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# Shame, Guilt and Reconciliation after War

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## Abstract

How do experiences of shame and guilt shape or reflect the ways in which the vanquished are reconciled (or not) to the new world order established by the victors? Shame and guilt are universal experiences in the emotional landscape of post-war politics, albeit for different reasons and with radically different political effects. An examination of Germany after 1918 and of Japan after 1945 reveals that experiences of shame and guilt may be pivotal for creating conditions of possibility for reconciliation marked by political and moral transformation. This transformative potential of shame and guilt, however, is a double-edged sword. In threatening old identities, values and beliefs, experiences of shame and guilt may provoke defensive, reactionary and violent political responses, and thus may precipitate hideous rather than salutary transformations. Political leadership and political culture are crucial factors in shaping the kind of reconciliation – reactionary or transformative – as well as the specific nature of transformations that experiences of shame and guilt may motivate the vanquished to pursue.

## Key words

■ guilt ■ reconciliation ■ shame ■ war

War is the father of all and king of all. . . .  
Some he makes slaves, and others free.

(Heraclitus)

## 1 Introduction

War constitutes the ultimate act of estrangement between states. Defeat after major war produces multiple estrangements within them. Peace treaties and settlements that conclude major wars constitute practices of international reconciliation between victors and vanquished, marking a movement from formal enmity toward peaceful coexistence and, potentially, their joint affirmation of a revised international order. Complicating practices of international reconciliation in the aftermath of the losses and devastations generated by major wars are universal experiences of shame and guilt that pervade the emotional landscape of post-war politics, albeit for different reasons and with radically different political effects.

Among the vanquished in particular, defeat itself generates experiences of both shame and guilt, especially for the political elites and military forces responsible for starting, conducting, or losing the war. This article explores such experiences and seeks to understand their impact on the trajectory of post-war reconciliation. Specifically, how do experiences of shame and guilt shape or reflect the ways in which the vanquished are reconciled (or not) to the new world order established by the victors?

It should be noted that this inquiry into reconciliation is distinct from one that focuses on interpersonal or intergroup reconciliation, understood as a movement towards mutually cooperative, respectful or friendly relations between previously estranged persons, groups or states. At both domestic and international levels, whether a former belligerent party is reconciled to the post-war order can be related in complicated ways to prospects for interpersonal and intergroup reconciliation. For example, taking a domestic case, if Hutu extremists responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide remain unreconciled to their defeat in the civil war and unreconciled to the establishment of the new political order under their former enemies, this irreconciliation could affect the trajectory of future Rwandan politics, as well as undermine prospects for intergroup reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis, especially if Hutu extremist ideology continues to exert political influence among the Hutu population. Investigating how defeated parties are reconciled (or not) to the new political order can thus help us to answer the more conventional and larger question about intergroup reconciliation. At the same time, these faces of reconciliation are clearly distinct. At the international level, for example, it is conceivable that a defeated state after a major war can become reconciled to the new international order, in the sense of accepting its new norms and practices, and becoming a member in good standing, but still fail to achieve intergroup or interstate reconciliation with the specific groups or states that it has previously wronged. Thus, Japan's reconciliation with the international order after World War II is hardly questioned, while issues of reconciliation with its mainly Asian victims during the Asia-Pacific War may continue to be questioned (Buruma, 1994).

Another way to think about the distinction between reconciliation of the defeated with the new political order, and reconciliation between former belligerent or victim/perpetrator groups, is to identify their distinct ends. The first kind of reconciliation involves the renunciation of the use of force by defeated parties to overthrow the new political order, and may even evolve into a positive affirmation of the new order's norms and practices by the vanquished; in short, the end of this type of reconciliation is an enduring political order, effected through a general commitment by the defeated to civic or international peace. The second arena of reconciliation pertains to the moral relation between specific groups that were previously estranged by war; its end is something closer to civic or international friendship between the specific parties.

This article will focus on two historical cases of international reconciliation. The first is known as one of the most catastrophic failures in the history of international reconciliation: the Versailles peace process that concluded World War I. According

to a popular account (Barkan, 2000: xxiii), far from fostering reconciliation and the moral regeneration of international society, Versailles 'humiliated' Germany and became the focal point of deep resentments in the defeated nation, laying the groundwork for a more devastating world war. The punitive peace compounded the shame of defeat and inspired projects of violent revenge in Germany that became instrumental in Hitler's rise to power. The second case, in comparison to the first, is a success story of international reconciliation: Japan after World War II. A lengthy post-war occupation run by US General Douglas MacArthur 'liberated' the Japanese people from the shameful follies of militarism and ultranationalism, and transformed an aggressive state with ambitions of regional domination into a peace-loving, democratic member of the community of states that formally renounced war as a right of sovereignty.

In both stories of defeat, powerful emotions such as humiliation, shame, guilt, repentance and remorse pervaded post-war politics, but the two disparate cases raise the question of how exactly *some* emotions translate into *certain kinds* of political forces. I take it as a given, then, that emotions do motivate and affect politics, but the key questions are why certain emotional experiences become more salient than others, and how they motivate and shape political action. Does the experience of shame, for example, always motivate a politics of violent irreconciliation, or can it contribute positively to engendering conciliatory attitudes among the defeated towards the new international order? What kinds of politics and what kinds of reconciliation can experiences of shame and guilt support?

These questions are especially important for proponents of practices of shaming and assigning guilt, such as trials and reparations. What is the practical use of the quest for accountability if it will only stoke emotions that are likely to produce further violence? Proponents of trials and reparations generally argue that justice, understood as perpetrator accountability, is crucial to the prevention of future wars and atrocities, but critics have tried to challenge such assertions by showing that such practices do not seem to deter future transgressions (Snyder and Vinjamuri, 2003/4), and may only foster resentment and continued communal conflict, undermining the prospects for social and political reconciliation (Stover and Weinstein, 2004). Are practices of justice and reconciliation fated to be irreconcilable strivings? If so, might sacrificing justice for the sake of reconciliation generate a more politically constructive strategy?

I will argue that experiences of shame and guilt among the vanquished may be pivotal for creating conditions of possibility for post-war reconciliation marked by political and moral transformation. Suffering defeat in a major war inevitably bruises and destabilizes collective senses of self, creating the need and opportunity for changes in political narratives of the collective self and its moral relation to others in the world. The transformative potential of experiences of shame and guilt, however, is a double-edged sword. First, because it threatens old identities, values and beliefs, experiences of shame and guilt may provoke defensive political responses that attempt to suppress their transformative potential, prompting a reactionary internal reconciliation that leaves old identities, values and beliefs intact. Second, experiences of shame and guilt may provoke hideous rather than

salutary political and moral transformations. Feelings of shame and guilt do not automatically generate political wisdom or morally and politically constructive responses, but may motivate attempts to displace and alleviate the pain accompanying experiences of shame and guilt through strategies such as political scapegoating, paralysis and destructive quests for invulnerability. Political leadership and political culture are crucial factors in shaping the kind of reconciliation – reactionary or transformative – as well as the specific nature of transformations that experiences of shame and guilt may motivate the vanquished to pursue. To get to these conclusions, we need to begin by clarifying shame and guilt as emotional experiences, and the problems they pose for international reconciliation after war.

## II The Trouble with Shame and Guilt

Experiences of shame and guilt are commonly thought to be central to having a moral life. Someone who is incapable of feeling shame or guilt might, in certain contexts, be considered a moral monster or, in milder circumstances, morally underdeveloped. Bernard Williams has put the distinction between guilt and shame in this way: '*What I have done* points in one direction towards what has happened to others, in another direction to what I am' or have become (1993: 92). Guilt involves a painful feeling of self-reproach that arises from one's recognition of the (negative) consequences (to significant others) of one's agency, while shame corresponds to a painful awareness of inadequacies in oneself, including in one's ideals or beliefs. Feelings of shame and guilt seem central to moral and social life because, when properly calibrated and directed, they motivate individuals 'to behave more appropriately' (Doris, 2002: 155).

At the same time, however, the philosophical literature has warned against the moral perniciousness of these emotions, especially shame. According to Martha Nussbaum, shame 'pertains to the whole self, rather than to a specific act of the self. . . . In shame, one feels inadequate, lacking some desired type of completeness or perfection' (2004: 184). Although she acknowledges a distinction between 'primitive' shame and 'constructive' shame, Nussbaum's discussion tends to emphasize the destructive consequences of shaming practices in producing humiliation and stigmatization, leading her to argue that 'a liberal society has particular reasons to inhibit shame and to protect its citizens from shaming' because shame undermines 'liberal respect for equality' or human dignity (2004: 15–16). Nussbaum argues that guilt, in contrast, is a more constructive reactive feeling to one's own wrongdoing: 'guilt is connected to the acceptance of moral demands, and to the limiting of one's own demands in favor of the rights of others . . . [and] for that reason, linked to projects of reparation' and atonement (p. 208). John Doris argues against shame because, like Nussbaum, he views shame as involving globalist notions of character, as opposed to guilt, which he argues is more 'discriminate' than shame (Doris, 2002: 166). The indiscriminate, globalist quality of shame, to Doris, can result in 'crippling self-condemnation' because 'it is often inobvious

how the imperatives of shame are to be satisfied. Shame frequently seems to come without a workable plan' (p. 167).

These discussions of guilt and shame are rich and complex, if somewhat perplexing, but before analyzing them, it is important to note that others have taken opposing views on the salutary potential of experiences of shame and guilt. John Braithwaite's (1989) work on 'reintegrative shaming', for example, has influenced contemporary discussions of shame as an important part of processes of social reconciliation in the aftermath of genocide and war. Braithwaite makes a distinction between respectful shaming 'that treats the person as a good person who has done a bad thing' and 'is terminated by repentance and forgiveness', and stigmatizing or humiliating shame 'that treats the person as bad' and 'permanently ruptures social bonds' (2000: 118). Mark Drumbl has relied on Braithwaite's work to argue that shame is more useful than guilt in the context of some postgenocidal societies: 'Whereas guilt arises from externally imposed judgment, shame emerges from internal acknowledgement that what one did was blame-worthy . . . Shame may be a particularly effective reintegrative device in the close-knit living patterns of dualist postgenocidal societies', such as Rwanda (Drumbl, 2000: 1232).

How are we to make sense of these contradictory claims about the moral and political implications of experiences of shame and guilt? Christina Tarnopolsky (2004) has made several important distinctions in her exposition of the structure of shame that help to untangle these preceding discussions. One part of the structure of shame is 'the occurrent experience of shame', which is the discomforting '*cognitive-affective awareness* of the gaze of an "other" that reveals a certain inadequacy in the self or in the "others" by which one currently measures the self' (p. 475).<sup>1</sup> Tarnopolsky's example is Socrates's dialogue with Callicles in *Gorgias*, which exposes Callicles – an ambitious young man in democratic Athens who claims to be a lover of the people – to shame for harbouring the fantasy of being a tyrant. This is a potentially educative moment for Callicles, as his discomforting recognition of the inadequacies of his ideals may lead him to alter his views of the 'others' by which he measures a good and valuable life. As Tarnopolsky puts it, 'discomfort and perplexity don't *necessarily* lead the person who is shamed to hide or withdraw from a debate or discussion. Instead they may lead the person to transform themselves in accordance with new or old "others" and/or to contest new or old "others"' (p. 478). There is a distinction between the discomforting feeling of shame, provoked by a 'moment of recognition' (p. 476) that raises a critical challenge to one's self-image, values or beliefs, and the myriad ways in which one may respond to such a challenge.

Distinct from the occurrent experience of shame and the reaction to such an experience are acts or practices of shaming, or the ways that we try, individually and collectively, personally and through institutions, to put others to shame. Practices of shaming may attempt to provoke a 'moment of recognition' within the occurrent experience of shame that has a potentially salutary function of raising the shamed person's self-consciousness and provoking '*self-reflection, self-criticism, and moral and political deliberation*' (2004: 479). At the same time, however,

practices of shaming may be used in repressive political systems against socially vulnerable groups to stifle or condemn difference and enforce authoritarianism and the preferences of the powerful. Indeed, many who belong to socially vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, the poor, the disabled, women, and gays and lesbians, may feel ashamed of their race, their class, their bodies, their gender, or their sexual orientation, because of social shaming practices that stigmatize agents with these attributes as inadequate or deviant. Chesire Calhoun (2004) has thus noted that 'in societies structured by relations of domination and subordination, shame is an especially worrisome moral emotion', as 'dominant social groups monopolize the power to shame and subordinate social groups are excessively vulnerable to being shamed' (2004: 128, 145). The moral and political implications of practices of shaming thus depend in part on the substance of the moral and political ideals and standards that they aim to enforce.

Using these insights, we can make sense of the contradictory assessments of guilt and shame outlined above. Nussbaum's critique of shame is mainly a disapproval of certain acts and practices of shaming, which produce humiliation and stigmatization, or aim to oppress socially vulnerable groups. Her concern points to the 'fundamentally social nature' of our sense of shame (Calhoun, 2004: 129), and how much that sense may be rooted in morality understood as a shared social practice; because of this, experiences of shame may tend to enforce moral and political conformity to problematic standards and ideals, and stifle critical contestation and deliberation. Ironically, Braithwaite's theory of 'reintegrative shaming' confirms Nussbaum's worries about shame. His work confronts the problem of criminally deviant behavior, and relies on an acknowledgement of the salutary potential of the occurrent experience of shame to stimulate offender rehabilitation, or *conformity* to accepted social and moral standards of conduct.

The distinction between practices of shame and guilt and occurrent experiences of shame and guilt explains Drumbl's denunciation of guilt and positive appraisal of 'reintegrative shaming' practices. His argument against guilt points to the inadequacies of practices of judging guilt such as criminal trials that determine legal guilt, but it does not speak to the potential of the occurrent experience of guilt to motivate self-criticism and transformation. Indeed, even practices of 'reintegrative shaming' may fail to produce the desired occurrent experience of shame, or reaction to such an experience. Furthermore, if the salutary effects of 'reintegrative shaming' practices ultimately rely on an account of morality as a shared social practice, it is difficult to see their successful application in cases such as post-genocidal Rwanda, where it is not *conformity* to shared moral standards and ideals that is required, but *transformation* of community standards and ideals. Drumbl acknowledges this point in his most recent work, in which he voices worries that, 'Restorative shaming theory predicated on a majority of the community's disapproval of the impugned conduct may not be directly transposable to contexts where a majority of that community may not have actually disapproved of atrocity' (2007: 148).

Concerns about how individuals respond to the exposure of their inadequacies also motivate Doris' and Nussbaum's critiques of shame. They are worried

that the occurrent experience of shame, especially when manifested as a globalist tendency to cast a shadow over the entire self, might provoke undesirable reactions such as moral paralysis or destructive behaviour. Although Doris and Nussbaum argue that guilt has a more discriminate nature, there is evidence that feelings of guilt may produce similarly excessive or misdirected responses in compensation and atonement (Vree, 1975). Consider the story of Mr Jones, who sent his 12-year-old son out one evening to buy a carton of milk. After some arguing, the boy reluctantly left the house on a dark night on his bicycle. An hour later, the police arrived at Mr Jones' house to inform him that his son had been killed in a road accident. It would not be surprising to learn that Mr Jones, crushed by feelings of guilt, had to be subdued by the officers as he tried to wrestle a handgun from one of them to kill himself.<sup>2</sup>

These reflections about shame and guilt should confirm the view that although they are distinguishable experiences, there is also much overlap and interaction between them (Jacoby, 1994: 2–4). Both kinds of experiences are windows to how we conceive of ourselves – individually and collectively – and our moral and social relation to others in the world. If experiences of shame may provoke troubling responses, similar troubles are likely to plague reactions to guilt. Contrary to those who assume that shame can only lead to moral paralysis, Farid Abdel-Nour has argued that both shame and guilt can motivate action: 'Like guilt, an agent's shame can call her to action' (2003: 20). The experience of shame can transform who we think we should or can be; that is surely a source of motivation for action. At the same time, however, while both shame and guilt can promote self-examination and morally constructive transformation, when guided by problematic values, ideals, or self-images, both feelings of guilt and shame can be dangerous in terms of the kinds of transformations to which they may give rise. Most obviously, perhaps, feeling guilt or shame does not by itself generate moral wisdom; in this sense, neither comes automatically with 'a workable plan' (Doris, 2002: 167). Experiences of shame and guilt that involve the recognition of inadequacies in oneself or one's ideals and beliefs do not necessarily illuminate the correct or most appropriate ideal, value or belief, or show how best to compensate, atone for, or rectify the exposed inadequacies, failings or wrongs.

We are now in a better position to assess the trouble with shame and guilt in processes of reconciliation among the vanquished after war. First, practices of shaming or of public judgement of guilt should be distinguished from occurrent experiences of shame and guilt; the former may be ineffectual in producing the latter in the relevant targets of these practices. Consider the defiant attitudes of Slobodan Milošević and Saddam Hussein during their trials, a story repeated in countless cases of lesser known, and much pettier criminals.

Second, even if practices of shaming or assigning guilt do provoke painful recognition of inadequacies in self-image, ideals or beliefs, they do not guarantee that the targets of the practice will feel shame or guilt for the right reasons. Practices of shame and guilt may thus provoke moments of *misrecognition* rather than the desired recognition of the target's inadequacies or failings. Thus, a political leader might feel ashamed of being put in a position of inferiority and having



to go through a trial, rather than feel ashamed of committing or orchestrating the offences that form the subject of the trial. Or a political or military leader might feel guilty or ashamed about losing a war, rather than starting or fighting an unjust war. These experiences of shame and guilt, far from encouraging reconciliation with the new international order, may instead reveal the depth of lack of reconciliation among the defeated with the post-war order.

Third, targets' accounts of the kinds of inadequacies that are revealed, as well as the sources of the acknowledged failings, affect the kinds of responses they develop towards experiences of shame and guilt. For example, those who are made to feel ashamed may respond with rage against that which provoked the painful recognition of their inadequacies, rather than engage in self-criticism and reform – this is the dynamic of 'shame–rage spirals' that has been analyzed by Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger (1991). Psychiatrist James Gilligan argues that the most violent offenders are typically ultrasensitive to the experience of shame, and that their extreme violence is motivated by the need 'to destroy their vulnerability to being shamed' (1997: 69). In the case of violent offenders, according to Gilligan's study, 'shame stimulates rage, and violent impulses, toward the person in whose eyes one feels shamed' (1997: 113). Braithwaite's work on 'reintegrative shaming' focuses on changing such destructive reactions offenders may have to the occurrent experience of shame; reintegrative shaming practices aim to provide the conditions under which offenders can be induced to feel shame for the right reasons, or confront their own failings, inadequacies and responsibility, without at the same time fearing the annihilation of the self.

Even when shame and guilt practices do produce feelings of guilt or shame, then, such feelings do not determine an appropriate or properly directed response. While 'shame–rage spirals' reveal an obsession with obliterating the painful exposure of the self's inadequacies, even well-intentioned reactions to experiences of shame and guilt may not produce morally constructive or sound responses. Feeling guilty about global poverty, for example, does not automatically generate a morally and politically viable plan for addressing it; furthermore, an obsession with assuaging painful feelings of guilt or shame may make us vulnerable to supporting ill-conceived or opportunistic ventures. Such observations show that experiences of shame and guilt may be especially powerful in motivating moral reflection and deliberation about one's beliefs, ideals and values, but may not contribute much to the substance of those deliberations. Thus, even if practices of shame and guilt generate appropriate moments of recognition in their targets, the hard work of identifying and constructing appropriate and effective responses to revealed inadequacies and defects remains.

Finally, why do societies institute practices of shaming and assigning guilt at all? Ideally, societies embark on such practices as a part of rendering justice for victims and perpetrators, and to affirm communal standards of right that were violated. In the highly nonideal circumstances that mark post-war political conditions, however, societies may employ such practices to scapegoat the few in order to let the majority off the moral hook, or elites may use them to sacrifice less culpable agents in order to preserve the most culpable ones; in such contexts,

the effect of practices of shame and guilt may be to undermine rather than strengthen a community's commitment to accountability and the vindication of declared standards of right. When practices of guilt and shame are used in these ways to displace or alleviate the painful feelings accompanying experiences of guilt and shame, they contribute to the distortion of moral judgement of culpable agents, and preclude the possibility of societal-wide self-examination, criticism and reform.

Clarifying these troubles with guilt and shame will help us to reassess their role in the politics of international reconciliation among the vanquished after war. It will become clear in the following analysis that political leadership and political culture are crucial factors in shaping how experiences of shame and guilt are evoked, and how they translate into political forces in the aftermath of defeat.

### III Historical Cases

#### *Germany after World War I*

It is common to read that the 'humiliation' of Germany at the Versailles peace negotiations in 1919 paved the way to World War II. As John Braithwaite has described this argument:

One reason World War II ushered in a period of peace among the belligerent states while World War I sowed the seeds of another was that the second war was terminated by rituals of repentance and reconciliation, while the first was terminated by the ritual of humiliation which was Versailles. (2000: 117)

Indeed, many have noted a direct link between Hitler's destructive policies and the 'shame' of Versailles: 'Every page of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* bristles with shame and rage' (Scheff, 1987: 147). Interestingly, these arguments accord with the assessments of international 'realists' who have generally viewed the Versailles Treaty process as a 'very silly humiliating and punitive peace imposed on Germany' that reflected the 'vindictiveness of the British and French', rather than rational political policy (Kennan, 1996: 16, 18). Realists tend to think that politics between states ought to be based on the calculation and pursuit of rationally defined interests, and that emotion-based moralistic politics distort rational (and sound) political decision-making. The architects of Versailles erred in letting their passions get in the way of rational politics, an error manifested in the 'war guilt' clause and the unwieldy reparations scheme.

How exactly did Versailles come to be interpreted as a 'ritual of humiliation'? After all, the architects of Versailles characterized their efforts as an attempt to achieve a 'peace of justice' ('Reply of the Allied and Associated Powers', 1919: 49). They hoped that a repentant Germany would, in accepting the terms of the peace, integrate peacefully into the post-war international order. Contemporary historical scholarship shows that the terms of Versailles, while flawed, did not lead to excessively harsh or punitive demands on Germany (Marks, 1978; Trachtenberg,

1980). According to Sally Marks, contrary to public memory, 'In the end, the victors paid the bills' (1978: 233). Yet most Germans at the time were uniformly convinced of the injustice of Versailles (Weitz, 2007: 38). It was not the old imperial regime, but representatives of the new democratic German government that, on 23 June 1919, declared that, 'yielding to superior force and without renouncing in the meantime its own view of the unheard of injustice of the peace conditions . . . it is ready to accept and sign the peace conditions imposed' by the Allied delegation at Versailles (Finch, 1919: 554).

The case of Versailles reveals a clear divergence between practices of shame and guilt, and the occurrent experience of shame and guilt in the target of the practices. The mechanisms of accountability set out in Versailles did not foster feelings of guilt and shame among the vanquished about Germany's role in precipitating the war; instead, feeling victimized at Versailles, Germans became preoccupied with expressing their rejection of the peace. Using Braithwaite's terminology, we might conclude that practices of shaming that humiliate an offending state are unlikely to promote the offender's peaceful reintegration into the society of states.

This story about the Versailles Treaty process precipitating the failure of German reconciliation with the post-war international order, however, is too simple. It implies that there could only be one kind of (violent) political response to shame, as if such an emotion is able to be translated directly and necessarily into a certain kind of political action. Such an interpretation also obscures the deep political divides and contestations that pervaded German post-war politics; between 1918 and 1933, political conflict within Germany included differences in political responses to the perceived injustices of Versailles. Eric Weitz's (2007) study of the Weimar Republic reveals that for the Germans, the experience of defeat after a brutalizing war that killed 2 million German men and wounded 4.2 million more, created the political conditions for great social and political transformations.

According to Weitz, however, the Weimar democratic revolution was incomplete, as it left in place entrenched conservative elites who remained stalwart enemies of the fledgling democracy. As Hans Mommsen has recounted in his thorough study of German politics in the interwar years, 'The formal end of [World War I] did not mean that a more pacific attitude and a desire for peace had gained the upper hand' in Germany (1996: 76). The revolution in Germany exposed deep political divisions among the vanquished that promised to precipitate a thorough and critical self-examination, but influential parts of the conservative elite were able to subvert this politically painful and potentially transformative process by uniting Germans against Versailles. Any account of the reasons for the failure of international reconciliation after World War I thus must include the established conservative elite's denial of defeat and hostile attitude towards the democratic republic; it was the self-serving strategy of this conservative elite to magnify the flaws of Versailles and popularize the interpretation of Versailles as a 'ritual of humiliation'. In this light, the flaws of Versailles served as a convenient excuse for conservatives to resist the repudiation of Germany's authoritarian and militarist traditions. Wolfgang Schivelbusch has noted that the propaganda of

the times tended 'to be so obsessed with the bruised, defeated ego that little energy remain[ed] for more productive forms of regeneration' (2003: 225).

It is also important to remember that although Germans of the entire political spectrum considered Versailles to be deeply unjust, they differed on how to respond politically to the 'humiliation'. By 1925, for example, the Weimar government under the conservative Gustav Stresemann had chosen a policy of 'fulfilment': Germany would meet its treaty commitments while negotiating their revision (Weitz, 2007: 205). By September 1926, Germany had gained admission to the League of Nations, and in August 1928, Germany became part of the initial group of states to sign the Kellogg–Briand pact, renouncing war as a means of resolving political conflicts (2007: 109). Weitz argues that the mistake made by the Social Democrats in the revolution after World War I was 'their refusal to challenge the social and economic bases of elite power in the army, churches, economy, universities and state bureaucracy' (p. 359). In pandering to the political right, the Weimar democrats chose a strategy that would yield dire anti-democratic consequences in the 1930s when political, social and economic conditions deteriorated with the onset of the Great Depression (2007: 349).

Conservative elites sought to displace the pain of a shameful defeat by vilifying the Weimar republic and exploiting contemporary political and economic crises to effect its overthrow. The hideous transformation of German politics by the Nazis required the complicity of the reactionary conservative elites who continued to aspire to 'an authoritarian system domestically and a revival of Germany's great-power status internationally' (2007: 357). In this vein, Weitz argues that the rise of the Nazis was 'a counterrevolution' (p. 358) against the democratic transformations pursued under the Weimar republic. With the instrumental alliance of reactionary conservatives, the Nazis thus brought about another kind of internal revolution that spelled permanent irreconciliation with the post-war international order.

### *Japan after World War II*

On 15 August 1945, the Emperor of Japan made a radio broadcast to the country announcing the end of the war, and encouraging his subjects to 'endure the unendurable' fact of a lost war (Dower, 1999: 118). Defeat greatly complicated the path to redeeming the costs and consequences of war for the Japanese – 2.7 million Japanese civilian and military deaths, 66 incinerated cities, and widespread urban homelessness and malnourishment. For most Japanese who, throughout the war years, were led to imagine themselves to constitute a 'leading race' destined to create a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', the emperor's announcement and the subsequent occupation of country under the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), US General Douglas MacArthur, confirmed that 'their once-proud empire had been humbled into dust' (Dower, 1999: 43). Given the Japanese elite's preoccupation with achieving great-power status, MacArthur's assessment of Japan as a 'fourth-rate country' (1999: 44) was a traumatic experience that provoked 'shame and dishonor' (1999: 104).

Indeed, many Japanese were overcome by 'a sense of shame and guilt that, in failing to live up to their sovereign's expectations, they had caused him grief' (1999: 37). As in the case of Germany after World War I, however, experiences of shame and guilt, while perhaps universal, were not uniform. Historian John Dower argues that 'there was no single or singular "Japanese" response to the defeat apart from a widespread abhorrence of war. On the contrary, what is fascinating is how kaleidoscopic such responses were' (p. 25). After such a catastrophic defeat, re-engaging with the world 'involved not merely reconstructing buildings but also rethinking what it meant to speak of a good life and good society' (p. 25). While some among the vanquished were crushed by despair, others 'experienced a sense of liberation and opportunity', 'a rare moment of flux, freedom, and openness when new patterns of authority and new norms of behavior were still in the process of forming' (p. 121). The case of Japan after World War II confirms that the experience of defeat can precipitate painful but potentially liberating moments of recognition that provoke reactionary and transformative political and social movements. The diversity of responses reveals the contours of the contending political forces that would contribute to the reconstruction of a post-war Japanese national identity.

Post-war Japan came to be transformed, socially, politically and institutionally, in profound ways. The specific nature and extent of that transformation were affected greatly by political leadership, especially of the US Occupation authorities, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). For a large part of the occupation that ran from August 1945 to April 1952, SCAP's agenda of 'demilitarization and democratization' aimed to eradicate 'the very *roots* of militarism that had led [Japan] so recently to war' (1999: 76). While conservatives self-servingly warned against the 'confusion of thought' (1999: 313), upsetting conventional loyalties and beliefs was central to effecting social and political transformation away from militarism and ultra-nationalism. SCAP's initially liberal policies allowed a wide variety of critical political voices and grassroots social movements to flourish. Under the conditions of occupation, intellectuals in particular came to form a 'community of remorse'; 'many dwelled openly on their guilt and responsibility for having failed to take a principled stand against repression and aggression' (p. 235). This 'community of remorse' eventually supplied the authors of the new school textbooks that would extol the virtues of peace and democracy (Yoshida 2007: 51–80).

The political leadership of SCAP also affected, albeit in unexpected ways, the battle between conservative and progressive forces over the making of the post-war constitution. While the conservative government argued that only cosmetic adjustments to the Meiji constitution were necessary, socialists and communists envisaged far more fundamental institutional and structural transformations. MacArthur's intervention was decisive, if somewhat unexpected: for, in addition to democratization and demilitarization, MacArthur's primary concern was to protect the emperor. His argument to the ultraconservatives was that 'the only possibility of retaining the Emperor and the remnants of their own power is by their acceptance and approval of a Constitution that will force a decisive swing

to the left' (Dower, 1999: 362). When the draft constitution was unveiled on 6 March 1946, by Japanese Prime Minister Shidehara, the Emperor also released an imperial rescript, in which he commanded his government to fulfil *his* 'desire that the constitution of our empire be revised drastically upon the basis of the general will of the people and the principle of respect for the fundamental human rights' (1999: 385). A new Japan was born that while retaining the emperor, renounced war and its instruments, and made former subjects of the emperor into citizens of a new democracy.

SCAP's interventions also decisively shaped the kinds of self-examination that were prompted by defeat. In the area of accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, for example, the US-dominated Tokyo trials put to death militarists who waged war in the name of the emperor, but did not touch the emperor. When Tōjō Hideki, testifying in December 1947, referred to the emperor's ultimate authority, the 'American-led *prosecution* immediately arranged that he be secretly coached to recant this testimony' (1999: 325). The Tokyo trials thus failed (intentionally) to provoke wider self-examinations of war responsibility among ordinary Japanese precisely because the Occupation authorities actively cultivated the image of the emperor (and the Japanese people) as a victim of rogue militarists (Orr, 2001: 34–5). As the Cold War loomed, the decision to preserve the emperor became a strategic move, and the US growing concern for an Asian ally led to a 'reverse course' in occupation policy (2001: 9) that involved steering the trajectory of Japan's post-war political transformation away from the communist camp. Japan's reconciliation with the emerging Cold War international order thus required stifling the transformative potential of critical leftist social and political movements unleashed in the aftermath of defeat.

#### IV Reconciliation and the Politics of Transformation

Martha Minow has argued that social and political efforts to deal with mass violence and atrocity wager 'that social and political frameworks can make a difference to how individuals emerge from devastating atrocities' (1998: 147). The cases of post-World War I Germany and post-World War II Japan reveal the importance of political leadership and political culture in shaping the identities, values and beliefs that guide what people feel ashamed or guilty about, as well as how individuals and collectives respond politically to experiences of shame and guilt generated by defeat in a major war.

In the case of Germany after World War I, established conservative elites had their own reasons to respond to the 'moment of recognition' that was Versailles in a reactionary way to undermine the Weimar Republic's promise of a radical revision of German political identity, values, beliefs and ideals. They thus focused the German public on the pain of shame generated by defeat and the Versailles peace process, sapping the potential of the experience to consolidate a democratic transformation. While conservatives instrumentally allied with the Nazis in order to effect a counterrevolution against the Weimar republic, their internal

reconciliation precipitated a hideous politics of irreconciliation with the international order that would claim millions of internal and external victims.

Although Japan's reconciliation with the post-World War II international order was, in comparison, more successful, the work of intergroup reconciliation between Japan and 'the nations and peoples it victimized during the Asia-Pacific War' (Yoshida, 2007: 51) remains unfinished. Exploring reasons for the disjuncture between Japan's successful reconciliation with the international order, and the 'sluggish progress' (2007: 73) of its reconciliation with its Asian neighbours and former victim groups may reveal important features of the subject of intergroup reconciliation that have not been addressed by my discussion so far. One barrier to intergroup reconciliation in this case may be found in the contested political narratives within Japan about its imperial past. In contemporary Japanese politics, we continue to witness a battle between conservatives whose 'victim consciousness' breeds 'an amnesia over Japanese war aggressions' and progressives who struggle to 'remember their past with integrity and compassion for all who suffered during World War II in Asia and the Pacific' (Orr, 2001: 173, 177). According to Dower, neonationalists have attempted to depict 'the period of defeat and occupation as an overwhelmingly *humiliating* epoch when genuinely free choice was repressed and alien models imposed' (1999: 30, emphasis mine). As in the case of Germany after World War I, it pays to ask what political interests, agendas, beliefs, values and ideals seek to be revived through such constructed interpretations of the experience of defeat.

At the same time, however, it goes against the grain of democratic politics to enforce hegemonic political narratives; thus Takashi Yoshida is right that disputes between conservatives and progressives about Japan's imperial past will likely remain an enduring feature of Japanese politics. In his longitudinal study of history education in Japan, Yoshida shows that contemporary conservative efforts to glorify Imperial Japan's wartime exploits are extremely marginal, but have a disproportionately negative impact on intergroup reconciliation: 'although these [conservative] groups by no means represent the thinking of Japanese society as a whole, many of Japan's neighbors take their rhetoric as typifying the Japanese view' (2007: 69). Other barriers to intergroup reconciliation may thus stem from the side of former victim groups. Yoshida astutely observes that claims of historical victimhood may serve contemporary political purposes: 'the Chinese government has manipulated the history of the war in order to promote patriotism and loyalty to the Community Party among Chinese citizens' (2007: 74). When examining and evaluating the progress of intergroup reconciliation, then, it is profitable to interrogate not only the political self-images, ideals, beliefs, agendas and interests of perpetrator groups, but also of victim groups, especially when these are represented as political claims by governments.

The process of political transformation wrought by defeat after major war is, of course, terribly difficult and painful. As Pat Barker has observed, 'the process of transformation consists almost entirely of decay' (1991: 184). When experiences of shame and guilt prompt self-examination and revision, at individual and collective levels, we face the loss of old and cherished (even if erroneous or unhealthy)



self-understandings, values, ideals and beliefs. German conservative elites after World War I became vulnerable to Nazi propaganda promising internal unity and external glory because their preoccupation with avoiding the pain and division caused by a shameful defeat enslaved rather than liberated them from continued 'mistakes, illusions and disorientation' (Klein, 1998: 220) about Germany's fundamental interests and moral relationship with other states and peoples in the world. At the same time, political transformation is especially difficult or costly for those political actors and groups that stand to lose power, status and influence with the renunciation of old values, beliefs and ideals.

That post-war politics is conflictual is hardly surprising – one of the most important aspects of such political conflict is how experiences of shame and guilt among the vanquished are constructed by elites and manifested as political forces. If institutions and practices of accountability, such as trials and reparations, generate or exacerbate social tension and conflict, this is not necessarily morally and politically unconstructive. It should be expected that critical moral accountings, internally or externally generated, in courtrooms or in textbooks, will provoke diverse experiences of shame and guilt, and expose deep political divisions among the vanquished. Ultimately, in precipitating shame and guilt, experiences of defeat provoke identity crises that present both danger and opportunity; for they may generate political responses that feed a downward spiral into a violent and reactionary politics, or they may inspire a transformative, liberating politics of critical self-reflection and political reform. Some will be enslaved, and others made free.

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## Notes

- 1 Tarnopolsky distinguishes between 'the occurrent experience of shame, the moment of recognition within this experience, acts of shaming, and the disposition or sense of shame' (2004: 475).
- 2 The case of 'Mr Jones' was used in a 1990 training programme by the Vancouver Police Department for 911 operators, as an example of how sudden death notifications can create special hazards for attending officers.



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