaneously frustrating and fascinating, and this was evident at a conference on 6th and 7th December 2012 in Berlin. Entitled 'Shame and Shaming in Twentieth-Century History', the conference aimed to explore the relationship between shame and various practices and discourses of shaming in the twentieth century. It brought together researchers in history, literature, culture, society and psychology for two days, in which the directions of discussion shifted dramatically from concrete questions of 'what' and 'who' is involved when we talk about shame, to theoretical questions of 'how' and 'why' scholars engage with shame.

The introductory panel approached the 'what' of shame from two different disciplinary perspectives. UTE FREVERT's (Berlin) paper started with several images, including four from the conference poster, which depicted historical instances of shaming with victims' faces highlighted. She suggested a focus on practices and discourses rather than philosophical concepts, and asked about the relation of shame to power structures, historical trends and national or regional differences. LUC CIOMPI's (Belmont-sur-Lausanne) paper asked about shame from a social psychological angle: how are historical and political events influenced by shame? He described 'collective emotions' and proposed a spiral effect of shame which could trigger repression, leading in turn to rage, aggression, recovered pride and even arrogance and megalomania, setting the spiral in action

again as others are shamed. The difficulties of asking what shame and its consequences are were picked up in the resulting discussion: how can something so slippery be defined, and how does 'shame' differ from 'shaming', 'humiliation', 'guilt', and related terms? Ciompi argued that existing definitions merely reflect the concerns of isolated researchers or disciplines, and discussions during the conference even suggested that any single definition might close down shame's productive meanings. Methodological and ethical issues already played an important role, with the poster provoking concern about doubling shame by reproducing images without problematising their use.

Frevert also asked 'who': who acts, who protests, who watches in practices of shaming? She suggested a focus on interactions between individuals, not just on politics in a traditional sense. This was picked up in the second panel. ANNE RUDERMAN (Yale) and MAREN RÖGER (Warsaw) raised the issue of gender in shaming practices, looking respectively at the 'femmes tondues' in post-occupation France and the punishment of female fraternisers in 1940s Poland. Ruderman analysed French images and documentaries to argue that 'femmes tondues' were used symbolically to recover lost national pride and contrasted their depiction in American documentaries. Röger emphasised differences with the French case: not just the range of punishments, but their prevalence in Poland before 1945. Both papers remarked on the dehumanisation of women and their instrumentalisation in affirmations of national identity. ISMEE TAMES (Amsterdam) looked at the postwar Nether-

lands, arguing against dominant assumptions that Nazi collaborators were subjected to long-term shaming: her analysis showed many reintegrating with few problems. Although shame and guilt remained for some collaborators' families, such emotions were often ignored by the state. The panel showed how shaming practices tie individuals into larger sociopolitical configurations, such as national identity, and highlighted cross-cultural differences in how shame is instrumentalised. The papers once again sparked the question of how to use sources: participants reflected on conflicting sympathies when reading narrative accounts, for example. Ruderman's paper suggested a more responsible strategy for reproducing visual sources: she edited a postwar documentary on her laptop and filmed playback on the laptop screen. The resulting footage clearly placed the researcher's mediation and editing between the audience and the source.

BARAK KUSHNER (Cambridge) widened the geographical scope of the conference, although not its overriding focus on the Second World War and its aftermath, by discussing trials of Japanese war criminals in China by the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. The conference's otherwise limited geographical scope – unintended by the convenors – was reflected in Kushner's decision not to use war criminals' names. This was to avoid confusion for an audience unused to East Asian names, but its effect was intriguing: criminals were not named and shamed by academic recapitulation of their trials, but were also deindividualised. Kushner and ANN GOLDBERG (Riverside) showed shame used in diverse juridical contexts for personal and political ends. This pluralising strategy was enhanced by MARY FULBROOK's (London) paper on shame and guilt after Nazism, in which she outlined a methodological framework for a 'people-centred approach' to shame. She differentiated communities of 'experience', 'connection' and 'identification' to account for feelings of shame and guilt in individuals with varying degrees of emotional and historical connection to Nazism. Fulbrook again shifted focus from the 'what' or 'who' of shame to questions of 'how', in particular difficulties in researching emotions for historians, and of 'why', asking why shame is felt by people far removed from the atrocities.

In a presentation by representatives of the University College London project on 'Reverberations of War', GAËLLE FISHER, ALEXANDRA HILLS, JULIA WAGNER and CHRISTIANE WIENAND (all London) interrogated scholarly assumptions about shame. Surprisingly, shame was often absent in contexts where the researcher expected it. This demonstrated the problems in under-

standing such an evasive concept, and held a mirror up to the researcher, asking how and why we look for shame: which sources can we use, how do we negotiate our own biases and assumptions, how can an interdisciplinary approach be productive and how does shame translate across cultures? The latter aspect was raised over coffee, when AGNIESZKA KOMOROWSKA's (Mannheim) question as to the English translation of the French *pudeur* highlighted the cultural specificity of concepts of shame. Whereas *shame* in English is broadly equivalent to the German *Scham*, German cognates are more versatile: *to shame* can only be used transitively in English. Meanwhile, the French *honte* also carries the meaning of 'scandal' or 'Schande', while *pudeur* suggests decency or humility in the shame experience. ANETA STĘPIEŃ (Surrey) later considered the misogynistic overtones of an archaic Polish word for 'shame', *sromota*. This indicated a direction for future research, looking at inter- and trans-cultural perceptions and manifestations of shame.

The 'how' and 'why' of scholarship on shame formed the basis for RUTH LEYS' (Johns Hopkins) lively and engaging keynote lecture, which followed on from her book *From Guilt to Shame* (2007) by looking at developments in theories of shame and the affects and analysing Catherine Malabou's *Les nouveaux blessés* (2007). Questioning Malabou's use of sources, Leys argued she eliminates affect entirely, subsuming people whose capacity to exhibit emotions is compromised for widely varying reasons, from trauma and brain lesions to schizophrenia and Alzheimers, under her category of 'the new wounded'. Malabou's radically materialist focus on the neuronal quality of emotions, Leys argued, eliminates agency or motivation behind actions or emotions. This prompted questions as to scholars' motives in using shame – the first asked why Malabou produced such a category – and the ethical implications of this extreme version of the focus in shame scholarship on identity dominated the subsequent discussion, as Leys argued the dangers of denying agency, motivation, guilt and meaning.

The next two panels looked at shame in power relations. ULRIKE WECKEL (Bochum/ Berlin) discussed the use of atrocity films in British and American occupied zones in postwar Germany and STEPHANIE BIRD (London) looked at the narrator's use of shame in Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906). Both papers gave insights into how we interpret sources and analyse shame, focusing on formal aspects, from the voiceover in atrocity films and the set-up of the screenings at the Nuremberg trials, to the narrative strategies

in presenting Törleß's rape of a boy at school. How to find and interpret expressions of an affect which often drives people to silence was a problem highlighted by Weckel, who emphasised how shaming more obviously calls into question the morals of those doing the shaming. Bird picked up on this in interpreting the narrator's lack of shaming in *Törleß* as a non-engagement with an exploitative practice which reinforces the moral purity of the group in power. She argued this was a more ethical approach which could disrupt the shame-rage spiral described by Ciompi earlier. Surprisingly, given Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's prominence in the so-called 'affective turn', Bird's was the only paper to raise queer themes. This reflects the conference's unintentionally but unfortunately narrow look at forms of shame, and is perhaps indicative of the primary concerns in Germany and German Studies, where focus falls naturally on emotional responses to the Second World War and the Holocaust. The narrow focus again prompts consideration of researchers' motivations and biases.

The second panel on power and shame looked at the German Democratic Republic. ALEXEY TIKHOMIROV (London) argued that emotional discourses were crucial in legitimising the nascent GDR, shifting from shame at Nazi atrocities to pride in the antifascist tradition and the 'new Germany'. PHIL LEASK (London) identified a cycle of humiliation in the GDR, picking up on Ciompi's shame-rage spiral and suggesting that 'shaming' is one type of act of humiliation. He argued that Party leaders were forced to submit to humiliation while exiled in the USSR and this led to continued use of humiliation in the GDR. The discussion picked up on Weckel and Bird's emphasis on shaming practices as imposing the moral values of the 'shamer', and struggled once more with differentiating between 'shame', 'shaming' and 'humiliation'.

These continued problems with the 'what' of shame were channelled into a look at literary representations and interpretations. Aneta Stępień analysed instances of shame in the three young men in Hubert Klimko-Dobrzianiecki's *Raz. Dwa. Trzy* (2007). She argued, with echoes of Ciompi and Fulbrook's papers, that Klimko-Dobrzaniecki shows collective shame passed down in communities in Silesia and inscribed on male bodies. Stępień's look at the gendered body, like Hills's contribution to the 'Reverberations of War' presentation, emphasised how shame takes bodily and narrative form, which Agnieszka Komorowska picked up in analysing attitudes to Holocaust testimony in Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* (1947) and Marguerite Duras's *La Douleur* (1945/1985). She argued that *La Douleur*

plays with genre expectations and gender roles through Duras's excess of emotion. In both papers, shame attached to the male body, unlike the shame of the female body analysed earlier in the conference, and this produced fruitful reflections on the relationship of shame to gender. Participants also discussed how the tools of literary analysis could be of use to the historian of emotions.

The final round-table drew together the threads of the conference effectively, with Frevert articulating the problems with untangling 'the family of shame' to answer the question of what shame is, and with shifting concepts of self and identity between cultures and time periods which complicates discussion of the 'who' of shame. Participants agreed the different and changing manifestations of shame to be at once a strength and a complication for its use in scholarship. For Leys, the conference revealed the need to investigate 'the uses of shame': in other words to focus on how scholars engage with shame. The question of why scholars focus on shame was raised explicitly. What the researcher brings to discussion of the emotions was an important issue: does one bring one's own emotions to study of shame? And how can we interpret expressions of shame in sources which self-consciously display emotions? Fulbrook remarked on the use of style by the historian which could carry emotional information, for example. In closing, Fulbrook described the days' discussions as 'extraordinarily fruitful', identifying five themes: 'metatheoretical evaluation', 'definitions and approaches', 'methodologies', 'historical contextualisation and interpretation' and 'community embeddedness'. These categories demonstrate how in-depth engagement with shame ultimately prioritised questions of methodology, approaches, interpretation and focus on the scholar herself. Whatever results from the conference in more concrete terms, this ethical and methodological focus will undoubtedly be the conference's legacy for its participants.

Conference Overview:

Definitions, Explanations, Contexts

Ute Frevert (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin): Historical Semantics and Social Scripts

Luc Ciompi (Belmont-sur-Lausanne): Do Collective Emotions Make History? The Effects of Shame, the 'Master' Emotion

Social Practices of Shaming

Anne Ruderman (Yale): The 'Femmes Tondues' and the Historicization of Shame

Maren Röger (German Historical Institute Warsaw): Shaming Practices in World War II Poland and Postwar Sanctions Against Female Fraternizers

Ismee Tames (Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam): Shame and Shaming: Nazi Collaborators and their Families in Postwar Dutch Society

Justice, Guilt and Shame

Barak Kushner (Cambridge): Searching for Shame in Immediate Postwar East Asia: The Pursuit of Justice and the Dilemma of Benevolence

Ann Goldberg (University of California, Riverside): Nazism and Defamation Litigation in Postwar West Germany

Mary Fulbrook (University College London): Guilt and Shame among 'Perpetrators' and 'Victims'

UCL AHRC Research Group 'Reverberations of War'

Gaëlle Fisher / Alexandra Hills / Julia Wagner / Christiane Wienand (University College London): Researching and Searching for Postwar Shame: Presences and Absences

Keynote Lecture

Ruth Leys (Johns Hopkins University): The Disappearance of Shame?

Power and Shame (1)

Ulrike Weckel (Ruhr University Bochum/Humboldt University Berlin): Shamed by Nazi Crimes: The First Step for Germans' Reeducation or a Catalyst for Their Wish to Forget?

Stephanie Bird (University College London): Perpetrator Trauma and Shame

Power and Shame (2)

Alexey Tikhomirov (University College London): From Shame to Pride: A Moral Economy of Victors and Defeatists in Postwar East Germany (1945–1956)

Phil Leask (London): Humiliation, Shame and 'Normalization' in the GDR

Literary Representations

Aneta Stępień (Surrey): The Flesh of Shame: Representation of Collective and Individual Shame in Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki's *Raz. Dwa. Trzy*

Agnieszka Komorowska (Mannheim): Shame in the Literature of the Shoah – The Ethics of Testimony

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/