

‘People are strange when you’re a stranger’¹: shame, the self and some pathologies of social imagination

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Abstract

In this paper I respond to Samantha Vice’s prescriptions for living morally as a white person in South Africa today. I allow that her ‘How do I live in this strange place?’ (2010) is convincing when read – probably against intent – as a *descriptive* account. It fails, though, in its attempt to provide an attractive set of moral prescriptions. I set out an argument against both shame and silence, focussing primarily on shame as I contend that the need to withdraw or keep silent follows from feeling ashamed. I argue that shame is experienced as a diminution of the self, whereas guilt is experienced as a burdening of the self by wrongful behaviour; the diminution of the self in shame experiences is intrinsically harmful, and instead of enabling the self to be moral, actually inhibits the moral instincts of a person by cutting the self off from other selves. In a group context this type of severance has unhealthy moral features, as well as negative consequences for inter-group relations.

Introduction

This paper forms part of a response to the debate on ‘whiteness’ instigated by Samantha Vice in her controversial paper, ‘How do I live in this strange place?’ (2010). Vice asks how ‘white people can *be* and live well’ (2010:323) in a land such as South Africa; or, in other words, how whites ought to deal morally with the fact that they were, and more tellingly, still *are* being privileged by the oppression of others.

Vice proposes both an emotional and a ‘practical’ moral reaction, with the practical being primed by the emotional. Three candidate emotions are considered and weighed for moral appropriateness, namely: (1) guilt; (2) agent-regret; (3) and shame. Vice opts for shame as the *most* appropriate moral emotion to experience in the face of a problematic ‘whiteness’. Although guilt and agent-regret are also appropriate, only shame captures the emotional experiences of a self implicated or ‘stained’ by immorality. White privilege, or ‘whiteness’, says Vice (2010:329; my emphasis), ‘does not attach

¹ This phrase is from *The Doors*’ song ‘People are strange’. I would like to thank prof. Jim Olthuis for kindly corresponding with me on this difficult and personal topic.

merely to what one does or how one benefits, but, more fundamentally, *to who one is*'. This is so because whiteness entails both habituation and necessary moral damage on Vice's account (see 2010:324-326); being white thus means that one's very self is 'constituted by injustices' even if one does not want to and/or did not choose to be unjustly privileged (Vice 2010:330). The 'gap' that opens up in a morally aware and rational person upon realizing that they are *not* as they want or ought to be, constitutes the moral emotion of shame (Vice 2010:329; 339).

The question now becomes what one ought to do *morally* with feelings of shame. Vice argues that one should *not* 'take solace in the thought that at least we are sensitive and caring enough to feel shame' (Vice 2010:329), or actively cultivate our feelings of guilt, shame and regret (2010:333). One should, however, 'accept and live with shame' (Vice 2010:329); meaning that one ought to both acknowledge and continually remain aware of 'oneself as always ... privileged and existing in a world that accommodates one at the expense of others' (Vice 2010:329). In practice, this entails that whites should direct their moral attention towards their selves in a 'private project of self-improvement' (Vice 2010:334-335). Whites ought to be *careful, humble and silent* in the public realm, given the 'necessary self-vigilance' entailed by shame. Once shamefully aware of their 'damaging presence' (Vice 2010:335), whites ought to make themselves 'invisible and unheard', living 'as quietly and decently as possible' (Vice 2010:335). Although Vice admits that she is not entirely sure whether silence is indeed the appropriate practical response to a shameful awareness of moral taintedness, she does eventually endorse a *political* silence (2010:337). This silence is not passive or deaf to other voices (2010:335), and it does not preclude conversation or advocate acquiescence in the face of injustice (2010:336, 338). It is, rather, an *active* silence in the political realm, which entails actively and consciously preventing one's 'whitely perspective' from damaging others in these spaces, which are where 'whiteness is most problematic and charged', according to Vice (2010:337).

Vice's moral proposals have mostly been met with negative criticism. Some of it – mostly in the popular press – is of a degraded and unthinking sort to which I subsequently pay no attention here. The more intellectually forthcoming and thorough criticisms that I've read seem to me mostly focussed on the issue of silence² (the third part of Vice's argument). There are also some responses that focus on the first part of Vice's paper and set out arguments against the idea of continued privilege and/or cast the issue in terms of a privilege as such³. In this paper I would like to focus on the endorsement of shame as both *an* appropriate and – especially – as the *most* appropriate emotional response to continued unjust privilege and habituated 'whiteness'. I personally do not find the endorsement of shame morally convincing or appealing; and I am sceptical of, what seems to me, the generally unwarranted proffering of 'obvious' *moral* stature to this emotion⁴.

2 Cf. Lawrence Blum's 'Antiracist Moral Identities, or Iris Murdoch in South Africa' (2011); and Eusebius McKaizer's 'How Whites Should Live in This Strange Place' (2011). Alison Bailey's 'On White Shame and Vulnerability' (2011); Andrea Hurst's 'This White 'I': The Reciprocal Shame of Oppressor and Oppressed' (2011); and Bruce Janz's 'Shame and Silence' either give 'kinder' criticisms of, or provide amendments to Vice's argument.

3 Cf. Charles Villet's 'How do we live in this strange place? Post-apartheid South Africa as heterotopia' (2012).

4 Charles Mills is also critical of Vice's promotion of shame in his 'Vice's Vicious Virtues: The Supererogatory as Obligatory' (2011). He argues that Vice erroneously makes the supererogatory obligatory,

I will defend my doubts by drawing on recent research findings in empirical psychology that underscore my intuition that shame is (mostly) unwarranted as a strictly *moral* emotion. I proceed with a philosophical argument – drawn from the work of Paul Ricoeur – on the nature of shame, and on its place in our moral vocabularies and sensitivities. I argue that our individual moral emotions are intimately tied to our ability to *imagine* both our selves and others, and to the ability to imagine the *social bond(s)* between self and other. On my account shame (even when experienced individually) functions as a *social* emotion that signals the threat of social *exclusion* – a threat that leaves the self with only two possibilities: withdrawal/submission, or aggression/retaliation. Shame, described in this way, can be plotted onto the grid Ricoeur provides for the operation of social imagination. It then becomes an emotion which signals the self's ultimate (submissive or aggressive) retreat back into the folds of an exclusivist group. Our most urgent task as white South Africans, I argue, cannot be to retreat back into our own group; it consist, rather, of moving outside of ourselves in an attempt to forge genuine relations with non-white South Africans.

The 'hidden costs' of shame

The so-called 'self-conscious emotions' – shame, guilt, embarrassment, hubris and pride – are central to psychological functioning. Yet, they have only recently begun to receive serious theoretical and empirical attention from emotion researchers (Tracy & Robins 2007:4). This lag can be attributed to the fact that self-conscious emotions are not *basic*; meaning that, unlike anger, fear, disgust, sadness, happiness and surprise, self-conscious emotions are not unambiguously biological, not shared with other animals, not panculturally experienced nor identifiable via discrete, universally recognized facial expressions (Tracy & Robins 2007:4). Although the 'basicness' of our basic emotions makes them easier to study, psychologists have become increasingly attracted to the challenge of studying the self-conscious emotions as well. The result has been a rich repository of thought-provoking theories and findings that I find well worth the while of any moral philosopher⁵. I would consequently like to highlight some of the most relevant research findings on the self-conscious emotions. I will only focus on the most important recent psychological research findings pertaining to shame, seeing as this particular self-conscious emotion is my main concern in this paper.

Shame has mostly been studied together with guilt. The distinction between shame and guilt has, however, been notoriously fuzzy (Tangney, Struewing & Mashek 2007:25). After the appearance of H.B. Lewis' *Shame and guilt in neurosis* (1971) emotion researchers started to realise that shame could be distinguished from guilt by a difference in the focus on the self. Most theorists currently agree that the distinction

and therefore constructs an 'unrealistic schedule' of virtues. I will offer a different argument against shame in this paper.

5 Reference to 'empirical findings' in a philosophical argument can make the argument vulnerable to 'cherry picking'. I want to stress that the empirical studies I read on shame and guilt *consistently* reported the so-called 'hidden costs' of shame. T.J. Ferguson, D. Brugman, J. White, and H.L. Eyre's 'Shame and guilt as morally warranted experiences' (2007) is one of the few papers that *defend* shame and raise some doubts about methodological issues in previous research on shame and guilt. The paper concludes with an argument for 'shame infused guilt', which is a concept I am open to exploring in further work, but that does not really detract from, or imply a challenge to the specific arguments I set out in this paper.

between shame and guilt centres on the *object* of negative evaluation and disapproval. When the object of negative evaluation and disapproval is the global and stable self, shame is elicited; whereas guilt is elicited when the object of negative evaluation and disapproval is a specific behaviour or action taken by the self (see Lewis, 2000; Tangney & Dearing 2002; Tangney et al. 2007). It is this differential emphasis on self ('I did that horrible thing') versus behaviour ('I *did* that horrible *thing*') that distinguishes shame from guilt, and solicits the concomitantly distinct experiences associated with these emotions. Shame is, on average, experienced as more painful than guilt; and is typically accompanied by a sense of shrinking or 'feeling small', and by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. Guilt, on the other hand, is typically experienced as less painful and threatening; and is more often accompanied by the feeling of a self being burdened, or being forced to carry something heavy (Tangney et al. 2007:25).

The distinction Vice makes between shame and guilt is similar to the theoretical distinction emotion researchers have come to prefer. In fact, her reasons for privileging shame as a moral emotion hinges on shame being 'the recognition that one ought not to be *as one is*' (Vice 2010:329; my emphasis); in other words, it depends on the fact that shame involves a negative evaluation of the global self as opposed to 'merely' involving a negative evaluation of some specific behaviour. This, of course, makes perfect sense given Vice's emphasis on the involuntary nature of privilege. We can, in fact, 'only feel shame' as she puts it (2010:329), when confronted with a self *implicated* and 'stained' by injustice because shame actually *is* the emotion one feels when one attributes moral (or any other) failures to internal, stable, uncontrollable and global features of the self.

But what happens when a self experiences shame in the face of wrongdoing (whether moral, or not)? It seems that the moral worthiness of shame is overblown when compared to guilt. Empirical research strongly suggests that guilt is, on balance, a more adaptive emotion than shame. Five lines of research, in fact, illustrate the adaptive functions of guilt, in contrast to what Tangney et al. (2007:26) call 'the hidden costs of shame'. In this paper I will only discuss, very briefly, three of these major clusters of research findings⁶, seeing as they most directly pertain to the themes I am discussing here.

The first important research finding is that shame more often than not motivates efforts to deny, hide from, or escape the shame-inducing experience, whereas guilt often motivates reparative action (see Lewis 1971; Lindsay-Hartz 1984; Tangney & Dearing 2002; Tracy & Robins 2006). If failure represents a stable, global shortcoming of the self, the adaptive solution simply seems *to be* to withdraw and avoid repeated attempts at success which could further reveal the self's inadequacies. If a failure however entails internal, unstable and controllable attributions, the self is motivated to either repair a wrong or increase future efforts at success (Tracy & Robins 2007:15).

The second important cluster of research findings suggest that feelings of shame actually disrupt individuals' ability to form empathic connections with others (both at the level of emotion disposition and emotional state), whereas guilt is associated with 'other-oriented empathy' (see Joireman 2004; Leith & Baumeister 1998; Tangney &

⁶ The two lines of research I leave out pertain to the findings that shame-proneness is related to a variety of psychological symptoms, whereas guilt-proneness is not; and that there is virtually no evidence for the presumed moral function of shame as a deterrent of illegal or immoral behaviour (Tangney et al. 2007:27-28).

Dearing 2002). In addition, a third cluster of research findings show that a robust link exists between shame and anger, as well as between shame and the propensity to blame others (see Bennett, Sullivan & Lewis 2005; Harper & Arias 2004; Tangney & Dearing 2002); guilt-proneness, on the other hand, has been consistently associated with constructive responses to anger (such as non-hostile discussion) and a general disinclination toward aggression (see Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall & Gramzow 1996; Tangney et al. 2007).

It seems that shame has such high 'hidden costs' because it is an emotion borne of an experience of essential powerlessness. If I do something wrong or immoral and I realize that it is something about me as a *person*, something deep-seated and unchangeable, which is to blame for my mistakes, I can easily become overwhelmed by psychologically painful feelings of shame. The action tendencies that accompany shame aim at relieving the self of the psychological torment inherent in helplessness. Withdrawal and avoidance help the self to escape from the scenes of its own failure, as well as forestalling future failure. And anger and hostility can help the self to restore its own sense of worth, rebounding shame in order to blame others for one's own failures.

I assume (and take it to be uncontroversial) that any morally sensitive person would choose to withdraw from the scene of their own moral failure if, and when such a failure was brought about by stable, uncontrollable and global features of their selves. I subsequently find Vice's move from shame to silence persuasive and coherent: if one agrees that whites ought to feel shame, one must agree to heed the call for silence as well.

Self-consciousness, sociability and the moral emotions

We often say that someone 'ought to feel ashamed of themselves' when they've committed a morally heinous act. Being ashamed of who one *is*, or reflecting on one's character or person when confronted by a moral failure seems (to me at least) a rather uncontroversial part of most our philosophies of morality. It also seems to make quite a lot of sense that one would retreat from and avoid situations of moral failure where one knew failure to be in some sense preordained. Perhaps shame is only detrimental when met by ego defences that hinge on anger and aggression?

I argue that the most important reason we have for doubting the moral worth of shame lies in the reported link between shame and disrupted other-oriented empathy. In order to defend this claim, I will explore the link between morality and the self-conscious emotions. If we have a more thoroughgoing understanding of what exactly makes self-conscious emotions *moral* emotions, we can begin to understand that shame has an important and pernicious shadow-side.

The self-conscious emotions are, as we've already seen, not 'basic'. What this means, in more detail, is that they require a high level of self-awareness and self-representation. Hence the self-conscious emotions develop later in childhood, facilitate the attainment of complex social goals and are cognitively complex (Tracy & Robins 2007:4). Morality starts to factor into this developmental equation because the cognitive complexity of the self-conscious emotions allows them to become provoked by *self-reflection* and *self-evaluation*. We can both *anticipate* our own shame and/or guilt in relation to a projected failure, and we can *experience* actual shame and/or guilt as a *consequence* of moral failing (Tangney et al. 2007:21-22). It is when the self thinks

about and evaluates herself that the so-called ‘moral emotions’ arise. We then no longer need others to tell or show us that we did something wrong, and we no longer need simply to fear the wrath of some form of authority in order for us to know wrong and desire right.

This seems a slightly solipsistic affair; yet the moral emotions are constitutively tied to the self’s *sociability*. The self that self-reflects and self-evaluates is evolutionary primed to be sociable, it is a ‘social self’ capable of reacting to ‘*other people’s* real, implied, or imagined judgements’ (Leary 2007:45; my emphasis). One can say that the ‘morality’ contained in the moral emotions is that of a self who is capable of being sociable on its own. We often act in morally decent ways because we are able to anticipate and experience moral emotions on our own, meaning – as well – that the moral agent need not always be ‘out there’ or ‘in the thick of things’ to *be good*.

But how do selves achieve this type of sociability? I would like to suggest that the human faculty of *imagination* is central to both the development and functioning of self-consciousness and the moral emotions. Human beings have the remarkable ability to imagine themselves and others *and* to experience some form of emotion because of these (and many other) imaginings. In an essay on the development of self-reflective emotions, psychologist Mark Leary (2007) distinguishes three evolved abilities that enable human beings to experience self-conscious or moral emotions, namely: (1) the ability to *extend the self* by reflecting on the past and contemplating the future; (2) the ability to form a *private self* with access to private, subjective information; (3) and the ability to *conceptualize or symbolize the self*, which involves the capacity for abstract, symbolic self-thought (Leary 2007:40-41). Although these three ‘selves’ require different types of cognitions, they are all basically tied to the power of imagination.

Our extended self is conditioned by our ability to imaginatively deal with experiences of time; our private self by our ability to imagine how we are, or are likely to be perceived and evaluated by others; and our conceptual/symbolic self by our ability to imagine cultural standards as they apply to us (see Leary 2007:42-48). These various ‘imaginings’ allow us to ruminate on the past and to anticipate the future, to ‘see’ ourselves through the eyes of other people and to represent our own group or culture even when we are alone. These imaginings give rise to powerful feelings and emotions: we can become anxious about our anticipated future, obsess over the past, feel embarrassed in the company of others, and feel proud or ashamed of a collective. Our thoughts and our feelings, it seems, are not ontologically cleaved; it is our very ability to think abstractly about the self *via* our imagination that also allows us to experience intense emotions such as shame.

The powerful emotional incentives and deterrents that arise from our self-relevant thoughts facilitate the internalization of moral standards, codes and – perhaps most importantly – sensitivities. Mark Leary (2007) argues that this link between self-consciousness and the moral emotions means that our self-relevant thoughts exist not so that we can compare an actual to an ideal self, but so that we can think about other peoples’ perceptions and evaluations of our selves. Guilt and shame (as well as embarrassment, hubris and pride) thus require an intense consciousness of *self* but evolved in order to facilitate a sophisticated awareness of *others*, and to therefore facilitate our social interactions and relationships (see Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton 1994; Keltner & Beer 2004; Leary 2007).

If the self-conscious emotions are, as Leary (2007:46) suggests, ‘more strongly tied to what we think other people might think of us than to what we think of ourselves’, we need to revise our definition of shame somewhat. Shame is a negative evaluation

of (the stable, uncontrollable, and global) the self that is based on the real and/or imagined disapproval of others. When we experience shame we perceive and/or imagine another person or persons' disapproval of, or disgust at our very being. The negative self-evaluations entailed in shame experiences are of a stable, uncontrollable and global self *as seen through the (oftentimes imagined) eyes of the other*.

We need shame in order to register and develop sensitivity towards the social bond and to forestall social threats. Emotion researchers consistently report that shame is the 'premier social emotion' (Gilbert in Gruenewald, Dickerson & Kemeny 2007:68), seeing as the negative self-evaluations entailed in shame experiences signal our response to perceptions of low social attention, low social attractiveness, declining social status and social exclusion (Gruenewald et al., 2007:68). Guilt, on the other hand, is the more probable emotional response when behavioural violations of social standards (lying, for instance) take place (see Keltner & Buswell 1996). This means that guilt is emotionally more focused on specific, moral wrongs and on those who were affected by the self's illicit behaviour. Thus we often feel ashamed if someone hints at (or we imagine) our selves being socially unacceptable in some way (being fat or ugly, for example) whereas we seldom – if ever – feel *guilty* about being perceived in a lowly social manner.

The differential emphasis on self and behaviour that distinguishes shame from guilt consequently shows up another interesting difference between these two emotions: the self-focus involved in shame is tied to social status, esteem and inclusion; and the behavioural-focus involved in guilt, to social codes and standards of morality. The shadow-side of shame start to disclose itself here: its 'withdraw-or-retaliate' action tendency serves to protect a social self that is almost completely concerned with its *own* social status and safety. Both individual and vicarious (or 'group') shame cut the self off in some way from another person (or group) by mobilizing the self's psychological resources for 'own use'. Genuine pro-social and benevolent moral agency, of which we are (I believe *always*) capable, is therefore not to be sought in the *cultivation*⁷ of shame. In addition, I would like to argue that shame and the diminution of the self entailed by it, is especially harmful (and perhaps even morally pernicious) in cases where the self has no real social contact with the other(s) she perceives as a social threat.

Paul Ricoeur and the 'pathologies' of the social imagination

The negative self-evaluations entailed in shame experiences are, as we've seen, negative evaluation of a stable, uncontrollable and global self as it is 'seen' through the eyes of the *other*. The imaginative capacities involved in this process constitute it, but also make it particularly vulnerable. Our 'mind-reading' abilities are both limited and fallible; and the social threats we register *via* shame can therefore be misread and misjudged⁸.

7 At most, shame ought to function as a type of existential 'signal' or 'prompt' urging us to examine ourselves in a way that leads to truthful accounts of our own guilt/being-guilty. Fleshing out this, more 'constructive', version of 'shame' – or, another concept close to it – remains work to be done in a separate article, though. I refer to reader, once again, to T.J. Ferguson et al.'s 'Shame and guilt as morally warranted experiences' (2007).

8 This is an important factor to keep in mind when reflecting on the current situation in South Africa, for although apartheid officially ended almost two decades ago most white South Africans (especially those

The concept of the (social) imagination can, then, be used to imply both ‘transcendence’ – allowing us to move beyond what is given in sensation and/or capable in ‘pure’ thought – and ‘criticism’ – luring us too far beyond what is real and/or rational (Voice 2006:284). For Paul Ricoeur the ‘ambiguities and aporias’ we find on the level of the social imaginary, arise out of their ‘original starting point’, or out of the constitution of imagination as such (2007:169). In his well-known essay⁹ on the possibilities of extending the ‘linguistic’ imagination (employed in his theory of metaphor¹⁰) beyond the sphere of discourse to the ‘sphere of action’, Ricoeur defends the view that the ‘ambiguities’ we run into when reflecting on imagination are not simply drawbacks of a given *theory* of imagination but ‘are constitutive of the very *phenomenon* of imagination’ (Ricoeur 2007:169). I do not have space here to give a detailed account of Ricoeur’s philosophy of imagination. I therefore mention only the conceptual ‘graph’ he employs to plot various theories of imagination on in order to provide some background for his own theory of social imagination.

Ricoeur’s ‘graph’ of imagination theories attempts to capture what he sees as the four major uses of the term ‘imagination’. The first (‘noematic’) axis of his graph is related to the object of the imagining consciousness, and the second one to the subject who imagines (2007:170). Along the first axis run the opposing theories of the ‘image’ as either ‘presence’ or ‘absence’. What Ricoeur has in mind here, are ‘presence’ theorists (Hume, for instance) who view imagined content as faded or weakened *perception* (or ‘presence’), and ‘absence’ theorists (like Sartre) who conceive of imagined content in terms of absence itself, or as essentially ‘other-than-present’ (Ricoeur 2007:170). The second (or ‘noetic’) axis of Ricoeur’s graph next distributes theories that vary according to ‘degree of belief’ (Ricoeur 2007:170-171). At one end we find the ‘fascinated consciousness’ as conceived in theories that posit imagined content as illusions that confuse or mislead us (Pascal’s denunciation of ‘the power of lies and errors’, for instance), and on the other end we find theories where critical distance is fully conscious of itself – the so-called ‘critical consciousness’ theories (such as Husserl’s transcendental reduction, for example¹¹). Rival theories of the imagination have their origin, Ricoeur suggests (2007:170), in the way they ‘spilt themselves’ along the different lines of his graphs depending.

Ricoeur, however, wants to work out a philosophy of imagination that is wide-ranging as well as plastic enough to account for the aporetic imagination itself. His theory of the social imagination presents a type of culmination of this endeavour, as it is here that he brings his insights into ‘work’ of the imagination as it reveals itself in metaphor and narrative to full fruition. The ambiguity of imagination is manifested at the social level *via* two different ‘*imaginative practices*’: ideology and utopia (Ricoeur 2007:181). The bond or ‘analogical tie’ that constitutes the social, ‘that makes every man my brother’ (Ricoeur 2007:181), can only ‘become accessible to us’ through ideology–utopia, Ricoeur argues (2007:181).

Why is this? In Ricoeur’s account, ideology and utopia presents us with imaginative variations on the theme of *social power*. At its most obvious, social power refers to,

who live outside the major urban areas) still live relatively cordoned off from the majority of non-white South Africans.

9 Cf. ‘Imagination in discourse and in action’ (2007).

10 Cf. Ricoeur’s, *The rule of metaphor: multi-disciplinary studies in the creation of meaning in language* (1978).

11 All examples are Ricoeur’s own examples.

and entails, the state's and other state sanctioned authorities' monopoly on the power of punishment; less obvious, but more fundamental however, is the (almost completely hegemonic) power of social *inclusion* and *exclusion*. The fulfilment and dissatisfaction of our social needs (both in term of 'distribution' and 'recognition'¹²) hinge on various mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. All authority seeks to legitimize itself in some way, and therefore relies on the genuine desire of individuals to be included in its reach so that the gap that always exists between power and consent can be 'shrunk' (Ricoeur 2007:183). Ideology and utopia then operate (in polar fashions) under the auspices of various imaginary variations on the theme of social power and inclusion–exclusion.

What ideology does is to imaginatively 'bind' the social group together whereas utopia imaginatively 'expands' the social group. It is here, however, that a second ambiguity is revealed with regards to the social imagination: each imaginative practice also contains a polarity 'within', seeing as both ideology and utopia can be split into 'healthy' or 'pathological' variants (Ricoeur 2007:181). The healthy function of utopia consists in the imaginative *dispersal* of current ossified power relations, and the concomitant re-imagining of a new social order where novel possibilities of sociality may lie in wait (Ricoeur 2007:184).

Proceeding from a spatial-temporal 'nowhere' (implied in the 'u-topos'), the utopian imagination projects an 'absence' of which it is fully and critically conscious into the future. As is the case in narrative fiction, this abolishment of reference to the real, present world acts as 'the negative condition' for the release of a 'second-order referential power' which is capable of *re-describing* reality and of thereby opening-up new possibilities for living and acting in the world (Ricoeur 2007:174-175 & 184; see also Ricoeur 1991). The healthy function of utopia is thus to 'expose the undeclared surplus value of authority and unmask the pretence common to all systems of legitimacy' (Ricoeur 2007:184), and to offer us 'other' ways of exercising power in the social group. The '*mad* dream', as Ricoeur (2007:185) phrases it, which ensues if this projection of an absence into the future is without any warrant whatsoever begets the pathological side of utopia – a social 'schizophrenia' which subordinates reality to dreams, fixates on perfection and ignores the 'work of time' (Ricoeur 2007:185).

The madness of a pathological utopia dreams up a social world without power or exclusion. It is to this schizophrenic vision of the social world that the healthy function of ideology responds to in a corrective manner: the imaginative practice of ideology searches for what *is* and tries to integrate and 'fill in' the various voids and gaps of social life. There are some forms of authority and some types of exclusion that are warranted and essential, and the integrative function of ideology serves to make this available to us. The integration effected by ideology can, as we unfortunately know too well, quickly become petrified. The ossified social bond then oppresses, illegitimately excludes and smothers any type of dissidence, thereby stifling all that is new, hopeful and alternative.

I argue that we can plot shame onto Ricoeur model of the social imagination because it is, as I've been at pains to point out, a pre-eminently *social* emotion. The self who feels shame is a self who feels socially threatened in some way; this means that the shamed self perceives a very specific threat, namely the threat of social exclusion. Afraid that it might be rejected and misrecognized, or barred from the redistribution of

12 Cf. Nancy Fraser's Tanner Lecture, 'Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition and participation' (1996).

goods, the self either retreats or retaliates. Both these action tendencies however imply that no real changes in or of the self are being considered; and in the case of vicarious shame this means that the experience of shame *enforces* the current social bond. Shame is ideological in the sense that it hegemonically compels the self to adhere to socially acceptable behaviour; and where the self is shamed vicariously, the shame experience compels it to either withdraw and act submissively towards the group that threatens it, or to mobilize the group it belongs to in an effort to retaliate against and to counter another, menacing group.

If, and when, white South Africans reflect on the injustices of past (and on the way it still affects the present and most probably will the future) they perhaps cannot help but feel a sense of shame. If I were black what would I think, and how would I feel about whites? It is not difficult to see why whites can (and probably have reason to) 'fill in' the gaps here; we can and very often do imagine non-white South Africans being disgusted at us personally for being representatives of a cruel system we ourselves may never even have taken part in upholding. This feeling of shame, however, draws us back into the folds of 'whiteness' and expels all non-white South Africans into that insidious group we call 'the Others'.

Afraid that we might be rejected, scoffed at or despised by non-whites and/or that what material and cultural goods have been accrued to us will be taken away, we become deeply ashamed. Some of us may feel a pressing desire to get away completely, others may want to make themselves 'invisible and unheard', living 'as quietly and decently as possible' (Vice 2010:335); and others may want to 'fight back', to consolidate and entrench a group that will be proud and not ashamed of us. None of these options, however, entail any attempt at reconciling, rebuilding or reconnecting with peoples that an unjust socially engineered system had torn and kept apart for almost a century. We cannot mend the moral breaches caused by apartheid by simply 'keeping to ourselves', whether this is done submissively (instead of aggressively) or not. If the South African social bond ought to include people of all races, then the most important task faced by all races is to figure out the ways in which this bond can be constituted.

Conclusion

I would like to emphasize that my reflections on Samantha Vice's 'How do I live in this strange place?' has been an attempt to exercise a distinctly 'Ricoeurian brand' of critical social theory. What is particularly attractive about Ricoeur's critical theory, and his work in general, is that it is always fundamentally 'unfinished'. Ricoeur was fond of referring to his philosophy as a 'fractured systematicity' by means of which he could seek to effect a range of 'fragile mediations' (Villaverde 2006). In line with his meta-philosophical ideas, he allows the social imagination to also function in this fragile but mediated way. The tension between ideology and utopia is 'insurmountable', he concludes. It can (and must), however, always be *mediated* in a dialectical movement that propels us 'forward' in a progressively narrowing 'spiral' of deepened understanding (Ricoeur 1986:312).

We take possession of the creative power of the imagination only in a critical relation with these two figures of of false consciousness [i.e. ideology and utopia]. As though, in order to cure the folly of utopia, we had to call upon the 'healthy' function of ideology, and as though the critique of ideologies could

only be conducted by a consciousness capable of looking at itself from the perspective of 'nowhere' (Ricoeur 2007:187).

If we look at the 'ideology of shame' from the vantage point of an as-of-yet un-reconciled South Africa we can see a still pertinent ossification of whiteness at the heart of it. In its most obvious guise, this ossification is the face of a renewed 'white pride'; and in its less obvious guise, it is a submissiveness that signals obedience to a new authority that frightens 'us' very much. 'White shame' can easily become a cover-up for real guilt; it can also covertly entrench whiteness by using 'submissiveness' as appeasement, thereby safeguarding the vast cultural and economic resources white South Africans continue to enjoy.

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