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SHAME AND THE ANTI-FEMINIST BACKLASH

BRITAIN, IRELAND AND AUSTRALIA, 1890–1920

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

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Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash

Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash examines how women opposed to the feminist campaign for the vote in early twentieth-century Britain, Ireland, and Australia used shame as a political tool. It demonstrates just how proficient women were in employing a diverse vocabulary of emotions—drawing on concepts such as embarrassment, humiliation, honour, courage, and chivalry—in the attempt to achieve their political goals. It looks at how far nationalist contexts informed each gendered emotional community at a time when British imperial networks were under extreme duress. The book presents a unique history of gender and shame, which demonstrates just how versatile and ever-present this social emotion was in the feminist politics of the British Empire in the early decades of the twentieth century. It employs a fascinating new thematic lens to histories of anti-feminist/feminist entanglements by tracing national and transnational uses of emotions by women to police their own political communities. It also challenges the common notion that shame had little place in a modernising world by revealing how far groups of patriotic womanhood, globally, deployed shame to combat the effects of feminist activism.

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa is a senior lecturer in history at the University of Wollongong.

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For my mum and dad,
Kate and Sean.

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Introduction

> For Great Britain is already too rapidly losing many of the noble ideals and institutions which once made her the unrivalled mistress of the world . . . and if the mothers of the British race decide to part altogether with the birthright of their simple *womanliness* for a political mess of pottage, then darker days are in store for the nation than can yet be foreseen or imagined. For with woman alone rests the Home, which is the foundation of the Empire. When they desert this, their God-appointed centre, the core of the national being, then things are tottering to a fall.[1]

In 1907, Marie Corelli—phenomenally popular novelist, celebrity, and self-appointed 'guardian of the public conscience'[2]—published her much-quoted anti-suffragist text, *Woman, or—Suffragette?* As the pamphlet's title indicates, the radical suffragist's transgressions were so great that the line dividing woman and radical feminist was an unbridgeable one. As an incredibly successful writer and public persona, Corelli's fame was predicated on the sales of 500- or 600-page novels that capitalised on descriptions of the loose and decaying morality of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British society. A particular feature of her writing was her condemnation of the women at the centre of that decaying moral fabric.

Who were these women? In Corelli's world—and that of her vast army of readers—they were modern or 'new' or feminist women. These were the author's 'distracted, man-fighting sisters', who were inspired to go 'clamouring like unnatural hens in a barn-yard about their "rights" and "wrongs" ', intentionally attempting to 'neutralise their sex', and at the very least robbing that sex of its dignity.[3] These were shamelessly deviant women, like the notorious New Woman[4] and the violent suffragettes,[5] who while fighting publicly for the vote and other such worldly gains only invoked disgrace. Their dangerous and indecorous behaviour, Corelli assented, was 'a degradation to the very name of woman'.[6] Devoid of the womanly feelings of modesty and shame, these gender abominations alienated their respectable non-feminist sisters. Even more than that, their deviant actions harmed the nation and empire to which they owed allegiance. These feminist

women were, then, 'a scandal to the nation' because they made 'England a laughing-stock to the rest of the world'.[7] Their selfish desires for political power exposed their inability to be guided by feminine emotional values. Their continued campaigns also threatened to dismantle the entire emotional regimes underpinning the gender relations of the nation and the Empire, and indeed, of the civilised world.

Corelli's attacks on the feminist woman were steeped in shame. She attempted to shame transgressive women into abandoning their disruptive activities. As a moral and social emotion, shame worked by instilling in individuals a fear of losing the love or respect of someone or some community they were attached to or to whom they attached value. If women valued the communities to which they belonged—gendered and national communities—then they would desist from these acts. Otherwise, they risked being ostracised. However, as feminist theorist Jill Locke explains, shame has its limitations.[8] If feminists did not honour their connection with the community of 'good' patriotic womanhood, then they were unlikely to be motivated by Corelli's shaming. Therefore, shame performed a number of ideological functions in her writing. It existed to inspire reform. If it could not do this, it was assigned a protective role. It was used to highlight the boundaries existing between the true community of English womanhood and its transgressive other. For anti-suffragist women such as Corelli, shame was a versatile political tool.

Corelli and her fellow female anti-suffragists did not use shame without articulating their wider understanding of the nature and workings of this emotion and related emotional concepts, such as honour, courage, chivalry, and embarrassment. Rather, their collective body of writing reveals much about the complexities of early twentieth-century deliberations on the make-up of gendered emotional regimes. Feminists were considered scandalous because they threatened the nature of the emotional regimes which guided men's and women's behaviour. Men and women were expected to adhere to different sets of emotional standards—those appropriate to their sex. For example, men were required to be honourable in their daily dealings. They were expected to enact the emotional qualities underpinning honour: courage, chivalry, honesty, and fairness. Women, on the other hand, were directed to behave according to a different set of emotional rules. They were expected to be sensitive, loving, and nurturing. Each set of emotional rules reflected the proper place of the sexes in society: men's emotional regimes guided their participation in the public realm and women's were much more suited to their place in the private sphere. When feminists committed public outrages—such as staging mass demonstrations or damaging property in the name of 'Votes for Women'—they threatened to appropriate men's emotional regimes. In doing so, they jeopardised the integrity and operation of those gendered regimes. As Corelli pointed out, this was detrimental to two intersecting communities: womanhood and the nation.

In this book, I undertake the much-neglected task of examining how women deployed emotions in their attempts to regulate the behaviour of other women. In particular, I analyse how politically minded women understood and used shame in their discussions about women's empowerment and disempowerment. I address a series of questions relating to women's articulations and manipulations of shame and related emotions. For example, was shame an empowering tool for the politically disempowered? Did women's deployment of shame accord with their wider understanding of the gendered nature of emotions and emotional regimes? That is to say, shame and its antithesis, honour, were profoundly gendered emotions: shame was regarded as inescapably feminine, whereas only men could actively pursue honour. Therefore, when defending the integrity of the nation from the perceived feminist onslaught, did 'good' patriotic women act to appropriate a distinctly masculine remit? Did they erode the masculine nature of honour? If so, how did they rationalise such an incursion into masculine emotional regimes? My study of shame extends beyond the question of how women used shame in the attempt to ensure compliance. It also analyses how these women understood the wider nature of emotions and emotional regimes—that is, the emotional context in which shame and shaming operated.

I adopt a national and a transnational approach in this book by drawing on the political writings of patriotic women in other sites of empire—namely, Ireland and Australia. Historians of empire have long had cause to embrace transnational approaches to the past. The essence of empire involves movements and exchanges across national and colonial borders.[9] How far did concerns about gender, nationalism, and emotions connect or disconnect patriotic women across the British Empire? For example, in the first decades of the twentieth century, all three countries—England, Ireland, and Australia—were undergoing significant degrees of political upheaval uniquely linked to their relative places on the British imperial spectrum. Across these separate but related national sites, concepts of female citizenship diverged. Patriotic women used these varying concepts of female citizenship to maintain or reconstruct their gendered communities. I analyse how far understandings and uses of shame intersected or diverged across these disparate sites. I look at how each community of patriotic womanhood articulated the nature of the emotional contexts in which shame and shaming operated.

Gendered Emotional Regimes and Communities

This book adds to the expansive fields of gender history and the history of nationalisms and imperialism. It also contributes to the more recent, but ever-burgeoning, field of emotions history. Much has been written over the past few decades about what has been termed a history of emotions.[10] The works of prominent scholars such as Barbara Rosenwein and William Reddy

are of particular relevance to this study of the emotional values of different communities of patriotic womanhood. In the early 2000s, Rosenwein argued that a given society accommodated numerous emotional communities and that individuals moved through multiple emotional communities daily. The emotional styles, rules, standards, and expectations varied from community to community. Members of each emotional community were expected to adhere to 'the same valuations of emotions and their expression'.[11] They were expected to amend their emotional styles to suit the relevant emotional environment. Women connected by their intertwining views on the relationship between gender and the nation formed a type of emotional community. They identified specific emotional values and styles that women should adhere to in order to be regarded as bona fide members of that gendered national community.

At around the same time, William Reddy formulated the term emotional regimes. He understood emotional regimes to be the set of normative emotions prescribed by societies and governments and the codes of expression and repression (emotives) designed to inculcate and manage those emotions. He argued that such prescribed emotions and codes were required to underpin any stable political regime.[12] Since then, other scholars of emotions have added to and amended those theories. Benno Gammerl, for example, has extended the study of emotional regimes and communities to argue that far from being restrictive or rigidly prescribed, many of these emotional communities were fluid enough to variously cut across or bridge distinctions of class, race, nationality, or gender.[13] How fluid or rigid were the emotional regimes directing women's participation in nationalist politics? Did groups of patriotic womanhood construct emotional communities that were open and flexible in the face of feminist demands?

In this book, I am concerned with how emotional communities and emotional regimes intersected with national and gendered politics. Despite the obvious presence of emotions in politics, Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta argue that there has been some hesitation on the part of academic observers to admit to the place of emotions in political life. Instead, they have managed to 'ignore the swirl of passions all around them in political life'.[14] In accounting for this relative absence, political scientist Carol Johnson cites the perceived gendered nature of emotions generally. Traditionally, emotion was associated with the feminised private sphere of home and family, while emotion's supposed antithesis, reason, was associated with the masculinised public world of business and politics.[15] I add to the emerging body of literature that works to reject this binary by analysing how women used emotions strategically to achieve political ends. By concentrating on women active in protest movements at the beginning of the twentieth century, I perform the much-needed task of historicising political emotions, specifically shame and its close family of emotions—negative (for