

Shameless and Guiltless

The Role of the Two Emotions in Making Ethical Decisions in Indonesia

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Setting up the scene

Since April 2012, the Indonesian government have started the campaign “Malu Pakai Bahan Bakar Minyak Subsidi” (Eng: Shame on Using State’s Subsidized Gasoline”). The government took this step to reduce the use of subsidized gasoline and encourage the use of normal gas especially for people who drives luxury cars.² Jero Wacik, the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources of Indonesia says, “Shame on you, if you are financially able yet still buy the subsidized gasoline. This subsidized gasoline is intended for the not haves (Detikfinance Website 2012 atau Centroone Website 2012).” As a result, many government official’s car are now using non-subsidized gasoline. These cars are recognizable from a large yellow sticker on the back of the car that says, “This car is not using subsidized gasoline.”

In another unrelated event, the judgement of ‘shameless’ was also used to describe Nurdin Halid, the ex-chair of the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI) who did not want to step down from his position despite the legal corruption charges that saw him behind the bars for 2 years (Detiknews Website 2004; Waspada Website 2007). He later continued his leadership from prison and stubbornly denied the corruption accusations in the Football Association itself. World football governing body FIFA finally banned him from running for the third period as chair because “a convict cannot lead a football organization (Kompas Website 2011).” Apparently, the public pressure (Liputan Enam Website 2011), FIFA’s advice, the establishment of another Football Association at national level to pressure him, and even the President’s comment himself (Pikiran Rakyat Website 2011) are not enough to make him feel guilty, let alone shameful. He said, “I will say this once more, Nurdin Halid will not step down because of pressure (Tribun News Website 2010).” His stance is completely different if we compare it to the resignation of the President of Germany Christian Wulff following a series of scandals that is not yet proven (CNN Website 2012) and the Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, following criticism of how he handled the aftermath of the tsunami and the crisis at the nuclear power plant (Guardian Website 2011).

Both stories have triggered me to write this paper. The burning question that came to me, while fuelling my car with the so-called subsidized gasoline, was, “Would I be considered shameless if I buy it?” Or, should I feel ashamed of buying the gasoline? If I were forced to feel ashamed for buying the subsidized gasoline, then what should Nurdin Halid feel in his

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² The Indonesian government subsidized its gas price and use fixed price as much as Rp. 4500 per liter (with the assumption of US\$ 1 is Rp. 9500). This is considered still below the normal world price which is Rp. See another explanation on the topic by Indonesian economist Kwik Kian Gie, <http://kwikkiangie.com/v1/2011/03/istilah-subsidi-bbm-menyebabkan-mengapa-dipakai-untuk-menaikkan-harga-lagi-artikel-1/> (accessed August 20th 2012).

case? And to a larger extent, what about the many corruption suspects in Indonesia that do not seem to feel embarrassed or ashamed even when they were found guilty?

The two unrelated issues bring us to the question that we will explore in this paper, “what is the relation of shame and guilt in Indonesian context and how do the two emotions help us in building a good ethical system?” The following question is, “how can theological and Christian ethical principles contribute to the first question?” This paper will try to answer the question by first describing the relation of shame and guilt, and then try to find out how Indonesians really use both terms in public sphere. We will also look at the theological basis of shame and guilt and will decide whether we can apply them in the context of Indonesian society.

Definition of shame and guilt

Shame and guilt are considered as part of human emotions. According to Ilona E. de Hooge (2008), “emotions are thought to arise after an evaluation (an appraisal) of an event as positively or negatively relevant to one’s goals or concerns” (see also Frijda, 1986). Thus, emotion is always connected with something or someone. Emotions can be divided into negative emotions and positive emotions. Shame and guilt are considered as emotions that come to us after a certain event occurred.

Let us first take a look at the meaning of the words from their linguistic and psychological point of view. Oxford dictionary explains shame as “painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour; a loss of respect or esteem; dishonour; */count noun/* a person, action, or situation that brings a loss of respect or honour (Oxford Dictionary Online, b.v. shame).” We have to notice that ‘shame’ in the English meaning has a connection with consciousness which demands a concept of moral norms from the self that comes as a result of the interaction with the society (Midgley 1991, 42-43).

In Indonesian, ‘shame’ or ‘malu’ can be described as ‘feeling bad’ or looking bad at one self because of something that was not right; or different from what is customary.” It can also be translated as “hesitant, respect, or displeased (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, s.v. malu).” We can already look at the difference between the meaning of the English and the Indonesian word. The Indonesian word has concern about what is customary, which involves other people and not only the conscious. The Indonesian ‘malu’ shows a different stress compared to the English word, that is more relational than individual. This difference has something to do with the cultural difference of both societies that we will discuss later on.

Meanwhile, guilt means “the fact of having committed a specified or implied offence or crime; a feeling of having committed wrong or failed in an obligation (Oxford Dictionary Online, b.v. guilt).” While Indonesian “salah” means “incorrect, made a mistake, doing something that is not supposed to be done, miss (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, s.v. salah).” This shows that guilt is more of a feeling after doing something that is wrong or not supposed to be done.

Actually both terms are often intertwined when it was used to describe emotion. Ruth Leys (2007, 11) shows the difference between the two, that “guilt concerns your actions, that is, what you do, or what you wish or fantasize you have done,” and “shame is held to concern not your actions but who you are, that is, your deficiencies and inadequacies as a person as these are revealed to the shaming gaze of the other.” Daniel Just (2010, 895) stresses this difference and says, “Unlike guilt that pertains to one’s actions and intentions, shame relates to one’s

affects and emotions.” In short, shame is more connected with the self, and guilt is connected with actions (Ying Wong & Jeanne Tsai 2007, 210).

Most researchers in psychology agree that shame holds a higher moral level than guilt (Scheff and Retzinger 1991, 65). Thomas J. Scheff (1990, 169) says, “In feeling shame, one experiences... the *disintegration of the self*, or its potential for disintegration.” While guilt is blaming your action, shame attacks your personality for your mistakes (Knight 1998). Kurt April and Boipelo Mooketsi shared their construction about the two terms (2010, 69-70):

“(1) Shame is, as opposed to guilt, a social emotion; (2) Shame is distinctively related to the entire self, guilt is tied to some specific behavior; (3) Shame is linked with ideals, whereas guilt concerns prohibitions; (4) Guilt and shame are internal affective states that often arise from similar situations, but have different effects on the individual; and (5) Shame is oriented towards the self, while guilt is oriented towards others.”

By knowing the relation and definition of shame and guilt, we can now move on to the next question, and that is how we use them in making moral decisions.

How Shame and Guilt are used in Different Context

Recent studies have shown that shame and guilt are differently used in different types of society: between the inter-connected society and the individualistic society. Most research about the topic has been done in the U.S. and as a result, the mainstream models of the relation between shame and guilt are mostly individualistic. The main model considers that shame is when a person is valued by the others, while guilt comes from the self, and usually followed by retribution. This means that moral decision that came from shame is a result of society-pressure, and guilt comes from the self.

Meanwhile, the more collectivistic culture sometimes finds that the two emotions are closely connected. This gives us another type of relation. In a society where the people are more connected to each other, such as Japan (Benedict 1946) and South Korea, shame is used more to point out mistakes rather than guilt (Wong & Tsai 2007, 212-214). Meanwhile, in individualistic society such as the European and North America, guilt is more effective as a moral regulatory. The reason for this is because other people’s approval is needed in shame based society, while the values have already synced in internally in guilt based society (You 1997, 57-58).

Shame in collective society is used more than in individualistic culture in the character education of the children rather than guilt. For instance, if a child is making a mistake, then the parents will be more likely to imply shaming techniques than guilt. Another example of moral values based on shame is that when people did mistake, it is most likely that they will think about the honor of the family rather than afraid of being guilty. Shame produces moral measurement for actions.

Both guilt and shame are present in a culture or person, and sometimes they both crossed each other’s path. In an inter-connected society, sometimes we cannot separate guilt from shame. A research on the Chinese vocabulary of shame and guilt has shown that some Chinese terms that mean shame are shown with ‘guilt’ character (Wong & Tsai 2007, 212-214; See Li et. Al., 2004).

Meanwhile, in Western society, shame is considered more negative than guilt because it attacks the personality and not the action. Moral value should come from the self, and according to the standard model, guilt brings the individual moral value. ‘Shame’ on the other hand only attack the person without encouraging a change of self or retribution. Tangney who has done research on the subject says, “Shame is an ugly feeling” (1991, 600).

The research of de Hooze, from the Netherlands, suggests that shame might have an interpersonal function as a moral emotion (2008, 48). This shows exactly that Western society still think of shame as something that is more destructive than guilt, at a personal level. In her research, de Hooze points why shame is a complex and important emotion. She says (72),

“Shame is perhaps the most important self-conscious emotion (M. Lewis, 2000; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984), playing a role in many personal and interpersonal aspects such as self-esteem, shyness, eating disturbances, depression, development, and self-regulation (Erikson, 1963; Harder, 1995; Harder, Cutler, & Rockart, 1992; Sanftner, Barlow, Marschall, & Tangney, 1995). It is an overwhelming emotion that is associated with feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, and of a damaged self-image (Ausubel, 1955; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1992). Experiences of shame mainly arise after moral transgressions or incompetences and are characterized by confusion in thought, inability to speak, and rumination (Keltner & Buswell, 1996; Miller, 1995; Orth, Berkling, & Burkhardt, 2006).”

This shows that shame is really important in forming moral decisions based on the self. While guilt is important in defining what is right from wrong in collective situation.

Comprehending an Indonesian Model of “Malu”, “Salah”

Now that we have looked at the understanding of shame and guilt, and how they are used in different context, it is now time to return to our earlier inquiry, what is shame and guilt in Indonesian context. We have seen that the word “malu/shame” is more relational, while “salah/guilt” involves a more legal sense. Based on the model of society, then Indonesia should be in the category of the inter-connected society, where the value of shame and guilt is inter-connected and shame is used more in moral values than guilt.

Based on this finding, we can agree that what the Indonesian government is doing in the subsidized gasoline case is trying to persuade people not to buy it with the ‘shame’ approach. I realized the reason why the government has taken this step of campaigning ‘shame culture’ in the case of subsidized gasoline is because they cannot prove anyone who is doing it guilty. They cannot arrest people legally for buying cheaper gasoline; thus the approach of the emotion side of ‘shame’ is made.

The second case however shows exactly how someone who has been proven guilty yet did not feel ashamed of his actions. It seems that his “shame” has been separated from “guilt”. This separation can be seen as remarkable considered the collectiveness of the Indonesian society. Nurdin Halid is not alone. There are many cases of corruption where suspects and convicts do not show their remorse or shame; i.e. Gayus Tambunan, Miranda Gultom, Angelina Sondakh, etc.

The government are now trying to create a shame culture to the people who are legally found guilty. The KPK (The Indonesian Anti-Graft Commission) has now tried to create a ‘shame’ culture for corruptors by forcing them to wear prisoner uniform. Similar act of creating a ‘shame’ culture also comes in the form of creating Korupedia.org, which is a kind of Wikipedia website for corruptors. The purpose of these acts is to bring back the ‘shame’ to people who have been proven guilty.

How can such separation between shame and guilt happen in the inter-connected society? Who should create moral values of shame? Can the government campaign for creating ‘shame’ culture while some people in the government who were found guilty are not ashamed of their actions? What is the best way to bring back ‘shame’ in Indonesian society? Have Indonesian society moved to a more individualistic society where guilt is the norm and not shame?

A Theological Understanding of Shame and Guilt

In Christianity, shame can be connected with conscious. It is also recognized as the voice of intuition, the *Higher Self*, the *God-Self*, and the *Holy Spirit*. However, human also have the wrong intuition which is called ego (Bloch 2002, 13-14).

We will now turn to how Christian ethics and theology can shed light into our question of shame and guilt. We will try to look at the origin of shame and guilt in the bible and how they are used in the first Christian communities.

There are some biblical resources that have given us the idea of shame and guilt in the Bible. The story of the fall is seen as the beginning of shame (Sphar 1997). Asa Sphar explains that after eating the fruit of wisdom, "Not only were Adam and Eve ashamed of being seen by God, but they were also ashamed of being seen by one another (1997, 68)."

First Christian congregations are more connected with the ideas of honor and shame instead of guilt (Meeks 1993, 39-42). However, the honor that they are protecting is not from the larger society that has cast them out, but rather from the new family of Christian community itself (Watson 2010, 147-149).

Biblical findings show that the honor culture, which is more applied in connection with shame and guilt as inseparable components, is the basic moral values in the first Christian community. However, the extent of the community is limited to the Christian community itself. They did not consider other society's valuation at large is important to their concept of honor. For them, the virtues of Jesus are considered higher than the norms of the society at large.

Conclusion

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