"Shame at being human" as a transformative political concept and praxis: Pedagogical possibilities

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Abstract
Feminist theorizations have recovered the ethical and political value of shame, suggesting that shame operates not only as a mechanism of normalization and social exclusion but also as a primary affect of intersubjective life. This paper argues that this theorization can be enriched by putting into conversation Agamben's and Deleuze's interactions with Primo Levi on shame as an ambivalent affect. What is shameful, for both Deleuze and Agamben, is not simply the sense of being judged by others as unworthy, unwanted, or wrong, but rather the awareness of one's complicity in Others' suffering. This essay explores the pedagogical openings of shame as the inability of the self to respond to Others' suffering. The paper concludes by suggesting that certain experiences of shame can be transformative in that they create pedagogical possibilities that could subvert negative referents of shame. What the author terms *critical pedagogies of shame* pay explicit attention to the affective complexities of the narratives of oppression and suffering that enter the classroom and interrogate in particular the trappings of normative narratives of shame.

Keywords
politics of shame, pedagogy, Primo Levi, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben

In his book *If This is a Man/The Truce*, Levi (2000) talks about the days following his liberation from Auschwitz. The book opens with the arrival on 27 January 1945 of four Russian soldiers at the concentration camp that has been hastily abandoned by the Germans. Levi was with another man and they were in the process of taking

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the body of one of the men in their group to the common grave, when he saw the Russians approach. This is what he writes:

> They were four young soldiers on horseback, who advanced along the road that marked the limits of the camp, cautiously holding their sten-guns. When they reached the barbed wire, they stopped to look, exchanging a few timid words, and throwing strangely embarrassed glances at the sprawling bodies, at the battered huts and at us few still alive. [...]

> They did not greet us, nor did they smile; they seemed oppressed not only by compassion but by a confused restraint, which sealed their lips and bound their eyes to the funereal scene. It was that shame we knew so well, the shame that drowned us after the selections, and every time we had to watch, or submit to, some outrage: the shame the Germans did not know, that the just man experiences at the other's crime; the feeling of guilt that such a crime should exist, that it should have been introduced irrevocably in the world of things that exist, and that his will for good should have proved too weak or null, and should not have availed in defense. (Levi, 2000, pp. 187–188; also cited in Agamben, 2005, pp. 87–88).

This "confused restraint" and the "embarrassed glances" or "the shame that drowned us after the selections," in Levi's words, is the shame of being a *witness* to a crime of unimaginable scale, the shame one feels for being unable to have done anything to have prevented the unthinkable. Witnessing – understood as an act of seeing or perceiving that produces a responsibility to an event – is at the heart of Levi's account of shame, and also in Agamben's (2005) reading in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Regarding this mutual collective shame that "we knew so well," writes Levi, "it is foolish to think that human justice can eradicate it" (Agamben, 2005, p. 189). As La Caze (2013) explains in her analysis of Levi's account: "The just person feels shame at the actions of others, whereas the ones who have committed the crimes are shameless; they are not concerned with justice or how they appear in the eyes of the world. The gap left by their shamelessness is filled by the shame of the victims and witnesses" (p. 91).

Feminist theorizations in recent years have recovered the ethical and political value of shame (e.g., see Bewes, 2011; Hutchinson, 2008; Leys, 2007; Munt, 2008; Nussbaum, 2004; Probyn, 2005; Sedgwick-Kosofsky, 2003; Tarnopolsky, 2010), suggesting that shame operates not only as a mechanism of normalization and social exclusion but also as a primary affect of intersubjective life with revolutionary potential. The revolutionary potential of shame is grounded in the idea that both suppression of affect in general and negative associations with it in particular are closely aligned with the project of patriarchy. Engaging with shame, then, can make an important contribution to feminism and its vision for social and political transformation.

For example, Probyn (2005) suggests that if shame is felt for the right reasons, negative referents of shame may be alleviated and lead to transformation. Also, Sedgwick-Kosofsky (2003) argues that shame is not merely a painful feeling of

social exclusion, but it can also function as a protective mechanism of defense against the contingencies of social and political life. Guenther (2011, 2012), in particular, discusses this ambivalent nature of shame in Levi's account to highlight that shame operates both as a mechanism of normalization and exclusion of oppressed groups and as an ethical and political tool in evoking a moral response to the Other and providing a starting point for resistance (e.g., against patriarchy, racism, nationalism, etc.). Both of these dimensions of shame are present in Levi's quotation at the beginning of this paper: the shame being used against camp prisoners to exclude and control them, and the shame felt at witnessing unimaginable acts and the emergence of ethical responsibility despite the inability to prevent wrongs.

Woodward (2000) articulates this experience as "traumatic shame," namely, the "shame that cannot be transformed into knowledge" (p. 213), because it is "the sign of a catastrophic psychic wound and a devastating rupture of the social bond" (p. 236). Woodward suggests that even the most radical proliferation of shame would not necessarily be turned into action-oriented empathy, solidarity, or political change. This is not to dispute feminist efforts to recover shame's ethical and political value; shame is of interest as an ethical and political phenomenon to the degree it signifies individual and collective responsibility and opens spaces for resistance and transformation. However, the notion of traumatic shame raises questions about the pedagogical possibilities that can be made available in situations in which shame silences, excludes, and forces people to witness the limits, or even dissolution, of human subjectivity (Guenther, 2012). By pedagogical possibilities, I refer to the extent to which shame can be made part of pedagogy; pedagogy is understood here as both a discipline and a practice. As shame tends not to be part of pedagogy, the problem posed in this paper is: Can educators invent *pedagogies of shame* that are both critical and make a difference—namely, pedagogical practices that are politically transformative—if, according to Woodward, even the most radical proliferations of shame do not necessarily lead into some sort of transformation?

In responding to this provocation, this paper invokes Agamben's and Deleuze's interactions with Primo Levi regarding the ambivalent affect of the "shame at being human"—a phrase Deleuze (1995) associates with Levi's (1988) *The Drowned and the Saved* (although such a phrase does not appear there, according to Bewes [2011])—the shame of being unable to stop the deaths inflicted by other human beings. In his discussion of Levi's writings on the survivors of the Shoah, Agamben (2005) addresses shame as the more fundamental affect and an ethico-ontological question concerning the subject's relation to its own being and to others (Guenther, 2011, 2012). What is shameful, for both Deleuze and Agamben, is not simply the sense of being judged by others as unworthy, unwanted, or wrong, but rather the awareness of one's complicity in Others' suffering. This paper suggests that feminist theorizations of shame can be enriched by putting into conversation Agamben's and Deleuze's interactions with Primo Levi on shame as an ambivalent affect. The theoretical ground of this conversation can be used, then, to explore the pedagogical openings of shame as the inability of the self to respond to Others' suffering.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part offers a brief genealogy of shame in contemporary feminist and political discourses, discussing in particular the ambivalence of shame. The second part reviews Agamben's discussion of shame through his reading of Levi; this part draws on Guenther's (2012) analysis, which highlights Agamben's ontological claim that shame is structured through a double movement of subjectification and desubjectification; my own analysis expands the discussion of how to overcome the limitations of this claim in order to constitute a biopolitics of resistance rooted in an ethics of alterity. The third part presents Deleuze's interaction with Primo Levi to talk about shame and shame-lessness (the latter understood as indifference or insensibility) as a powerful affect toward *seeing* (or failing to see) what is intolerable. In this respect, shame has the potential to be an ethical and political affect because it disrupts commonsensical and normative ways of being in the world. Finally, the last part of the paper discusses the transforming power of the notion that ''shame is already a revolu-tion'' (O' Donnell, 2017, p. 1) in the context of pedagogy as both a discipline and a practice. In particular, my conceptualization of shame as a transformational con-cept serves two important purposes in both scholarly conversations and pedagogi-cal activities: First, it enables educators to reconsider theoretically the transformative potential of ''the shame at being human'' in light of the affective complexities of traumatic shame; and second, it creates pedagogical openings for activities that engage students in acts of resistance and solidarity toward Others who suffer.

The ethical and political ambivalence of shame

Shame has been reevaluated in recent years by feminist and other social theorists and philosophers who argue that it is the affect that most reveals our orientation to and relationality with others (Guenther, 2011; O'Donnell, 2017). In general, these theoretical contributions emphasize that the relationality of shame is crucial in identifying the political and ideological mechanisms through which one is socia-lized to experience (or not) shame (e.g., for one's national belonging or in-group actions); as such, shame is part of the process of becoming a subject in relation to others (Tarnopolsky, 2010). For example, Scheff and Retzinger (1991) consider shame as a master emotion because of its part in nearly all daily acts—individual and collective ones—comprising humiliation, discomfort, rejection, failure, and insecurity, especially in relation to others with whom we may be in conflict (see also, Scheff, 1994). Also, Sedgwick-Kosofsky (2003), who draws on the work of Tomkins (1995), argues that shame is a primary affect of intersubjective life, thus it needs to be understood as a social and political emotion—one that is not only intrapsychic or merely a painful feeling of social exclusion but also an affect that attaches to and intensifies the meaning and feeling of who we are. Tomkins and Sedgwick-Kosofsky understand shame as fundamental to selfhood in rather pro-found ways. So too, Ahmed (2004), who writes of the necessity to recognize ''what shame *does* to the bodies whose surfaces burn with the apparent immediacy of its affect'' (p. 103, added emphasis). For all these scholars in affect studies, shame is

very much about bodily surfaces, which has implications for the educational context and the potential for critical pedagogies, as I discuss later in the paper.

One of the most challenging issues in the literature on shame is its distinction from guilt. Shame and guilt are almost invariably paired together, but there are important differences that are not limited to the anthropological distinction between shame cultures (Japan is given as the prime example) and guilt cultures (e.g., Western cultures) (Woodward, 2000). These differences can be identified at various levels (see Zembylas, 2008). At a chronological level, it is argued that in the course of moral development, shame should yield to guilt—a five-year-old, for instance, is far too young to feel guilt (Woodward, 2000). At a historical level, shame is regarded as the more primitive emotion, one that in the normal course of things should be replaced by the more complex and modern emotion of guilt (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991). This notion is based on Freud's theorization that guilt indicates the internalization of values as opposed to shame, which shows the external disapproval by others; thus the ancient Greek culture (and Japan too) is motivated by shame to avoid disgrace, whereas modern Western civilization internalizes convictions of right and wrong and socializes people to feel guilt (Scheff, 1994). There is, of course, the counterproposition by Elias (1978) that there has been no decrease in shame, but rather an increase in undercover shame—that is, there is now more shame than formerly, but much less awareness of it. Finally, at a philosophical level, it is suggested that one who feels guilt acknowledges that he or she made a specific error; when one feels ashamed, his or her entire being is attacked (Forrest, 2006; Williams, 1993). In other words, wrongful acts lead to guilt; shame follows from the sense that these acts are offensive to one's ethical being, leaving one questioning him or herself (Benade, 2015).

The concept of survivor guilt has become a major aspect of Holocaust historiography and pedagogy, especially after Primo Levi's memoirs and interviews with survivors. Over the years, scholars (e.g., Langer, 1999) have problematized survivor guilt, suggesting that it deflects responsibility from perpetrators to victims. Leys (2007) considers this debate over Holocaust survivors' guilt as a phenomenon that has broader culture significance and suggests that "the change from a culture of guilt to a culture of shame in Western thinking about the emotions is highly significant and has important consequences" (p. 4). Leys observes that the shift from guilt to shame can also be understood in the context of broader developments in theories around affect and trauma. For example, the development of shame theories, according to Leys, represents a shift from psychoanalytic emphasis on the survivors' emotions and intentions toward an emphasis on identity, responsibility, and differences in personal experience.

Two of the most important philosophical articulations of the nature of guilt and shame that are valuable in my analysis here are found in the work of Jaspers and Arendt (La Caze, 2013). La Caze (2013) discusses their ideas "to highlight how perceptions of guilt and shame have shifted from perpetrators to victims" (p. 86). Writing about German guilt in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Shoah, Jaspers (1947/2001) defines guilt as a feeling of culpability, that is, a felt recognition and signal of collective responsibility that we have done something

wrong. Arendt (1964/2003), on the other hand, criticizes the notion of collective guilt on the grounds that it is a way of evading guilt, which is always individual. So the articulation of guilt and shame, argues La Caze (2013), has to take into account the relation to responsibility: In cases of collective political responsibility, according to Arendt, it is more likely to feel shame, rather than guilt, because shame is an acknowledgment of shared responsibility for moral wrongdoing.

Like Arendt, Levinas (1932/2002) has elaborated responsibility as shame—understood as a feeling of remorse and culpability for the suffering of others, whether or not someone is personally responsible for this suffering (Guenther, 2011). Levinas is careful to disassociate shame from guilt: Guilt connotes a failure to do the right thing in a particular instance, whereas shame connotes a responsibility much more thoroughgoing and inescapable (Murphy, 2004). As Levinas (1989) writes about responsibility and shame in relation to the horrors of the Second World War and the Shoah, "My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?" (p. 82). Shame, for Levinas, then, is founded upon the solidarity with others, which obliges us to open up to the Other and take responsibility to respond before the face of the suffering Other (O'Donnell, 2017). In this sense, explains Guenther (2011), "the ethical shame which the Other provokes in me does not make me feel stuck to myself; rather, it opens a way of getting un-stuck from my own suffocating relation to being" (p. 32).

Other scholars—especially feminist, antiracist, and postcolonial thinkers (e.g., Bartky, 1990; Bewes, 2011; Munt, 2008; Probyn, 2005)—have connected the experience of shame to that of patriarchy and oppression. Oppression means that the Other's look is even more important (La Caze, 2013). Bartky (1990), for example, argues that shame implies an internalized audience that judges women and Others in oppressive cultures; shame may thus involve the recognition that the oppressed have failed in some way. In addition, if we feel shame about oppressed Others for failing to do something to relieve their suffering, we do so because we have failed to approximate a social and political ideal about the Other; thus shame, in this sense, is the loss of indifference (Ahmed, 2004). Once again, then, shame is recognized as an ambivalent affect in the sense that it is both a negative self-assessment and a form of witnessing that involves accepting ethical responsibility both for the suffering of others and their freeing from traumatic shame (Locke, 2007).

Consequently, it may be argued that shame can play a constructive role in sensitizing us toward actions that can transform what brought shame upon us in the first place or caused others shame (Tarnopolsky, 2010). For example, queer theorists have turned to the affect of shame to rethink queer politics in the 21st century and subvert the negative qualities of shame (Holmes, 2015). As Holmes suggests, the negative and isolating qualities that are constitutive of the affect of shame are negated when it is confessed, as in the case of gay pride; shame seems to dissipate when it is made public or when it is shared. It is important to highlight here, of course, that unlike the criminal acts of the Second World War, the shame

that such people feel in a heteronormative society is culturally inscribed. Thus, the denial of shame for being gay is simultaneously a self-affirmation for the collective body and a declaration of its self-pride (Probyn, 2005). The point I wish to highlight here is that the recognition of shame—that is culturally inscribed or brought on us as a result of circumstances beyond our control—can sensitize us to acknowledge "constructive" aspects of shame.

More importantly, though, as Probyn (2005) emphasizes, shame does more than sensitizing us, because it has the potential to develop ethical and political action toward transformation. As she writes: "[S]hame makes us question what we are feeling, the nature of the loss of interest, and fundamentally... who we are, as a reevaluation of the self" (Probyn, 2005, p. 64). Thus, shame is important "to discussions and debates about how to deal with pasts that could be called shameful; and to visions of life curtailed by the idea that there is something intrinsically wrong with feeling shame" (Probyn, 2005, p. xiii). Such a view of shame makes possible a space of solidarity that transcends feelings of resentment and anger invested in traumatic shame. As such, shame offers ethical and political leverage, "one that... has its own, powerfully productive and powerfully metamorphic possibilities" (Sedgwick-Kosofsky, 2003, p. 65). This understanding of shame moves away from essentialist notions of shame as negative self-assessment and offers a productive conception of shame that is also constitutive of new forms of ethical and political subjectivity.

All in all, there are two senses of shame that are relevant in this paper, especially in relation to the politics of shame. One is the sense of shame that feminists, antiracist, and postcolonial thinkers have argued that women and oppressed others are more likely to experience in oppressive situations; the other sense of shame is more relevant to Arendt and Levinas, namely, the moral shame and responsibility that someone may feel in relation to a wrong they or others have done (La Caze, 2013). My aim in discussing these two senses of shame here is to highlight the ethical and political ambivalence of shame as the feeling that expresses our entanglement with others in its potential for both negative self-assessment and productive engagement for transformation (Guenther, 2011). As I will also argue later in the paper, it is this ambivalence of shame that constitutes a major resource of pedagogical possibilities. In the next part of the paper, I talk about this ambivalence of shame in Agamben's discussion of Primo Levi's account of surviving the concentration camp.

Reading Primo Levi's account of surviving the camp: Agamben's approach to shame

One of the most illuminating examples of the relation between shame and subjectivity is found in Primo Levi's account of surviving the experience of imprisonment in Auschwitz. In a chapter entitled "Shame" in his book *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi (1988) looks back on the incidents he described in his book *If This is a Man/The Truce* (2000) showing the incarceration of prisoners, identifying a paradox to which he attributes feelings of shame and guilt. The survivor of Auschwitz,

says Levi, is caught between *either* his experience of suffering which has stripped him of the tools to talk about it *or* his ability to speak, in which case his eloquence testifies to the fact that he has not experienced the full horror (Bewes, 2011). Levi (1988) acknowledges that the shame of which he speaks has this paradoxical structure born of the fact that while it is an experience of the self, it has simultaneously a relational element because it is as much about others (who perished in the camps or survived or even hear the story afterward); shame, in this sense, is an affect embedded into the social world. It is an almost universal feeling among survivors of not having acted—"of having omitted to offer help", as Levi (1988, p. 78) writes—and it is of no help in judging the ethical worth of the person who suffers it.

Agamben (2005) begins his discussion of shame with the passage introduced at the beginning of this paper, that is, Levi's (2000) description of one incident which refers to the reaction of the first Russian soldiers who liberated Auschwitz. In this passage, the affect of shame is highlighted as an experience felt among the soldiers who came to liberate the camp, "that shame we knew so well," writes Levi, "the shame the Germans did not know" (p. 188). Agamben (2005, p. 21) reads this passage in the background of Levi's (1988) remarks on the "gray zone"; at this point, Levi was focusing on Kapos (prisoner functionaries in the camps) and how they were pitted against their fellow prisoners in order to maintain the favor of the SS. The zone is gray precisely because the oppressed were forced by the system to become oppressors themselves. Initially, Agamben praises Levi for his courage to enter into an unexplored territory of ethics and address the ethical implications of this gray zone. However, later in his text, Agamben is dissatisfied because Levi's discussion of the gray zone does not engage in a description of the logic of the camps as such, but rather those inhabitants who acted as Kapos (Guenther, 2012). As Guenther notes, Agamben criticizes Levi for two reasons: First, because Levi links guilt and shame; and second, because Agamben believes Levi cannot "master" his shame (Agamben, 2005, p. 88) since Levi links it to small "excusable" incidents in the camp he deeply regrets (see also La Caze, 2013, p. 91).

Moreover, Agamben (2005) is critical of shame as a feeling of responsibility for a crime that one did not personally commit, thus adopting Arendt's position that personal responsibility makes sense for crimes actually committed (Guenther, 2012). He is, therefore, suspicious of the notion of collective guilt because he sees it as a sign of an inability to handle an ethical problem (Agamben, 2005, p. 94) as well as a way to avoid specific responsibility and punishment. Levi (1988) agrees that guilt could only be inherited in a metaphorical sense and he is not sure that the survivor feels guilty for having taken the place of another. As he writes: "I do not know, and it does not much interest me to know, whether in my depths there lurks a murderer, but I do know that I was a guiltless victim and I was not a murderer" (Levi, 1988, p. 48).

In her analysis of Agamben's discussion of Levi and shame, Guenther (2012) argues that "Agamben seeks to move 'beyond good and evil' from the ethical register of innocence and guilt towards the ontological register of subjectification and desubjectification" (p. 63). Agamben (2005) argues that desubjectification (i.e.,

the collapse of the subject because of its suffering or death) and subjectification (i.e., the realization of one's presence to him or herself) are basic to subjectivity, suggesting that subjectivity and shame are linked. In other words, Agamben theorizes shame as an ontological affect, because it is not only concerned with particular acts or aspects of subjective being, but with our "very existence" (Guenther, 2012, p. 63). Guenther (2012) adopts this ontological claim about shame but she highlights its transformative elements:

> The importance of shame in this context is its emphasis on *relations* rather than acts: I feel shame not because of what I have done, but rather because others matter to me, and because I care what they think of me. [. . .] This is why shame can function as a site of resistance, a feeling for justice even in the midst of radical injustice: because it confirms the root of responsibility in our relations with others. Even if it is physically impossible to make good on these responsibilities, and even if the ones who are actually guilty absolutely refuse to carry their burden of responsibility, the response of shame holds open the possibility that things could be otherwise, that there is still some trace of meaningful ethical relation. (p. 64; original emphasis)

In this sense, Guenther moves beyond Agamben's ontological claim and offers an alternative analysis of shame as a feeling of *intersubjectification* rather than a process of simultaneous subjectification and desubjectification. Thus, for example, when Levi refers to "the same shame" between the soldiers who liberated Auschwitz and the prisoners who witnessed and suffered unspeakable inhumanities in the camp, he speaks to the capacity of feeling responsibility for crimes committed by others—not because prisoners and liberators have entered a "gray zone," but rather from a feeling of justice and intersubjectification with others. It is this feeling, suggests Guenther, that constitutes the basis for ethical and political resistance to racist, sexist, colonialist, and other forms of oppression.

La Caze (2013) suggests that Agamben's discussion of shame has revealed an important point about the nature of shame and its experience by members of oppressed groups. As she writes: "While the situation is one of humiliation—it is the behavior of one person demeaning, degrading and menacing another—when the person is a member of an oppressed group, they are likely to transform their experience into one of guilt or shame, to direct the pain that might otherwise be felt as indignation or anger against themselves" (p. 93). The survivor guilt or shame described by Levi is an expression of "a profound experience of oppression, violence, abuse and humiliation" (La Caze, 2013, p. 93). This sort of response, maintains Guenther (2012), raises the possibility of "a biopolitics of resistance rooted in the ethics of alterity" (p. 75), one that takes as its starting point the relationality with the Other rather than with subjectivity manifested as subjectification and desubjectification. Even when exposed to unspeakable suffering and forced to steal from others to secure one's own survival, Guenther (2012) notes, "the subject retains a relation to alterity which provides a starting point, however minimal, for resistance. [. . .]. . . a degree of resistance against everything that violates and exploits it: torture, poverty, humiliation, slavery, racism, and all the other ways

that human beings have created to destroy one another'' (p. 75). All in all, Agamben's interaction with Levi makes a significant contribution to articulating the ethical and political implications of shame; the recognition of these implications opens important pedagogical possibilities, as discussed in the last part of the paper.

The politics of shame in Deleuze's reading of Levi

Like Agamben, Deleuze's interest in shame and shamelessness—understood as indifference or insensibility—is developed against the backdrop of the horrors of the 20th century (O'Donnell, 2017). As Smith (2007) observes, there are three occasions where Primo Levi is cited explicitly in Deleuze's philosophy: *Negotiations* (1995), Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* (1994), and during an interview of Deleuze with Claire Parnet. The quotations found in *Negotiations* and *What is Philosophy?* will constitute my focus in the present paper, as shown below:

> I was very struck by the passages in Primo Levi where he explains that Nazi camps have given us ''a shame at being human.'' Not, he says, that we're all responsible for Nazism, as some would have us believe, but that we've all been tainted by it: even the survivors of the camps had to make compromises with it, if only to survive. There's the shame of there being men who became Nazis; the shame of being unable, not seeing how to stop it; the shame of having compromised with it; there's the whole of what Primo Levi calls this ''gray area.'' [. . .]. What's so shameful is that we've no sure way of maintaining becomings, or still more of arousing them, even within ourselves. How any group will turn out, how it will fall back into history, presents a constant ''concern.'' (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 172–173)

> Of course, there is no reason to believe that we can no longer think after Auschwitz, or that we are responsible for Nazism in an unwholesome culpability that, moreover, would only affect the victims. As Primo Levi said, they will not make us confuse the victims with executioners. But, he says, what Nazism and the camps inspire in us is much more or much less: ''the shame of being a man'' (because even the survivors had to collude, to compromise themselves). [. . .] Nor is it only in the extreme situations, described by Primo Levi that we experience the shame of being human. We also experience it in insignificant conditions, before the meanness and vulgarity of existence that haunts democracies, before the propagation of these modes of existence and of thought-for-the-market, and before the values, ideals and opinions of our time. [. . .] This feeling of shame is one of philosophy's most powerful motifs. We are not responsible for the victims but responsible before them. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 106–108)

There are two important issues emerging from these quotations: First, Deleuze considers the feeling of shame as one of philosophy's most powerful motifs, because it has important implications for our ethical encounters with others. Deleuze uses Levi's concept of ''the shame of being a man'' to emphasize shame

as a powerful affect that relates to *being* and *becoming*. The concept of shame is not only an experience of the subject's shameful situation but also a powerful basis that enables new capacities for ethical connections with others (Bewes, 2011; Smith, 2007). Second, as Smith (2007) notes, Deleuze reads Levi as having recognized that invoking transcendental moral questions (e.g., What is Good? What is Evil?) is inadequate and diminishing inasmuch as they obscure access to singular events conditioning them. In other words, Deleuze's reading of Levi does not focus on the shame of the survivor who has to make compromises to survive, but rather on what Levi (1988) calls the "shame of the world," when "those who, faced by the crime of others or their own, turn their backs so as not to see it and not feel touched by it" (p. 65). This is the shame of the contemporary everyday, rather than a transcendental shame which represents Nazism as a singular event (Smith, 2007).

O'Donnell (2017) reminds us that on a number of occasions, Deleuze recalls how moved he is by Levi's short phrases "the shame of being human" and "shame of the world." Deleuze's emphasis on shame as the contemporary everyday, suggests Smith (2007), does not seek to voyeuristically represent a survivor's shame, but rather it seeks to connect the "shame of the world" as a collective symptom with the individual's "shame of being a man." The connection of these two phrases by Deleuze (1995) tells us that shame is an ethical encounter with the Other denoting that we are all tainted by what we humans have done to one another—not in the sense of being guilty, but rather because of failing to *see* ourselves as connected to others. "Shame marks our interdependence," writes O'Donnell (2017), as "we are beings of relation, or, to use Deleuze's terminology, we are becoming-other" (p. 10). The Deleuzian reading of Levi, then, is less focused on "being seen or judged by the Other, than with one's indifference to the Other, and one's capacity to buffer oneself against what is intolerable in the world" (O'Donnell, 2017, p. 7). For Deleuze, part of the problem is coming to see, feel, and sense; therefore, if shame reveals our ethical relations to others, it can help resist individualism by operating at the level of affect. As O'Donnell (2017) further explains:

> It begins with the moment that one *sees* the intolerable. In this respect, the kind of shame that involves seeing rather than being seen does not involve feeling trapped, excluded or silenced, because it is not a personal affair. If one has fallen short, it is not because of who one is, but because of how one has been blind to others and to the possibilities of life. In this respect, shame has the potential to be a proto-political and proto-ethical affect because it suspends and precludes the ready invocation of clichés and explanations. Shame reveals 'how it is', how this is impossible, but also how from such impossibility, something new may emerge to disrupt the dominant logic. (p. 7)

Shame, then, is not an ethics predicated upon some sort of obligation towards the Other, but rather an *event*—to use Deleuze's (1990, 1993) terminology— in which the capacity of *seeing* can arise with the experience of shame as a point of departure for a new kind of ethical relation with others and the world. In this sense, shame is a deeply political affect—affect understood as the capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze, 1988)—that disrupts affective life in order to create spaces for different

ways of seeing, being, and feeling in the world. Shame can be a "precipitative force," says O'Donnell (2017), "as it interrupts, however briefly, the stupidities, cruelties and clichés that foster insensibility and indifference to life, to possibility and to becoming" (p. 8). Deleuze's relational and political understanding of shame makes an important contribution to my discussion here because it creates openings for new forms of relationality and solidarity. This is precisely how shame can become a pedagogical force of motivating us to *see* people and things differently. This is also why I argue, in the last part of this essay, that educators would gain a lot by turning to shame as the starting point for a renewed ethics and politics of alterity.

Pedagogical possibilities

My aim in invoking Agamben's and Deleuze's interactions with Primo Levi regarding shame has been to articulate the ethical and political implications of shame as an affect in social and political life. There is much to learn from bringing together into conversation these thinkers, but there are two important interventions that can be particularly productive in rethinking what I have previously termed "pedagogies of shame" (Zembylas, 2008). First, both Agamben and Deleuze highlight that shame involves ambivalence that not only expresses painful experiences in ethical encounters with others but also a sense of power and capacity to act in solidarity. "The ambivalence of shame," writes Guenther (2011), "attests to the irreducibility of our exposure to others, both as the site of relationality and ethical responsibility, and as the site of its exploitation through oppression" (p. 38). Shame is possible precisely because others matter to us; this is why, argues Guenther, oppression is not the last word on shame but one of its ambivalent possibilities. Another possibility is the provocation opened for critical interrogation and transformation of shame in pedagogically productive ways. But what is the basis of this provocation?

Given that the transformation of modes of existence is not simply a cognitive matter but must take place at the level of affect, shame can be a potentially productive and critical affect (O'Donnell, 2017). Shame is, in this respect, a political affect that has revolutionary power; in fact, O'Donnell reminds us how Marx considered shame already *as* revolution:

> This, too, is a revelation, although a perverted one. It is a truth that at least teaches us to recognize the hollowness of our patriotism, the unnatural character of our government, and to turn our faces away in shame. Smiling, you look at me and ask, "What is gained thereby? No revolution results from shame." I answer, "Shame already is a revolution." Shame actually is the victory of the French Revolution over German patriotism by which the Revolution was conquered in 1813. Shame is a type of anger, introverted anger. And if a whole nation were to feel ashamed it would be like a lion recoiling in order to spring. (Marx, 1967, p. 204 in O'Donnell, 2017, p. 13)

O'Donnell (2017) writes that Marx's statement concerning shame already being a revolution indicates an affect that involves tension, energy, and ambivalence;

although specific action might be delayed or suspended as one does not know how to respond, there is no doubt that some sort of response will come. Shame, then, performs an important role in cultivating a revolutionary feeling and action-orientation that can be subversive and transformative. As Muñoz and Duggan (2009) suggest, ''feeling revolutionary'' is a

> feeling that our current situation is not enough, that something is indeed missing and we cannot live without it. Feeling revolutionary opens up the space to imagine a collective escape, an exodus, a 'going-off script' together. [...] It is not about announcing the ways things *ought* to be, but, instead, imagining what things *could* be. (p. 278; original emphasis)

The second important pedagogical intervention made by invoking Agamben's and Deleuze's interactions with Primo Levi highlights shame as a way of *seeing*, rather than having to do with who one *is*, or how one feels one is *seen* (O'Donnell, 2017). More importantly, shame is *more than* a way of seeing; it constitutes a form of witnessing, as noted earlier in the paper. Shame as a form of witnessing that produces ethical and political imperatives helps us rethink our ethical and political relations (Bewes, 2011)—most notably, for the purposes of this paper, the pedagogical possibilities opened up by new ways of seeing, feeling, and becoming in the world *with Others*. In a world where social power is unevenly distributed along axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, and other ways of cutting up identity, there may be no social position free from the everyday manifestations of shame, thus we are all somehow entangled in multiple and conflicting forms of shame (Guenther, 2011). To see the intolerable, then, is not enough; one must learn how to see the possibility for something else—for something that builds solidarity with Others.

Pedagogically speaking, therefore, it is important to recognize that although there may be no way to resolve the ambivalent dynamics of shame, this does not imply that we should be stuck in its negative referent. My intention in theorizing shame as a transformative and revolutionary force here is not based on a wishful or romanticized approach to the uneven distribution of power and injustices in the social and political world, but rather on the social reality that the means we use are part and parcel of what is being produced: When shame is communicated as a negative referent, we perpetuate negativity; when shame is materialized as a productive and revolutionary force, transformation is what we might eventually get. To put this differently, when shame is understood merely as a mark of moral standards and notably moral failure, then it is likely to perpetuate the habits of the everyday that draw on the visible challenges of living together with others. In this sense, ''shame is understood as compensatory: a kind of ethical bad conscience that is oblivious, ultimately, to the degree to which it too has facilitated injustice'' (Bewes, 2011, pp. 36–37). However, when shame ruptures the habits of the everyday and draws to light the consequences of the intolerable, then it allows us to see and become witnesses of new possibilities in being together with others.

With some notable exceptions in the social sciences and humanities, as noted throughout this paper, shame has been either reduced to its negative connotations or altogether overlooked as an ethical and political affect, especially in the field of education. The few exceptions in education literature (e.g., see Benin & Cartwright, 2006; Bjerg & Staunæs, 2011; Burke, 2017; Zembylas, 2008) invite a different contemplation of shame by highlighting its revolutionary and transformative ethics and politics. To explain what this entails in pedagogical practice, I discuss two caveats concerning the possible use of shame as a point of departure for opening up a critical interrogation of the ''shame at being human'' and the ''shame of the world.'' These are by no means the only caveats or even the most important ones, but they seem to me to be valuable in inventing *critical pedagogies of shame*.

Firstly, it is important that students and teachers are offered pedagogical opportunities to *witness shame*, namely, to understand shame as an act of witnessing that produces responsibility, because one recognizes the shameful involvement one may have in Others' pain and suffering (Zembylas, 2006). For example, a pedagogical activity that would help bring this point to life is investigating, discussing, and writing about an issue that constitutes the source of shame for a nation: the shame to wrongfulness of the past in the context of Australia and the wrongs that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffered and continue to suffer (Ahmed, 2004); or, the shame one community may feel for the atrocities committed against another in conflict-affected societies such as Cyprus, Israel, Northern Ireland, and Rwanda, to name a few (Zembylas, 2008). *Writing shame*, as Probyn (2010) suggests, that is, the recognition of shame in our writing, has generative potential for students and teachers because it provides opportunities to acknowledge our ethical responsibility toward others. ''Shame forces us to reflect continually on the implications of our writing,'' says Probyn (2010, p. 73), and the insights we gain from this pedagogical activity will highlight that ''writing shame is a visceral reminder'' (Probyn, 2010, p. 73) of the things that are painful.

This experience most certainly will consist of discomfort and ambivalence and might include considerable risks for students and teachers—especially when discussions on shame become part of a curriculum and take place in conflict-affected societies in which groups may be unready to consider their part of what produces and induces shame, either in relation to historical trauma or about contemporary social and political issues such as oppression from patriarchy. However, this does not have to be a debilitating experience; it can start, for instance, with examples that explore shame in different contexts (e.g., Primo Levi's memoirs) and then move gradually and strategically to the specific settings of students and teachers. Getting stuck in negative feelings of shame is not only unproductive but could also perpetuate oppression, injustice, and inhumanity. Importantly, then, to create social and political spaces in the classroom that include such pedagogical activities requires taking into account that witnessing shame is neither about making students feel bad (e.g., about their ancestors' actions) nor about telling them moralistic tales of how to apologize for things that they or others in their community have (not) done. Witnessing shame is a form of critical pedagogy—in the broader sense of pedagogies promoting educational experiences that are transformative,

empowering, and transgressive (Giroux, 2004; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2003)—that can motivate students and teachers to recapture the constructive elements of shame through acknowledging ethical responsibility and renewing ethical encounters with others.

Secondly, a reconceptualization of the pedagogical possibilities that are created in view of the issues and the concepts raised here by Levi, Agamben, and Deleuze will need to constantly revisit the affective implications around issues of identity, trauma, and oppression and create powerful affective landscapes in the classroom that do not take such issues for granted or in essentialist ways. For example, embracing an antiessentialist curriculum would draw strength from the idea of multiple perspectives of identity and trauma, rather than framing those in monolithic terms; such a curriculum would also benefit from contrapuntal readings (Subedi, 2013), meaning that it explicitly focuses on questions of oppression and patriarchy. Pedagogically speaking, shame and its related concepts are neither "good" nor "bad," or inherently transgressive (Probyn, 2005). Attention to shame as revolutionary, however, allows educators to reach beyond the normative categorizations of identity and otherness. In political terms, this idea means utilizing the prospects of a productive politics of shame in education that keeps open the possibilities so that: First, the others are not locked in a normative perception we have constructed for them, and second, the others may show us something new and perplexing about ourselves that we have not recognized before. This sort of critical engagement with Others through pedagogies of shame avoids the kind of false consensus, reciprocity, and recognition that is often promoted in some multicultural or liberal discourses (Tarnopolsky, 2010). A truly productive politics of shame in education is one that preserves the openness to the ambivalence of shame, without resorting to any moralistic norms, but rather forces us to *see* and become witnesses of that which we do not wish to perceive (O'Donnell, 2017). How can this be achieved pedagogically in practice?

Sedgwick-Kosofsky (2003) used the term "reparative reading" to denote a critical practice of reading in psychoanalysis that begins from a position of psychic damage (the "depressive position") and that bears the possibility of a "reparative position" that picks up the fragments to construct a sustainable life. The depressive position recognizes that good and bad belong to the same object, thus there is acknowledgement of the ambivalence involved in this situation (Nicholls, 2006)—e.g., an acknowledgement of the ambivalence of shame, as discussed earlier in the paper. Importantly, what Sedgwick-Kosofsky (2003) calls a reparative position is not merely a critical practice of "making visible [...] the hidden traces of oppression and persecution" (p. 141), but rather it is affectively driven and "undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks" (p. 150). I am suggesting here that critical pedagogies of shame might constitute reparative practices that focus not simply on the acknowledgement of shame, oppression, and suffering, but rather on how to reconstruct a sustainable life in the wake of such suffering and oppression by invoking shame as a revolutionary force for change. For example, to return to the previous example of writing shame about past atrocities as part of curriculum and pedagogy, the aim would be to reconceptualize shame as both

revolutionary and reparative in interpreting traumatic histories and seeking just responses (see also Zembylas, 2017). What students and teachers can best learn from reparative pedagogies of shame is, perhaps, that loss and suffering might indeed find some repair and rest in the end (cf. Tarc, 2011) through everyday, ordinary actions of solidarity that neither avoid shame nor fetishize it. Engaging students in such acts of reparation in and beyond the classroom walls could instill in reparative pedagogies a political efficacy or activist slant that offers a much needed action-orientation in education (Zembylas, 2017).

Concluding remarks

Feminist theorizations of shame have foregrounded discussions of the ethical and political value of shame, suggesting that shame can be a transformative force. This paper has built on this idea by putting into conversation Agamben's and Deleuze's interactions with Primo Levi regarding shame as an ambivalent affect. I have suggested that certain experiences of shame can be revolutionary in that they create pedagogical possibilities for something new that could subvert negative referents of shame. My discussion of shame as revolutionary urges critical educators to think that if they wish to contribute to transformation, it is valuable to consider the possible openings created by Agamben's biopolitics of resistance and ethics of alterity as well as Deleuze's notion of shame as an everyday event; these ideas move students and teachers away from the cycle of negativity upheld by dominant shame discourses. Importantly, the notion of shame-as-revolutionary does not deny or repress its negative referents, but rather encourages critical educators "to confront oppressive circumstances and painful experience directly, as long as we translate potentially destructive emotions into constructive dispositions and behavior" (Chabot, 2008, p. 816). Needless to say, to turn negative shame into shame as revolutionary is not an easy task, but rather a patient, knowledgeable, and disciplined effort that prioritizes critical interrogation of shame as a way of confronting both "the shame at being human" and the "shame of the world."

Envisioning spaces of critical interrogation of shame and engaging in acts of affective connectivity with others—e.g., acts of compassion, sociality, and dignity—are precisely what a productive politics of shame in education may offer. Unraveling the productive referents of shame—both as analytic tools and as points of departure for cultivating individual and collective political consciousness, self-reflection, solidarity, and responsibility—creates pedagogical possibilities for enriching teachers' and students' perspectives about shame as a dynamic that helps to reconsider affective relations with others. What I have termed "critical pedagogies of shame" pay explicit attention to the affective complexities of the narratives of oppression and suffering that enter the classroom and interrogate in particular the trappings of normative narratives of shame. As critical pedagogies, critical pedagogies of shame engage in the critical interrogation of power relations and aim at subverting patterns of subordination associated with negative shame. Thus critical pedagogies of shame focus more specifically on identifying and

challenging the affective investments and ideologies rooted in shame that underlie possible responses toward suffering and oppression—by students and teachers alike—and seeking to make a concrete difference in sufferers' lives through specific actions. Needless to say, not just any action is "good" action; an important component of critical pedagogies of shame is to help educators and students differentiate various modes of action and engagement with shame and shamelessness (e.g., see Zembylas, 2013). A revolutionary ethics and politics of shame in critical education forces educators and students to break patterns of subordination, allowing them to create something new.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

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