

BOOK REVIEW

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Judith Rowbotham, Marianna Muravyeva and David Nash, eds, *Shame, Blame and Culpability: Crime and Violence in the Modern State*. London: Routledge, 2013. 228 + xiv pp. £90 hardback. ISBN 978-0-415-53722-3

In the introduction to this essay collection—the first to be published in the *Routledge SOLON series on Explorations in the Histories of Crime and Criminal Justice* - the editors define the key nouns in their title. ‘Shame’ refers to ‘essentially a public thing’ and ‘part of long-standing community strategies for management of offensive behaviour that may, or may not, have a formal legal dimension to it’. ‘Blame’ is defined as the allocation of ‘responsibility for “bad” behaviour among the players in an offending scenario, enabling punishments to be mediated according to the levels of blame allocated to those most responsible for the offending’. ‘Culpability’, finally, is seen here as ‘a more mechanistic process, located firmly within formal legal processes and requiring an assessment of “guilt”, rather than blame or shame’ (2). The ‘underlying theme’ of the diverse essays is using these ‘complex’ and ‘fluid’ (3) concepts to understand ‘strategies for managing justice’ (5). ‘Linear’ perspectives are rejected by arguing that modernising states - rather than replacing customarily-legitimated, community-imposed shame with rational, institutionalised forms of legalistic culpability - integrated older notions of shame into modern criminal justice systems in different ways in specific times and places. The 13 essays that follow the jointly authored introduction cast a wide net: alongside broad, ‘European’ focused chapters there are specific contributions on Scotland, Australia, France, Britain, Greece and Russia. The eras covered stretch from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century, with particular emphases on the early modern period and the nineteenth century.

The first, primarily theoretical section focuses on ‘shame’. Marianna Muravyeva considers early modern honour cultures from philosophical and judicial perspectives, especially the place of shame in criminal punishment and the legal codes that defined violations of (and provided means for repairing) honour. Antonella Bettoni explores early-modern, community-imposed shame and its changing legal position in institutionalising justice systems. David

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Nash sketches out a wide-ranging programme for shame research, exploring (and critiquing) existing perspectives influenced by the work of Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault.

The second section, on 'blame', leads off with Judith Rowbotham's analysis of the growing criminalisation of behaviour - especially violence - and the related shift from (community-defined) 'shame' toward (judicially determined) 'culpability'. 'Blame' served as the bridge in this process, and the media was a 'mediator between the official and the popular perspectives' on criminality (74). Neil Davie finds an enduring influence of eugenic thinking underpinned by Lombrosian ideas about the 'born criminal' in twentieth century criminology. Concluding the section is Barry Godfrey's clearly argued and fascinating study of the 'desistence' from criminality in Australia, with regard both to individuals (employing a 'criminal lives' perspective that has proven revealing elsewhere) and national identity.

The final section contains seven case studies exploring 'issues of authority in shame, blame and culpability'. Paul Friedland, addressing medieval and early modern France, makes an intriguing and convincing argument against seeing capital punishment as 'a coherent and unified concept' and suggests that 'the theoretical intent of punishment envisaged by jurists and government officials, the actual penal practices that developed over time, and the ways in which people watched executions, may have had little to do with one another' (112). Anne-Marie Kilday compares shaming rituals in Scotland - a society marked by what she sees as a distinctive 'preoccupation with female deviancy' (127) - with those of England: north of the border, these rituals survived longer, more often targeted women, involved greater brutality and featured more church participation and intermingling of community and judicial authority. Two contributions focus on honour and violence in Greece. Katerina Mousadakou, examining rape in the 1820s during the Greek revolution, finds continuities in the scepticism with which women's rape accusations were greeted and in preferences for community over state justice; however, unlike other crimes, tolerance for rape did not increase, punishments for it could be severe and a 'manly self-discipline' over 'emotions of cowardice and sensuality' (147) became central to 'genuine' revolutionary Greek masculine ideals. Aris Tsantiropoulos offers a lively survey of the discussions surrounding a series of revenge killings in a Cretan village on a single day in 1955, giving balanced attention to the different perspectives of the local community, the press and the justice system.

In the first of three Russian case studies, Julia Barlova examines debates surrounding poverty (and its melioration), in particular the tensions between a native 'paternalist' perspective (which tended away from stigmatisation) and a "blame" rhetoric' (154) that was partly imported from Western Europe (particularly Britain) and partly encouraged by the end

of serfdom and onset of industrialisation. Natalia Pushkareva explores gendered notions of honour and shaming in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries via the experiences of unchaste single women and unfaithful wives. She highlights not only regional differences but also the severer punishment of wives' infidelity, which contrasted with greater (and apparently growing) tolerance for premarital female sexual activity. Boris Kolonitsky considers insults against the royal family, finding that many defendants could reduce culpability for their offences by claiming drunkenness and that such insults were often 'strategically' employed in local disputes involving political or ethnic elements.

As a whole, the volume breaks new ground in incorporating eastern and southern Europe (regions rarely considered in English language crime historiography) into a comprehensive European perspective. The editors also deserve praise for emphasising long-term continuities and embedding 'crime' within broader phenomena such as forms of community self-policing, religious belief and state development. 'Shame', 'blame', and 'culpability' are unquestionably vital issues, and new light is cast on them in many of these essays. Nonetheless, the comment by one of the editors that shame has been 'surprisingly little studied' (43) goes rather too far. Shaming rituals (addressed in several of the chapters of this collection) have been researched and written about since the early days of social history, as have the closely related issues of changing attitudes toward violence and shifts in understandings of criminal responsibility. Similarly, the continuing vitality of community notions of justice well into the late nineteenth century could even be now seen as something of a historiographical consensus. Those scholars working within frameworks influenced by Elias or Foucault might, in addition, be surprised by (and wish to object to) the claims that their theories are 'locked into an overarching and descriptive thesis that somehow bypasses the nineteenth century' (45) and 'do not effectively acknowledge the existence, longevity or importance of shame within the nineteenth century, nor do they offer signposts or explanations for any existence that shame might possess within modernity' (46). Likewise, given that few historians of crime would today present justice systems as developing in a strictly linear, 'teleological' fashion, the editors' effort to stress their own opposition to such an interpretation finds them pushing rather energetically at an open door. Indeed, the repeated emphasis on 'fluidity' and 'complexity' in this volume is so much of a piece with current trends in cultural history that there might be moments when some readers will find themselves happy to find a contributor willing to risk 'linearity' for the benefit of interpretive clarity.

Relatedly, given the collection's empirical breadth, its three organising principles bear a significant conceptual load and could have been developed more robustly. The distinctions among them are not always consistently employed, and the way in which the emphasis on

historical *shifts among* these categories fits together with the editors' stress on an essential underlying *continuity of* 'shame' could have been more clearly drawn out. At times, the focus is on 'shame' as an emotion, at others on *shaming* as a social practice. While related, they are not the same, and since the psychology of 'shame' is not explored in any depth (despite an astute reference in Xavier Rousseau's preface to work on 'deep history' (xiv)) it is not clear precisely what kind of stable human mental capability is responsible for an emotion that can be triggered by such a wide variety of social practices. In the end, one is left with an overall impression of many intriguing parts moving in different directions (though it must be said that this is an inherent problem in widely ranging essay collections and not a specific critique of the editors).

Despite such overall criticism, it has to be said that the contributors to *Blame, Shame and Culpability* have clearly put their finger on something important: that shame and the need to apportion blame play important roles in defining and defending forms of social order in very divergent national and chronological contexts, whether in the revenge cultures of local communities, the legalistic mechanisms of state justice systems or the often lurid sensationalism of modern forms of media. The collection raises fascinating and worthwhile questions about the past, and several of its essays suggest valuable ways forward in answering them.