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The Eyes of the Others: Shame and Social Conformity in Contemporary Indonesia

"How can you trust somebody who does not know how to blush?"

(Alexander von Humboldt)

Recently, an Indonesian student told me how he had had a really difficult time when he returned home for the first time after spending 5 years in Germany. It was only when he got back to Indonesia that he realized how much his years in Germany had changed him. "I have forgotten," he explained, "to continuously feel shame (*malu*) and see myself only through the eyes of the others."

This short sentence contains three important components that I wish to address in the following: First, he points out how a central role seems to be assigned to shame in the Indonesian context. Second, he implies that seeing oneself in public through the "eyes of the others" plays an important role in shame processes. And, third, the young Indonesian's information that he had lost his shame competence in Germany points to the flexibility of emotions as socially learned and thus changeable qualities. These are the topics I shall be addressing in the following.

I. Shame in Indonesia: Facets of a Cultural Model

The emotional dimension of shame plays a dominant role in the context of Indonesian societies (*malu* is the corresponding term in the national language *Bahasa Indonesia*). An enormous range of behaviors in everyday interactions are classified as shame-evoking. This range extends from the slightest infringements of etiquette—such as having dirty shoes—to major violations of social norms such as offences against the gender segregation rules. The decisive point is always that there is a public sphere for the specific misbehavior, that it takes place in front of the "eyes of the others." In brief, shame (which I shall define later) is a strongly emphasized and very visible emotion in Indonesia.

I shall start off by sketching the main aspects of the Indonesian model of shame by referring to my own research data gathered among the Makassar in South Sulawesi (a highly stratified Islamic society). Nonetheless, the basic principles are also to be found in other Indonesian societies, as numerous social anthropological studies have confirmed.¹ This allows me to generalize and talk about a pan-Indonesian pattern or "model of shame."

The analysis of my material shows that there are essentially three factors that trigger feelings of shame (Makassarese: *siri*) in an individual (ego):

1. Ego infringes social rules and norms and knows or believes that others are aware of this.
2. Another person misbehaves, and this impacts on ego either (a) directly through the misbehavior, that is, ego is injured either symbolically or materially; or (b) indirectly because ego is a member of the particular context to which the transgressor belongs.
3. A more high-ranking person is present ("status shame").

An anthropological vignette will provide a closer look at the first two aspects:

The stream feeding the farmer Musa's paddy fields has dried up. Therefore, he diverts water from the still plentiful irrigation system serving the fields of his neighbor Bora. However, he is caught out. In the village, Musa is now described as a person without shame (*tena siri'na*). He holes up in his house and avoids the public sphere for weeks. His family also avoids every unnecessary walk through the village. Later, he tells me he half died for shame [*siri*']. Bora also classifies his feelings as *siri*'. He reacts with anger [*larro*], making harsh demands for compensation from Musa, demands that the village community considers to be fully justified.

¹ For example, H. Geertz «The Vocabulary of Emotion. A Study of Javanese Socialization Processes», *Psychiatry* 22 (1959), 225–37; C. Geertz «Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali», in C. Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, 1–46; W. Keeler «Shame and Stage Fright in Java», *Ethos* 11.3 (1983), 152–65; K.G. Heider *Landscapes of Emotion: Mapping three Cultures of Emotion in Indonesia*, New York, 1991; C. Goddard «The “Social Emotions” of Malay (Bahasa Melayu)», *Ethos* 24.3 (1996), 426–64; E.F. Collins & E. Bahar «To Know Shame. Malu and It's Uses in Malay Society», *Crossroads. An Interdisciplinary Journal of South East Asian Studies* 14.1 (2000), 35–6; D.M.T. Fessler «Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches», *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4.2 (2004), 207–62; D.M.T. Fessler *A small field with a lot of hornets: An exploration of shame, motivation, and social control*, San Diego 1995

The first thing to note here is that not only the person who has violated a behavioral standard (Musa) but also the person who is injured by this (Bora) state of themselves: *siri'ka* [I feel shame, I am in shame]. Hence, norm violations initially seem to be generally shame-triggering, regardless of whether one is the offender or the victim.

However, is this the same just because it is called the same? Are the feelings the same in both cases? I shall take a closer look:

On the levels of action and behavior, there are clear differences, as the next little vignette shows:

Musa reacts by withdrawing; he tries to avoid the eyes of the others. In direct confrontations with Bora and his relatives, he remains silent, avoids eye contact, and displays a sunken posture—what the literature on emotions would call a typical display of shame.

Bora, in contrast, who has been injured by the violation, displays anger: He storms into Musa's house showing clear signs of strong physiological arousal. He scolds, threatens, and demands compensation in the form of a portion of Musa's harvest. The behavior tendency resulting from his anger is to be aggressive and assault his opponent. In this context, anger is also the socially anticipated emotional reaction; it is viewed positively. If Bora were to disregard Musa's misbehavior in a passive and docile way, he, in turn, would be considered to be a person who knows no *siri'*, and his social standing would suffer.

I shall now turn to the level of subjective experience: I asked a group of Makassar informants to describe the feeling phenomena associated with these two facets; in other words, to tell me what *siri'* feels like for the one who has broken a rule and for the one who is the victim. It is interesting to see that they start off by reporting a similar feeling schema for both aspects. At the precise time of the event, both sides experience something like a shocking emptiness, a paralysis that is replaced in one case by a feeling of physical shrinking or cringing and shallow breathing along with the triggering of a strong flight impulse; in the other case, by strong arousal, feelings that one is about to burst inside, rising blood pressure, and so forth leading to a tendency toward confrontation.

The question remains, why are these emotional facets that differ so clearly on the level of behavior and experience not differentiated on the level of language categories? What is the underlying cultural logic?

The fact that both these aspects are viewed as one phenomenon in the Indonesian context indicates that this is a cultural shame concept that is organized consistently in social-relational or dyadic terms: The shameful behavior of one person always impacts on other persons as well; it also always diminishes and threatens the social integrity of others. This makes it clear that the individual is always conceived as part of a network of social relations, a collective. I shall return to this later.

However, first of all, I shall look at the two triggers of *siri* that have not yet been considered. I shall start with the aspect that when a rule violation has become public, those persons who are associated with the transgressor also feel shame. The phenomenon of "coshaming" is a clear indicator for membership of a social group or social identification processes. In Indonesian societies with their kinship-based social organization, this is decisively important for family groups. Particularly in cases of serious social conflict, it is kin membership that regulates who is shamed along with ego. Nonetheless, social belonging is not just expressed through "coshaming" within family bonds. Individuals also feel shame with and for misbehaving persons with whom they associate or with whom they are associated with in a specific context. Direct personal bonds are not necessary at all. Coshaming can also be triggered with reference to people who live in the same location, come from the same region, or belong to the same profession, religious group, and so forth. This emotional reaction to the misbehavior of people to whom one belongs or who are assigned to the same social category, which is sometimes also called "vicarious shame" in the literature, generally leads to the misbehaving persons being admonished and rejected. In the Indonesian context, avoiding the persons concerned is the usual behavioral consequence of coshaming that is often carried out only very implicitly and subtly. However, as a form of social ostracism, this avoidance behavior is a powerful means of social control.

I shall now turn to the third shame-triggering factor: the presence of higher ranking persons. One can frequently observe that persons who have just been interacting in a free and easy manner will fall silent, start shrinking, look away, and try to escape as soon as a person of clearly higher rank comes into view. This shame-evoking potential of persons of higher rank is also reflected in the fact that such persons are also called "persons who cause shame" [Makassarese: *tu-nikasirikang*]. They embody the central social values to

such a high degree that others feel fundamentally "inadequate" in their presence, even when they have done nothing wrong themselves. This would seem to be a logical consequence in stratified, status-oriented societies. Nonetheless, the social anthropologist Dan Fessler² has pointed to studies that confirm the existence of this form of shame in egalitarian societies as well. He uses this to argue that status shame should be seen as an evolutionary emotional system that makes it easier to adapt to social inequalities, to the different relations of dominance and power based on the factors age, gender, physical strength, or number of relatives that can also be found in societies with an egalitarian ethos. "Simple subordination shame, the ancestral trait evident in other primates, has been preserved in the repertoire of human emotions because the selective force of dominance ranking, though attenuated, has never disappeared."³

II. Shame, Self, and Social Conformity

The cultural model of the emotions underlying the term *siri'* (*malu*) bonds the individual to a matrix of social values in a twofold manner: first, in that every individual is continuously aware of the controlling eyes of fellow members of the community; and second, that each individual in turn also continuously observes the behavior of others in a controlling way. This is because those who fail to react to the misbehavior of their fellows also reveal themselves to be persons who lack a feeling of shame. This makes it possible to understand the apparent ambivalence of the Indonesian concept of shame (or the *siri'* concept): It proves to be a marked sensitivity toward perceived or suspected negative evaluations by others. In this way, it corresponds to classic definitions of shame: Even Darwin already assumed that shame emerges through "the thinking what others think of us," thereby making it a fundamentally social emotion. Ever since then, the approach that views shame as a process of self-reflection through the eyes of others has permeated the literature—above all, in the social sciences. "Shame is," according to, for

²D.M.T. Fessler «Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches», *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4.2 (2004), 207–62

³ Fessler, *Shame in Two Cultures*, 246

example, the sociologist Thomas Scheff, “the social emotion, arising as it does from the monitoring of one’s own actions by viewing one’s self from the standpoint of others.”⁴

It is important to stress that shame in this sense, that is, as a sensitivity toward the evaluations of others, is taken to be fundamentally positive in the Indonesian context. A strong sensitivity to shame is viewed as a virtue. A person who "knows shame"—and convincingly demonstrates this repeatedly—is socially respected. As a result, displaying shame takes on a crucial role in everyday interactions.

In this context, it is also interesting to see that there is no term, no explicit concept of "honor" in the sense of a sociosymbolic status designed to be permanent in nature.⁵ It is far more the case that the focus on shame, that is, on the short-term emotional phenomenon, emphasizes the fragility of social evaluations. It is continuously necessary to repeatedly acquire the esteem of others in everyday interaction. Even the inherently competitive aspect of honor concepts emphasized by Bourdieu,⁶ which leads to spiraling challenges in the fight over the symbolic capital of honor, is lacking or culturally "underdeveloped"—as also emphasized by Collins and Bahar.⁷ Nonetheless, the boundaries are not fixed here, because shame in the sense of a virtue, that is, as a marked willingness to quickly feel shamed or scorned by the behaviors of others, and to react to this with anger and rage or also by avoiding or excluding the "offender," may well be interpreted as a form of sociosymbolic capital in the sense of Bourdieu's example of the honor concept developed by the Kabyle people.⁸ People who violate decisive norms reveal that they "possess no shame" [*tidak ada malu*]. As a result, they lose all claims to

⁴ T. I. Scheff «Socialization of Emotions. Pride and Shame as Causal Agents», in T. Kemper (ed.) *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, Albany, 1990: 281

⁵ The anthropologist M.J. Casimir points to the need to view shame as being emotional equivalent to dishonor; see M.J. Casimir «Honour and Dishonour and the Quest for Emotional Equivalents», in B. Röttger-Rössler and H. J. Markowitsch *Emotions as bio-cultural processes*, New York 2009:287–93

⁶ P. Bourdieu *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabyliischen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt 1976; P. Bourdieu *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*, Frankfurt 1987 See P. Bourdieu *Theorie der Praxis*, 1976:18,19, who talks about this in terms of "fighting for honor." The same also applies to pride with its emphasis on the individual and his or her achievements that numerous works on emotion theory view as the positive antithesis of shame. In Indonesian societies, it is considered to be a negative, socially undesirable emotion. They also reveal no concept of guilt. See Fessler *Shame in two cultures*, 222f; see also J.R.J. Fontaine, Y.H. Poortinga, B. Setiadi, and S. Markam «Cognitive Structure of Emotion Terms in Indonesia and The Netherlands», *Cognition & Emotion* 16.1 (2002), 61–86.

⁷ Collins and Bahar, *To Know Shame*, 42

⁸ Bourdieu, *Theorie der Praxis*, 1976 and Bourdieu *Sozialer Sinn* 1987. Cf. L. Vogt *Zur Logik der Ehre in der Gegenwartsgesellschaft*. Frankfurt, 1997:121–52.

social recognition, esteem, and support. Given flagrant transgressions, they may even be expelled permanently from their communities, which is equivalent to "social death."⁹ As a virtue and thus as social capital, shame regulates social conformity in a decisive way. In some Indonesian societies such as the Makassar,¹⁰ but also the Pasemah in Sumatra,¹¹ customary law expects men to react to flagrant "shamelessnesses" by others, that is, major norm violations such as sexually assaulting women in one's own family, robbery and stealing animals, public defamations, but also elopements against the wishes of the family. Their task is to react with anger and aggression, and even go so far as to murder the delinquent. This reveals very close ties between ideas on morality, local legal practices, concepts of masculinity, and emotional discourses.

To summarize, the elaboration of shame in the context of Indonesian societies orients the individual toward the social community and its norms and values. It stresses the fundamental embedment of the individual in social frameworks and the fragility of social esteem. Shame makes this interdependence physically perceivable (either as shame anxiety or shame anger). It, so to speak, translates the "eyes of the others" into the individual body and mind, thereby motivating the individual to behave in line with social expectations.

This is where the relation between culture and the conception of the self becomes relevant—a relation that is discussed particularly strongly in cultural psychology and social anthropology. Intricate shame systems are viewed as components of a "socio- or allocentric" orientation toward society that is accompanied by a concept of the social-relational or "interdependent self." Based on this model, the individual can only perceive and experience him or herself in relation to others. According to the psychologists Markus and Kitayama,¹² interdependence involves "[...]seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behaviour is [. . .] to a large

⁹ Ritual declarations that delinquents have died are not unusual, see, for example, B. Röttger-Rössler *Die kulturelle Modellierung des Gefühls. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Methodik ethnologischer Emotionsforschung am Beispiel indonesischer Fallstudien*, Münster 2004.

¹⁰ (Röttger-Rössler, *Kulturelle Modellierung*, 231–5)

¹¹ Collins & Bahar, *To Know Shame*, 48–49

¹² H. R. Markus and S. Kitayama «Culture and self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation», *Psychological Review* 98,2, 1991:224–253, 227

extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship."

The antithesis to this is the independent self of so-called individualistically oriented cultures, which are essentially the West European and Euro-American societies. To clarify the "independent self," cultural psychology frequently cites Clifford Geertz¹³—as do Markus and Kitayama—who characterizes this self as "[...] a bounded, unique [. . .] center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background."

It seems to be a balanced picture: The emphasis on shame is logical in sociocentric societies that perpetuate a concept of the "interdependent self," whereas, in contrast, shame—as an emotion emphasizing social connectedness—represents an antagonistic phenomenon in individualistically shaped western societies.

However, is this picture as balanced as it seems? Is shame really such a peripheral phenomenon in the context of individualistic societies with their emphasis on the ideology of the autonomous self?

It is the above-mentioned sociologist Thomas Scheff who upsets the picture. He assumes that shame represents a "master emotion" that is effective in all societies, but merely less visible in some. In this context, he talks about "low-visibility shame." The empirical basis for his ideas comes from a study by Helen Lewis.¹⁴ She analyzed hundreds of video recordings of clinical therapy sessions and showed how these interactions contained numerous episodes of shame that were not recognized as such by either the client or the therapist. Lewis identified these shame episodes primarily on the basis of the prototypical behavior displays (cringing, looking away, blushing, lowering the voice) along with the contents of the discussions that always referred to contexts of social exclusion. She concluded that shame is a latent and continuously present phenomenon in the observed interactions that, nonetheless, remains "highly unacknowledged." This masking of shame, which has been confirmed in numerous more recent studies, has to be viewed in light of

¹³ C. Geertz «On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding», *American Scientist* 63, 1975:47–53, 48

¹⁴ H. Lewis *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, New York, 1971

the negative evaluation of this emotion in the context of today's Euro-American societies. Whereas—as pointed out above—shame and a strong sensitivity to shame are evaluated positively in Indonesia, persons who rapidly and frequently feel shame in our contemporary societies are considered to be insufficiently self-confident and too strongly dependent on others. Moreover, at a certain level, this is even classified as pathological and therefore requiring treatment.¹⁵ This results in a far-reaching masking of shame—in both individual mental experience and social discourse. This was also confirmed in a small survey (free listing of emotion terms) that a group of students carried out in one of my seminars. Forty-eight native German-speaking men and women in two groups aged 22–30 and 50–65 were asked to write down every emotion term that came to mind spontaneously. After 10 min, their lists were collected. On the total of 48 lists, shame was mentioned only seven times. The most frequent emotion terms, which were generally also at the top of the list, were love, hate, and joy. This little exercise indicates that shame is not one of the emotions that is particularly emphasized and stressed in social discourse and that accordingly also comes to mind spontaneously when asked to list emotions.¹⁶

III. Socialization of Shame

When referring to cultural differences in the weighting, shaping, and evaluation of emotions, social anthropologists talk about hyper- and hypocognizing processes. This concept was introduced by Robert Levy¹⁷ in the 1970s. It draws on the assumption that there is a series of biologically given pan-human emotional capacities that are, nonetheless, highly plastic; that is, they can be modeled in very different ways by social

¹⁵ See, for example, J.P. Tangney «The Self-Conscious Emotions: Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment and Pride», in T. Dagleish & M.J. Power (eds.), *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, Chichester; 1999: 541–68; J.P. Tangney & R.L. Dearing *Shame and Guilt*, New York 2002; M. Lewis *Shame. The Exposed Self*, New York 1995, 142f; see also A.P. Morrison *Shame. The Underside of Narcissism*, Hillsdale 1989.

¹⁶ Another interesting study in this context is a comparison performed by the American social anthropologist Daniel Fessler. In both California and Indonesia (Bengkulu/Sumatra), he used a card-sorting procedure to rank 52 emotion terms according to their perceived frequency and importance in daily life. The Californian sample contained 80 and the Indonesian sample 75 participants of both sexes. The four most frequent and important terms for the Indonesian respondents were: 1. *marah* [angry], 2. *malu* [shame], 3. *kasihan* [sympathy, pity], and 4. *berani* [dare, to, to feel brave, willing to do something challenging]; whereas in the Californian sample, the first four ranks went to: 1. love, 2. stressed out, 3. happy, and 4. sorry. Shame was ranked only 49th in the Californian sample, that is, the majority rated it as an infrequent emotion. Fessler, *Shame in Two Cultures*, 214–15.

¹⁷ R.I. Levy *Tahitians: Mind and Experience in the Society Islands*, Chicago, 1973

and cultural processes. To gain insight into these cultural modeling processes, it would seem meaningful to examine the socialization of emotions, that is, to study how culture-specific emotion models are conveyed and acquired. How do children learn the "feeling rules" (Hochschild¹⁸) of their specific society? How do they acquire the sensitivity to shame that is accentuated so strongly in the Indonesian context? Which explicit and implicit forms of socialization are involved in this, and what is the significance of affective childrearing practices in general? Particular attention should be given to the last aspect, because from a neurobiological perspective, childrearing practices such as shaming, frightening, teasing, but also praising actually function with a strong affective arousal potential. They are particularly effective, because emotional experiences become particularly fixed in memory through the complex biochemical processes triggered by affective arousal.¹⁹ Nonetheless, there have still been no systematic studies on the relation between affective childrearing practices and the internalization of culture-specific emotion schemas.

With reference to the Indonesian context, it now becomes interesting to ask how far shame is learned through shaming. In the following, I shall present a few prototypical vignettes of the socialization of shame as well as socialization through shaming that were collected mostly by my colleague Susanne Jung in our research project on the socialization of emotions among the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra. Nonetheless, they can also be observed in a similar form among the Makassar as well as in other Indonesian societies.²⁰

The typical shame reactions/displays mentioned above such as looking away, cringing, hiding, and making oneself small or invisible are emphasized and trained at a very early stage of socialization among the Minangkabau. Even when 2-month-old infants turn their heads away in face-to-face interactions, it is claimed that they are "*malu*." Hence, expressions associated with shame are emphasized and marked as meaningful behavior at

¹⁸A. Hochschild «Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure», *American Journal of Sociology* 85, 1979, 551–75

¹⁹J. LeDoux *The Synaptic Self. How Our Brains Become Who We Are*, New York 2002; N. Quinn, «Universals of Childrearing», *Anthropological Theory* 5(4), 2005, 477–516; N. Quinn, «Cultural Selves», in J. LeDoux, J. Debiec, and H. Moss (eds.), *The Self: From Soul to Brain*, New York, 2003, 145–76

²⁰ I wish to thank the German Research Foundation (DFG) for funding the project "Sozialisation von Emotionen in einer indonesischen Gesellschaft" [Socialization of emotions in an Indonesian society].

a very early stage—as soon as an infant shows them by chance. "*Oh, he already knows shame; what a clever child,*" say adults in praise, thereby positively reinforcing the display of shame. Even before they are able to comprehend the contents of communication and the situational contexts, children already acquire culturally significant expression competencies through this implicit "*priming*." Such indirect priming processes almost prepare the ground—as Quinn has emphasized—for the later application of explicit childrearing measures, thereby making these more effective.²¹

Deliberate shame training commences with language acquisition, and increases successively as language skills mature. According to the Minangkabau, but also the Makassar, children can only learn shame/*malu* (*siri*) when they begin to comprehend, and this requires extensive language skills. As soon as a child either intentionally or unintentionally displays an undesired behavior, those present make a great fuss. They point to the child, laugh extremely theatrically, and purposefully make others aware of the child's misbehavior, by calling out, for example, "Look, look! He knows no shame! He's wearing torn trousers!" Or "Look! She's eating her rice with the wrong hand! She knows no shame!" Or "Look at him, he's not ashamed: He hasn't washed himself yet!" Any children exposed to public attention in such ways will generally react in the same way: They will cringe, lower their eyes, or put their hands in front of their faces; they will try to make themselves small and hide; or they will leave the scene at the first possible opportunity. In short, they do their best to get out of sight of the others.

This theatrical accentuation of child misbehavior, this public "focusing the eyes of the others" on undesirable behaviors sensitizes youth at an early age to how the others see them. These shaming practices train children systematically to view themselves continuously through the eyes of the others and to anticipate their potential reactions. From the perspective of developmental psychology, shame is one of the "higher" or so-called "second order emotions," that is, the emotions that only emerge at a later stage in ontogenesis (round about the age of 3 years). This is because they require more complex

²¹ See Quinn, *Universals*, 482–3

cognitive abilities, namely, "mind reading."²² It is only when individuals can empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others, that is, when they have developed a "theory of mind," that they become able to see themselves through the eyes of others. There has been completely no research on how far children growing up in societies with highly elaborated shame systems are able to empathize cognitively and emotionally with others at a significantly earlier stage or to a significantly greater degree than children growing up in cultural contexts that play down shame or "hypocognize" it, thereby assigning no particular importance to what others think of them.

From the age of 3–4 years onward, Indonesian children successively learn the complex rules of social etiquette. This means, first of all, that they acquire the "status shame" that is so important in the Indonesian context; that is, they have to learn in whose presence they have to feel and display shame. For children, this is quite a large circle of persons: All older (and thereby higher ranking) men and women who do not belong to their direct nuclear family should trigger *malu* feelings in children and lead them to keep still in their presence, to avoid eye contact, and generally behave as inconspicuously as possible. Hence, this is no longer learning a social rule through shaming, but learning to internalize shame as the appropriate emotional and expressive reaction in the presence of unfamiliar adults. Although this is also an outcome of the above-mentioned shaming practice, it is learned primarily through adults frightening children and responding to them angrily. If, for example, guests enter the house, cheerfully romping children are expected to immediately stop what they are doing and either leave the house or behave in a calm and inconspicuous manner. If they fail to do this, they are admonished: "*Do you know no shame? Should our guests become angry and fetch the police or the head of the village?*" At events that high-ranking personalities are expected to attend, children are told days in advance how angry these personalities will be if they see children who do not know how to behave themselves, thereby showing that they know no shame. Hence, strangers, older

²² I. Bretherton, «New Perspectives on Attachment relations: Security, Communication, and Internal Working Models», in J.D. Osofsky (ed.), *Handbook of infant development*; New York, 1061–1100; H. Heckhausen, «Emergent Achievement Behavior: Some Early Developments», in *The development of achievement motivation*, 1984, 1–32; Lewis, *Shame*, 92–93; D.J. Stipek, «A developmental Analysis of Pride and Shame», *Human development* 26, 1983, 42–54.

persons, and high-ranking persons are presented to children as potentially aggressive others in a variety of contexts, so that they basically feel uncertain, fearful, and ashamed in their presence.

The desired behaviors and expression signs that children (or fundamentally all younger persons) should display toward older and more high-ranking persons and that are viewed completely generally as polite and cultivated manners prove to be classic displays of shame: looking away or lowering one's eyes, reducing one's gestures and lowering one's posture, making oneself "small," moving to the periphery of the space or field of contact; that is, removing oneself from the sight of others, never speaking first, and answering questions in a quiet voice with down-turned eyes. However, this raises the question as to how far this display of shame toward higher ranking persons does not consolidate into mere gestures of deference and politeness, to pure expression conventions during the course of socialization. Do younger or lower ranking persons really experience shame in asymmetric social encounters? Are these, perhaps, merely feelings of embarrassment? According to Fessler's surveys in Sumatra (Bengkulu) and my own research, the presence of persons who are clearly of higher rank does trigger deep, physically experienced qualms in the persons of lower rank. Both Fessler's and my own informants reported that the *malu* feelings they experience when they have made a publicly observable mistake or have shown themselves to be incompetent in a situation differ only in degree and not in substance from the *malu* feelings that occur in the presence of persons who are indubitably superior.²³ It can be assumed that the above-mentioned childrearing practices contribute to a profound internalization of this "status shame" and that the feelings are correspondingly strong when differences in rank are large.

IV. Conclusion

The emotional dimension of shame, whose facets are viewed primarily from a historical perspective in this volume, continues to represent a central emotion in numerous contemporary societies as the example of Indonesia shows. As a "social fear" of losing standing in the "eyes of the others" and being excluded from the circle of significant others, shame motivates social conformity. It translates moral guidelines, behavioral

²³ Fessler, *Shame in Two Cultures*, 220 gives a clear example of this "status shame", see also pp 246–250.

norms, and even social hierarchies into individual, bodily perceived experiences. It makes the violation or transgression of social norms just as physical an experience as differences in vertical social status. By displaying shame, individuals signalize their moral integrity. Those who have broken social rules use their shame to signalize that they are aware of their misbehavior and are familiar with the social conventions. By admitting their own inadequacy, they simultaneously placate the justified anger of their fellows. Persons who signalize shame over the misbehavior of relatives (coshame) may also be wishing to placate the indignation and aggressiveness of the victim, but they are also showing that they themselves conform to the norms and possess integrity. Displays of shame in the context of asymmetric social relations represent forms of deference and thereby also subordination that may ensure that the lower ranking person gains the good will and support of the high-status persons. Put briefly, a marked sensitivity to shame, a context-sensitive and finely graded shame behavior, represents a significant emotional and thereby social competence in Indonesia. In contrast, persons who display shame only rarely and not to an adequate degree, are considered to be asocial and disturbed. Shame proves to be the social emotion par excellence in this context: a seismograph for social competence and integrity and thereby an important symbolic capital that ensures social cooperation and support.