A Psychosocial Study of Guilt and Shame in White South African Migrants to Australia

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Abstract

Despite recent research interest in migrant psychology, little attention has been paid to the emotional reactions of guilt and shame resulting from migrants' decision to leave their homeland. Universalist theories have yielded to an understanding of emotions as culturally contextualised and interpersonally constituted phenomena. For reasons associated with South Africa's racial history and the social dynamics following the 1994 transition to democracy, some white migrants from this country display specific manifestations of guilt and shame related to their migration decision. Using a psychosocial research approach, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with white South Africans who migrated to Australia following the democratic transition. Explicit and implicit expressions of migration-induced guilt and shame were evident in many research participants. In addition to guilt associated with leaving loved ones to an uncertain future, participants reported complex admixtures of guilt and shame at having been apartheid beneficiaries, internalising racist attitudes, and 'abandoning' their motherland at a critical historical juncture. Disavowed guilt and shame was evident in some participants, indicating defensive efforts to avoid acknowledging and experiencing these painful emotional states.

Keywords: guilt, shame, migrants, Apartheid, whiteness, identity, South Africa, psychosocial research

Leaving one's homeland to settle in a new country evokes powerful and complex emotional responses, in those migrating as well as in those remaining behind. This paper emerged out of a broader research project (authors, 2015) exploring identity disruption, construction, and sense of belonging in post-apartheid black, coloured, and white South African migrants to Australia. While initially not setting out to investigate themes of guilt and shame, we soon realized that these featured in some white participants' accounts of their migration experience. Furthermore, the contextual manifestations and expressions of these emotions varied considerably from those reported in the scant research literature on migrant guilt and shame. Curious about the fact that it was only white participants who referenced guilt and shame, it was decided to make this the focus of systematic inquiry in a follow-up research project. Consequently, this paper seeks to highlight these reported emotions and explore the context for their experience

The nature of guilt and shame

The deep 'sociality' of emotions (Wentworth & Ryan, 1994) refers to the current understanding that emotional experience is fundamentally relational and interactively constituted, finding specific expression in significant cultural contexts. In this regard guilt and shame enjoy privileged attention in the psychological and social science literature as self-conscious, social and moral emotions: they involve subjective distress elicited by interpersonal contexts in which social judgments about the moral incorrectness of our thoughts and actions are mobilized and self-consciously appraised (Goetz & Keltner, 2007; Katchadourian, 2010). While there are no uncontested definitions of these terms or any invariant distinctions between them, guilt is usually considered to manifest as a painful feeling of regret associated with moral transgressions or avoided moral obligations that are believed to have harmed others or one's relationships with others (Katchadourian, 2010; Malti, 2016; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Guilt, by definition, is thus a relational phenomenon in that it assumes responsibility for damaged self-other relationships.

Shame, on the other hand, involves a global negative evaluation of one's core self, regardless of whether or not one's conduct is believed to have harmed others (Katchadourian, 2010; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). In shame, therefore, one's very self-concept or character is revealed to be defective, prompting humiliation and general self-accusations of badness and unworthiness. While it initially appears that shame involves a relationship with self rather than others, shame, too, is now acknowledged to be 'intersubjectively generated, maintained, exacerbated, and… mitigated within the relational system' (Orange, 2013, p. 85).

Guilt and shame are thus considered independent but related emotions which may, but need not, exist concurrently. Furthermore, while conceptually and experientially distinct, shame and guilt often appear in complex admixtures (Lansksy, 2005). Though guilt and shame are universal, their 'specific elicitors' (Goetz & Keltner, 2007, p. 160) may show cultural variation, making certain cultural contexts and actions in these contexts specifically salient as emotional precipitants. Given South Africa's unique history, we may anticipate that guilt and shame would assume specific manifestations and would be prompted by eliciting contexts less salient in other cultures. Migration, as will be demonstrated, is a good example of this.

Guilt and shame involve negative self-attributions in interpersonal contexts, but the concepts of collective guilt and shame have emerged to describe vicarious emotional responses to the perceived immoral actions of others to whom we feel some sense of affiliation. Collective guilt 'is a dysphoric feeling experienced when people perceive their ingroup as responsible for wrongly harming another group, even when they are not personally responsible' (Gunn & Wilson, 2011, pp. 1-2). The phenomenon of white guilt usefully illustrates this; it denotes the uncomfortable recognition and acknowledgement that merely being white in a racially discriminatory society confers unfair group advantage and associates one with the execution of unjust racist practices (Swim & Miller, 1999). Collective shame, on the other hand, refers to a 'concern experienced when the ingroup's actions are appraised as exposing, either to oneself or to others, the immoral shortcomings of the ingroup' (Gunn & Wilson, 2011, p. 4). White shame, therefore, transcends guilty responsibility for specific racist actions; it involves collective self-diminution inherent in the recognition of 'a morally damaged white self' (Vice, 2010, p. 338) borne out of complicity with racial domination and oppression.

Migrant guilt and shame

The literature on migrant shame typically focuses on cultural and racial othering or the experience of servitude in the migrant's adoptive country (Katigbak, 2017). These markers of difference result in perceived exclusion and discrimination, inducing feelings of inferiority, inadequacy and humiliation in migrant individuals. In other words, migrant shame is typically elicited by the (real or imagined) prejudiced gaze of the non-migrant citizen, which shames with its disparaging evaluation of the migrant self.

If migrant shame is mobilized by what one is undeservedly made to feel by natives in one's host country, migrant guilt typically concerns what one deservedly feels in relation to

those left behind in one's homeland (Baldassar, 2015; Ward & Styles, 2012). While there is considerable literature on migrant shame, few studies have focused on migrant guilt. We could locate only two studies addressing the phenomenon in relation to migrants to Australia, despite this country's status as the quintessential immigrant nation. Ward and Styles (2012) interviewed female migrants about their experience of migrating from the UK to Australia. They found that almost half of these participants reported feeling guilty about forsaking aging parents, depriving them of contact with grandchildren, and depriving their children of extended family. The authors report this guilt to be a 'pervading, punishing and long lasting emotion' (p.339) which, given the factors involved, does not readily permit reparation. They found guilt to be a destructive emotion that negatively impacts migrant well-being through self-punishment and erosion of self-esteem. Migrants in their sample showed no evidence of successful reparation, leading the authors to conclude that migrant guilt is a chronic and self-corrosive emotional state.

Baldassar's (2015) anthropological research on transnational caregiving focuses on adult Italian migrants to Australia and how migration violates normative cultural expectations that adult children should care for their parents. However, while acknowledging that guilt may have destructive effects, Baldassar considers it to be a mostly prosocial and functionally positive emotion. Guilt strengthens social bonds and attachments by prompting migrant children to invest resources in maintaining contact with homeland relatives and engage in reparative caregiving acts that restore emotional equity in relationships damaged by distance. From Baldassar's perspective guilt, though an unpleasant individual experience, may be both socially functional and amenable to propitiatory gestures by guilty migrants. However, Baldassar (2015) also addresses the active parental role in migrant guilt, noting that guilt 'is commonly induced by parents who convey their own sense of suffering over the failure of the migrant children to act in the desired fashion, that is, by remaining co-present' (p. 84). Guilt in these studies is an exclusively familial phenomenon; people feel guilty because specific intimate kinship relationships are negatively impacted by migration. Guilt, in other words, is not associated with more abstract entities and relationships, such as with one's country or society. Conspicuously, while Ward and Styles (2012) make passing reference to shame, it is not addressed or illustrated in their findings. Baldassar (2015) too, while distinguishing guilt from shame, also does not identify the latter in her participants' experience.

Despite the prominence of guilt and shame in the psychoanalytic literature, few psychoanalytic studies have sought to explore these phenomena as significant aspects of

migration. Even those authors who do consider these affective experiences (Akhtar, 1999; Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989; Ward & Styles, 2102) stop short of providing comprehensive accounts of how, why, and in what contexts guilt and shame emerge and interact in migrants' experience. In light of this research lacuna, our study is intended as a modest contribution to understanding the contextual specificity of migrant guilt and shame.

The post-1994 South African migration context

Since the 1994 transition to democracy in South Africa a large number of people, most of them white, have emigrated. The contemporary research portrayals of these migrants are less than edifying. They emerge as self-pitying post-apartheid 'victims', unapologetically reactionary and disparaging toward their homeland, indifferent to the social impact of their departure, and unreflectively engaged in self-seeking distortion of recent South African history and their own motives for leaving (Crush, 2013; Marchetti-Mercer, 2012; McKenzie & Gressier, 2016). While citing crime, violence, and deteriorating standards, their unarticulated reason for migrating is the pursuit of facilitating environments for their habitual whiteliness (Taylor, 2004). We are less interested in rehabilitating this unflattering image of white South African migrants than in probing it for the underlying tensions and contradictions suggested by the appearance of guilt and shame in our earlier research project.

White guilt and shame in the South African context have been the focus of extensive recent analysis (e.g., Straker, 2011; Suchet, 2007; Vice, 2010), but none of this literature has explored these phenomena in the context of migration from South Africa. One study that touches upon these migrant experiences in context is an unpublished PhD thesis (Hicks, 2015), which explores white South Africans' experiences of migration to Australia. Although not the focus of her research, Hicks observes that some of her participants felt guilty about leaving family behind, but also 'about having left the country itself' (p. 252). Hicks also identified evidence of shame in some of her participants: shame concerning their lack of post-migration success, as well as shame associated with being South African and having left South Africa. Challenged with this research lacuna it felt opportune to devote an in-depth, psychoanalytically informed research project to a fascinating and troublesome aspect of migrant psychological life.

Participants

The participants were 14 white South African professionals who had migrated to Australia after 1994. Confining the research to only white participants was a decision arising

from the fact that themes of shame and guilt related to having left South Africa were only prevalent in white participants from our initial research study. Thirteen participants lived in major Australian urban centres, while one lived in a small regional town. They were all recruited via professional networks and word of mouth. An email advertising the research was circulated to South African migrants, with a request to contact the first author should they be interested in participating. After 14 interviews were conducted it was decided that enough rich data had been collected and no more potential participants were approached. Eight participants were counsellors, psychologists or psychotherapists. Members of this professional category dominated the sample as the first author is a psychotherapist and has convenient access to this professional network. Nine participants were female and five male. Ten were English first-language speakers, and three were Afrikaans first-language speakers. Participants ranged in age from 41 to 62.

Method

The first author, a white South African clinical psychologist and psychoanalytic psychotherapist, migrated to Australia eight years ago. The second author is, in South African racial terminology, a 'coloured' South African community psychologist who migrated to Australia more than twenty years ago. As noted earlier, the current study grew out of an earlier thematic analysis investigation of cultural identity and belonging in South Africans, from various racial groupings, who had chosen to migrate to Australia after the South African transition to democracy in 1994.

To this end, the first author, who interviewed participants in the first study, continued to interview white participants, using the same semi-structured interview format. All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted face-to-face or via Skype. Participants were asked for detailed descriptions of their migration experience, what had prompted their migration decision, and how they located themselves socially and culturally in relation to their home and adoptive countries. To avoid leading participants, the interviewer refrained from introducing the topics of shame or guilt, and only pursued these affective states if participants spontaneously volunteered or implicitly referenced them.

One of the difficulties with researching guilt and shame is that the overt emotions are often not consciously present or acknowledged. Instead, what researchers may encounter are unconscious defensive efforts to avoid feeling and owning these painful emotional states (Lansky, 2005). Psychoanalytically informed qualitative research methods have arisen to

investigate unconscious dynamics at work in research participants' accounts of their experience and their interaction with research interviewers (Clarke, 2002; Frosh & Saville Young, 2008; Gough, 2009). Hollway and Jefferson (2005) premise their research approach on 'the divided psychosocial subject of unconscious conflict, a subject located in social realities mediated not only by social discourses but by psychic defences' (p. 147). Analysing the communications of defended subjects involves going beyond their explicitly stated intentions and meanings to identify psychic conflicts and defences against the accompanying emotional discomfort. This not only involves analysing participants' verbal content and how they speak, but also using the emotional impact they have on the researcher as a potential clue to complex, defended, or unarticulated meaning and feeling. The researcher's emotional responsiveness to interview participants, when reflexively interrogated, is viewed to be a research instrument, registering defensively repudiated aspects of the research participant's experience.

We decided to build our research method around this conceptual framework, drawing on the work of other psychosocial researchers investigating various topics (Clarke, 2002; Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2003; Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003). We wanted to pay due regard to the socially contextual and discursively constituted positions that participants adopted. At the same time, we could not endorse the erasure of selfhood and interiority evident in radical discursive psychological theory. While efforts to meld discursive and psychoanalytic approaches may be fraught with difficulties (Edley, 2006), we take the position that a psychoanalytic interpretive framework may help understand both the conscious and unconscious reasons for people's emotional investment in assuming specific discursive positions (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2003; Frosh & Saville Young, 2008). We were cautious to avoid positioning ourselves as expert interpreters of our participants' psychological processes, particularly when we perceived a tension between participants' consciously stated experience and our sense of something 'more' happening outside of their immediate awareness. The research interview interaction, moreover, features unconscious contributions from both participants in the interview process. A reflexive vigilance about how our own subjectivity impacts and co-creates the intersubjective exchange, particularly given a shared cultural and migrant history, was essential to the task of interpreting the interview material. Researchers' experience of their participants in interview contexts may provide a source of data and interpretive hypotheses but does not constitute evidence of participants' latent meaning and feeling (Holmes, 2014). Whenever interpreting the emergence of defended participant experience, we took pains to search for both

disconfirming and supporting evidence in the interview process and content. This led us to refine or discard speculative conclusions discrepant with participants' consciously stated experience, while factoring in the ubiquitous influence of unconscious motives in participant narratives and our efforts to understand them.

Data analysis

In the first stage of the post-interview research process I (first author) immersed myself in the data by transcribing each audio-recorded interview and writing reflections on the interview process and my emotional reactions to the interview content and interaction. For example, I noted when participants abruptly changed topics, lost their train of thought, fell silent, became confused or emotional, or needed to justify their actions or responses. I also noted the quality of my interaction with each participant over the course of the interview, and my emotional responses, thoughts and fantasies as the interview progressed.

The second stage involved deductive thematic analysis of substantive interview content for each participant, coding transcribed text and generating salient themes relevant to the phenomena of guilt and shame in the context of migration and participants' biographical information. What made the analysis deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was the fact that we approached our participants' broad accounts of their migration experience with a narrower and preconceived interest in experience related to guilt and shame. In order to remain experience-near, this stage of analysis attended to the participants' consciously stated accounts of their motives, perceptions, feelings and self-understandings. Commonalties and differences between participants were recorded to identify significant patterns and idiosyncratic features (See Table 1 for relevant themes).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

In the third stage, I (first author) looked for evidence of defended communication and interaction, both in the transcribed text and audio-recorded interview interaction. I looked for any manifestation of typical defensive strategies in participant narratives, such as topic avoidance, rationalization, displacement, splitting, projection, denial, and attempts to suppress or evade feelings. Mindful of the possibility that such defensive activity could be a co-created interactional response to emotionally difficult conversation, I reviewed my emotional reactions to participants' expression, the contexts in which this occurred, and the nature of my interview engagement with them at these points. Additional consideration was

given to how participants positioned themselves in terms of a repertoire of contextually relevant discursive positions, some of which were either the occasion for guilt and shame or functioned to defend against such experience. Examples of such discursive positioning include 'the good citizen', the 'apartheid beneficiary, the 'innocent crime victim', the 'traitor', the 'self-sacrificing parent', the 'maligned white person', etc.

In the fourth stage we compared our respective understanding of what we perceived to be happening in each interview, interrogating how our shared or discrepant responses might reflect our own migration experience and relationship with guilt, shame and whiteness. The final stage involved deciding which aspects of our rich data corpus to write about and illustrate with verbatim interview extracts.

Findings

Though the interviews were wide-ranging and produced data related to many migration issues, for the purposes of this paper discussion is confined to those findings relevant to the emotions of guilt and shame. The interviews were emotionally charged, with five participants becoming tearful as they spoke of their migrant experiences. Other expressed feelings included anger, bitterness and sadness. Significantly, eight of the 14 participants spontaneously referenced migration-related feelings of guilt, shame or some combination of these emotions. We will discuss the significant themes associated with guilt and shame, the specific eliciting migrant contexts, how participants attempt to evade or manage these feelings, and reflect on what facilitates or inhibits resolution of these difficult emotions.

Migration guilt: Abandoning the motherland

While family-related guilt associated with leaving behind loved ones (Baldassar, 2015; Ward & Styles, 2012) was evident in our participants, many noted an additional source of guilt, namely 'abandoning' South Africa through the act of migration. Given the contemporary prevalence of international migration, we were interested in why, for our participants, choosing to live in Australia should feel so guilt-inducing. A clue was evident in three participants referring to South Africa as their 'motherland.' One described South Africa as 'the oven in which I was cooked', as though she were bread rising in the steady heat of her homeland. In this gestational metaphor we can discern the maternal body in which the participant's foetal self grew. Another participant observed, 'There's been a big story around the tension and my historical relationships with my mother and my motherland, my family

and all the complexities around that.' This symbolic linkage of mother and motherland has implications for the meanings associated with voluntary migration.

Paris (1978) observes, 'No matter how well grounded the reasons for emigration or exile, there is a feeling of unconscious guilt in relation to the country of origin. Like parents, the nation of one's birth commands loyalty for having been the first to offer nurturance' (p. 57). If the country of our birth symbolizes the maternal body, then guilt in response to the perceived desertion of our motherland is readily understandable. Akhtar (2011) has also noted migrant guilt in response to leaving the home country. He relates this to the reparative wish springing from 'the inner awareness that in leaving home one has in a way attacked it' (p. 16). This psychoanalytic perspective may bring us closer to an answer but does not account for the intensity of guilt expressed by our participants, nor the conspicuous absence of this guilt elicitor in research on migrants from other countries. By paying close attention to contextual details of our participants' experience we were able to notice two implicit assumptions they made concerning their motherland: her perceived health and her race. Akhtar (1999) has elsewhere observed that guilt is 'likely to be greater in those emigrating from socioeconomically disadvantaged and unstable regions' (p. 83). In other words, the perceived health of the motherland the migrant leaves will at least partially determine whether guilt becomes a salient emotional response to emigration. You may leave behind a healthy mother, but what about leaving one who is frail and ailing? This perception of South Africa's relative infirmity was strongly evident in participants' elaboration of their experience. Samantha described

> a level of guilt really that remains unresolved around the fact that we left and didn't stay and make a contribution or make it work. We prioritized our own needs over that of the country and that's quite a hard thing to live with. I prefer living in Australia, but I can't help thinking, if I were a better person I would have stayed and tried to make a contribution to the future of the country. I feel like we abandoned a sinking ship - and certainly this was the message I got from a number of our friends when we announced we were leaving.

We may critically interrogate the Afro-pessimism implicit in this "sinking ship" metaphor, but it was very apparent that many participants perceived South Africa to be frail and struggling, ravaged by crime, poverty, and socioeconomic uncertainty. Leaving South Africa thus felt like an act of betrayal in which robust adult children, instead of caring for and supporting their weakened mother, selfishly abandoned her to her an uncertain fate.

A second factor implicated in the guilt response is that, while our participants were white, the mother they left is black. All of the participants left South Africa, a predominantly black African country, after apartheid had ended and a black government democratically elected. Migrant guilt is thus racially inflected, which would explain why it was not apparent in in the migration narratives of black and coloured participants in the first stage of the research. Jennifer, describing her sense of guilt and shame, said, 'I'd been this member of the Black Sash (an anti-apartheid organisation); I'd been out there marching and protesting [against apartheid], and all the rest of it. And my brother said to me, "You say you like the blacks, but when they come into power you run away. You bloody hypocrite."' Richard professed 'a strong connection to the suffering of the black person' and recalled his parents sheltering black activists fleeing from the apartheid police. Referring to how emigration changed his self-perception, he notes

feeling some guilt, a bit like a traitor. I feel embarrassed about it. Before I did it I used to get angry at people who emigrated. I used to think, "How can you leave the country, you're running away." So now this person was leaving. You know, that for me sums up some of the deeper feeling. I'm this person who has this connection, who writes this poetry, but now just fucks off like the rest of them.

White people flourished under apartheid and benefitted from it through their aggressively self-appointed racial privilege and discriminatory allocation of national resources. They thrived while black people were deprived. Of course, remaining in South Africa does not automatically repay this debt or assuage white guilt, but the indebtedness and guilt is magnified by the perception of fleeing the scene of apartheid crime via migration. Atonement, and the repayment of apartheid debt, it seems, cannot be accomplished from afar because in this context migration is equated with the selfish abrogation of social responsibility. Samantha, referring to her philanthropic work in Australia, commented: 'Of course none of this takes away my feelings of guilt about having prioritised my own well-being over my potential to give back to the country after having been a beneficiary of apartheid'.

White South Africans were nurtured by a black motherland and often literally by black surrogate mothers in the form of domestic workers who cared for them as children while their actual mothers worked or engaged in leisure activities. For three participants, abandoning domestic workers occasioned more guilt than leaving behind family members. Marinda said about Letta, her former domestic worker:

There was a lot of guilt, a lot. Still now there's a lot of guilt. She was really relying on us, and it was very difficult for her. And we looked after her for a while. We had taken Letta's family in, we were their financial support. And when we left we had to leave her just like that. So, so I knew she was lost. She had no pension, she was getting older, and I was leaving these people behind knowing that they were struggling.

The shame of being a racist and/or a traitor

Shame is usually understood to involve the apprehension of a defective self, announced by a painful sense of felt discrepancy between who one is and who one should be (Katchadourian, 2009; Pulver, 1999). Five of our participants spoke of feeling shame about having left South Africa. The two primary shame activators involved the self-judgment of being a racist or a traitor, both considerable moral failings. Jennifer observed:

The shame was, 'Am I actually racist? Is it true that, actually, is there a racist element to this? The fact that after democracy comes, and after a black majority government comes, and I don't like it anymore...what is this saying about me? Am I actually....you know...' It felt very white to not like all the disorder and chaos, you know. Yes, that's the shame, about feeling racist.

After many years in Australia, Richard returned to South Africa to run the Comrades Marathon, a quintessentially South Africa sporting event. He recalls

I suppose it was a bit of repressed unconscious being lifted by the dramatics of the day, the adrenaline, um, puts you in a zone where your defences go a bit to sleep and things just come out. And there were two Afrikaans guys behind me. I don't know if they asked where I was from or what, but I remember saying, 'Ek is 'n veraaier' [I am a traitor].

The retelling of this event, which happened a long time ago, deeply affected Richard in the interview. He fell silent, hands moving helplessly, as tears filled his eyes. When he recovered, he commented on his experience: 'It's like a letting down. I've let down something. I've let down my value system, something inside myself, and maybe others' perception of me.' The above interview excerpts are consistent with the claim that shame is a public emotion, typically linked 'to the exposure of a defect, failure, or transgression that damages one's public standing' (Katchadourian, 2009, p. 19).

The relationship between migrant guilt and shame

As noted previously, guilt is typically distinguished from shame insofar as it assumes responsibility for specific actions or intentions felt to be harmful to others, or otherwise considered morally indefensible. Shame, in contrast, is said to be less concerned with specific actions than with the overall experience of oneself as bad or deficient (Kostopoulos, 2012; Pulver, 1999; Swim & Miller, 1999). However, this distinction was not conspicuous in our participants, who struggled to separate them out and often used the terms interchangeably. For example, Marinda, who stated in a previous excerpt that she felt guilty about abandoning her domestic worker, went on to say: 'That was horrible. It still is, I still feel so ashamed. Even when she once tried to make contact, I didn't follow it up because I just didn't know what to say to her. I told myself that I had really tried my best.' Marinda clearly feels both guilty and ashamed about her self-perceived abandonment of Letta and it is difficult to tease out what aspect of her experience most relates to the respective feeling states. Our research supports the claim of Bailey (2011), who avers that shame and guilt 'cannot be separated with any empirical precision. The distinction between character and behaviour is artificial: we are what we do, and our doings say a great deal about who we are' (p.474).

However, some participants were very clear that they felt either guilt or shame, but not both. Rebecca said: 'I didn't feel guilty about leaving the country. I'm not part of South Africa, I've never identified as being South African, because I think it's part of the shame that comes with being a white South African. I never felt I could claim that as something to be proud of.' Rebecca's shame at being a white South African prevented her from emotional investment in a significant attachment to her country. Guilt presupposes a valued relationship with another, which is felt to be damaged by one's action or inaction. Contrary to other participants, because Rebecca felt no attachment to the damaged other (South Africa) she was able to leave without feeling guilty.

The relational-cultural elicitors of guilt and shame

Guilt and shame have been regarded as universal affective predispositions, mobilized as internal feeling states by the individual's critical self-evaluation. Missing from this individualistic psychological account is how culturally contingent and embedded these affective phenomena are in a nexus of cultural-relational transactions (Ewing, 2008; Taylor, 2017; Wise & Velayutham, 2017). White migration from South Africa during apartheid and in the post-apartheid period, while ostensibly the same process, are socially constituted as fundamentally different actions and are discursively framed in very different ways. The action of leaving a country ruled by an oppressive and racist white regime assumes a different

meaning and moral connotation to that of leaving a fledgling black democracy. The now widespread term 'apartheid beneficiary' was used by some of our participants. It refers to the retrospective but automatic status conferred on all white South Africans in the apartheid era, irrespective of their ideological sympathies. To own this identity position implies not only acknowledging a complicit role in an immoral history, with its assumption of guilt, but also a moral commitment to 'paying back' through reparative contribution or sacrifice. It is in this discursive context that migration assumes the status of a moral transgression: fleeing one's social responsibility rather than staying to make reparation for ill-gotten advantage.

Importantly, though, discursive positioning is given psychological significance and affective force by a network of interpersonal transactions, both real and imagined. Guilt and shame are certainly psychological states, but their meaning is interpersonally sponsored and maintained. Participant narratives were replete with references to relationship ruptures occasioned by sudden withdrawal, silences, or overt accusations of betrayal by South African friends, colleagues, and relatives. Sam observed;

> The relational fall-out was the thing I found the most difficult about leaving. It was a very difficult thing to negotiate in my relationships. Our very close friends (husband and wife couple) were very angry with us and she had been my closest friend. But it became a really difficult issue between us that they felt betrayed at a personal and political level by us leaving. Initially it wasn't something we could seem to resolve or talk about.

Sam went on to observe, "It is a thorn in my side you live with. When I speak to friends of mine who are doing good stuff in South Africa I feel bad about it." While migration predictably disrupts interpersonal bonds, leaving South Africa is interpreted through the discourse of political betrayal. Guilt is activated when this discourse is personalised in the context of valued relationships and is freshened by interactions that implicitly contrast the goodness of those who stay and do "good" with the moral stain of leaving.

Relocating to another country requires negotiating a new set of relationships freighted with fantasies about the meaning of migration and how the migrant self will be viewed in the host culture. While guilt and shame are mobilized in relation to those remaining behind in South Africa, it is also prompted by perceptions of how one is viewed in the receiving country. Given South Africa's history, in Australia these migrant antennae check the atmosphere for accusatory signals. Jennifer described her post-migration anxieties in Australia;

When people would ask me, 'So why did you leave?' I would still have that sort of sinking feeling in my stomach, thinking, 'Ah, I'm going to have to justify myself here, tell them big stories about how awful it was in South Africa. I really must make it sound like it was a legitimate decision.' And when people would say, 'Oh, you're South African', I would still feel that bit of a gulp, 'Yes, are you going to think I'm racist', kind of thing. It was sitting somewhere, like an accompaniment to my life. I was not overwhelmed but I carried it with me like a sort of secret, uncomfortable part of myself.

The problem with trying to disentangle relational realities from ever-present fantasy is well illustrated in this extract. Jennifer would hear Australian natives' curiosity about her reasons for migrating as a character indictment, mobilizing shame and defensiveness. While she fears their misattributing racist intention to her migration decision, this relational trigger is coloured by her own projections. At another point in the interview she wonders whether her leaving South Africa was indeed prompted by her racial discomfort with the perceived "chaos" of a country now under black rule.

Living with or resolving guilt and shame

An important issue is what happens to guilt and shame with the passage of time. In the case of many participants, despite having migrated a considerable time ago, these emotions persisted strongly and were evident in the powerful impact the interviews had on them. Ruth responded sadly, 'The guilt? Being here, I just sit with it I suppose. There's not a lot I can do.' Another spoke of 'a lingering level of guilt really that remains unresolved around the fact that we left and didn't stay and make a contribution or make it work. We prioritized our own needs over that of the country and that's quite a hard thing to live with.' Sam, speaking of how her involvement in poverty relief work in Asia helped to 'mitigate the guilt', went on to say, 'But it's a thorn in my side; you live with it, and I do, but when I speak to friends of mine who are really doing good stuff in South Africa I feel bad about it.'

Some participants, were able to resolve their difficult experiences. Jennifer began a PhD research project on South African migrants to deal with her troubling migrant experience:

That PhD started out of feeling shame and guilt. I felt so awful about it that I needed to find out, 'Are there other people who feel like me? Is there something wrong with me? What's going on here?' I think, talking to people and listening to their stories, there was something about the relentless confronting and exposure to the difficult feelings that allowed them to become metabolised. It was part of my experience. I can claim it as something that felt legitimate and real and important. It's not where I am anymore but

it's part of who I've been. I don't feel disconnected, it's just that I feel that I've processed some of that stuff; I feel okay now, I feel this is my life now. If I think about having left at that time, after 1994, I can still feel pangs of shame and guilt but these are not foregrounded in my sense of who I am now. I don't live in that sense of myself now.

Careful reading of this interview extract shows Jennifer's acknowledgement of having experienced guilt and shame and her clear description of the process whereby these emotions were gradually transformed, while still leaving detectable traces. It is clear, though, that guilt and shame are not inevitably transient emotions (Ward & Styles, 2012), receding or dissolving with the passage of time. How participants engaged with, evaded or attempted to manage their 'moral emotions' over the course of time is addressed in the following section.

Defending against guilt and shame

Many participants were able to use the interviews to investigate and share difficult experience. However, not all of them could fully acknowledge or maintain contact with their troubling feelings. Consequently, emotionally defensive manoeuvres were conspicuous in the interview interaction. Psychosocial research focuses on the fractured self and the unconscious employment of defences to manage affective distress elicited by the interview relationship (Hollway & Jefferson, 2005; Gough, 2009; Holmes, 2013). Given the emotional challenge associated with talking about guilt and shame, participants often presented defences against these emotions, rather than the emotions themselves (lansky, 2005).

Karl observed, in relation to his experience of others' perceiving his migration as a traitorous act, 'I think in the final wash the rationalisation was that I wasn't being a traitor. I had been a good citizen, I had paid my taxes, I paid my dues.' Karl's discursive positioning as a 'good citizen' may have been necessary to stave off, through the use of defensive rationalisation, the shameful self-accusation that he may indeed be a traitor and that his dues to the country have still to be paid. However, when the interviewer pointed out that the word rationalisation "is a loaded one, having defensive connotations", Karl was able to reflect on this and say, "Yes, yes, yeah. So the idea that was that we were jumping ship." The shift from feeling "accused" to entertaining the "idea" of being a traitor suggests Karl was able to re-position himself less defensively in the course of the interview dialogue.

Although Melissa originally mentioned guilt in the context of not being able to do more for her ill mother in South Africa, she went on to describe her guilt as 'pre-existing', linked to how she felt she was perceived in South Africa:

It was almost like, 'I've got privilege, and how did I get that privilege?' It wasn't the white thing because I'd educated myself, which gave me an option. My brothers and sisters didn't, they work for themselves. But that was my choice. But then you've got this system in South Africa saying, 'White people have privilege', so I felt guilt coming from that. I thought, 'Maybe I only studied because I'm white.' But then I'm like, 'No, I had to borrow the money from the bank and pay it back. And I had to get to class and work to do that, and do a first degree and a second degree.' And I keep having to reassure myself that I didn't get a freebie, that I actually earned this, that I wasn't privileged. And I remind myself that I actually walked to school, a little country school, and there were no great teachers there. Because you keep getting this, 'You had it better' or 'You didn't earn any of this.' So I had that coming down on me.

This interview segment suggests defensive rationalisation and projection as Melissa seeks to protect a fragile and threatened positive self-image of herself as a white South African migrant. With rapid, pressured speech and emphatic insistence, Melissa engages in hard rhetorical work to convince both the interviewer and herself that the guilt she fleetingly entertains is in fact not hers and does not stem from white privilege. Instead, guilt is externally imposed; indeed, unjustly inflicted upon her by a persecutory post-apartheid South African 'system.' This illustrates the claim that 'the misery produced by unconscious guilt is… displaced on to the other, supposedly cruel person, who is therefore heartily hated' (Jones, 1929, quoted in Akhtar, 2012, p. 9). The strenuous defensive efforts Melissa goes to suggests how emotionally invested in not entertaining feelings of guilt she is.

Importantly, Melissa forgot our first appointment. Reflecting on this in the rescheduled interview, she said: 'Last time we made an appointment I forgot. I think it happened subconsciously, for a reason. I struggled with that; I'm surprised at how I struggled. And my feeling was, "You want me to go back there; I'm not going back there!"' In this context the interviewer is cast as a persecutor, who Melissa unconsciously protects herself against by forgetting the appointment. We understood this to mean that she did not want to go back and look at the complex and difficult feelings associated with being a white South African, particularly guilt, and that by leaving the country she was able to nurture a fantasy that she had left behind these painful feelings as well. Our interview appears to have threatened her defences by confronting her with her disavowed and dis-located guilt.

Some participants showed insight into their defensive efforts to manage guilt and shame. Sam, discussing how she dealt with her migrant guilt, said, 'I guess I defend against it to some extent, in terms of focusing on the fact that my children don't owe that same debt in a

way to South Africa, and I have given them a life here…' She added, 'Perhaps my patriotism to Australia is a defence against my guilt about South Africa, but I can only comment on my conscious experience - or at least how I choose to construct it.'

Sam's contemplation of her possibly defensive patriotism contrasts with many participants who strongly affirmed their identity as South Africans and spoke about their ongoing difficulty to belong and identify as Australian. Rebecca observed, 'It's been a struggle to attach here. I felt my attachment was in South Africa and it was hard to detach from there; I still haven't.' Approximately half of our sample were dual nationals, actively choosing to maintain their South African citizenship. Some participants were aware that the vigorous assertion of their South African identity and 'refusal' to properly belong in Australia was a way of mitigating guilt; as one noted, 'I do have a sense of being a dual national, and maybe that appeases the guilt in some way, that I still have an element of South African identity.'

This refusal to identify as Australian was unconsciously performed twice in the interview with Ruth, who had spent more than a decade in Australia. Participants were requested to bring to the interview two objects, one South African and one Australian, which they felt best symbolized their relationship with these countries. Ruth enthusiastically discussed her South African object but laughed with embarrassment when I asked about her chosen Australian artefact, saying that she had forgotten that part of the request. When asked about her sense of belonging in relation to the two countries, she said of Australia: 'There are times where the not belonging feels quite strong but then, watching the Commonwealth games on television, I feel "Go South Africa (slip of the tongue)" [laughs]. I mean, "Go Australia."'

It is hardly surprising that guilt and shame might mobilize defensive efforts aimed at assuaging, minimising or denying these feelings altogether (Akhtar, 2012; Lansky, 2005). However, a crucial question is whether these migrants are able to use their experience in the service of self-discovery, uncomfortable though this is, or whether they fortify their defences against it. This determines the relative extent to which guilt and shame can be openly acknowledged and worked through, or whether these feelings are denied or assume persecutory manifestations. For example, migration allowed Sara the opportunity to experience and engage with implicit racism that was invisible to her in South Africa. She said:

It was very confronting for me to come here and realize that racism is part of my

genetic makeup. Having to face that, identify that, to own it before I could do

something with it. I had spent my whole life thinking I'm not a racist and then I came to
Australia to discover that I had preconceived ideas about Asian people, especially
Asian medical professionals, assuming they're incompetent.

We may contrast this openness to self-confrontation with Melissa's assertion that South
Africa itself was responsible for her troubling feelings and behaviours. She was clearly
discomfited by the emotions the interview stirred up. Each time we approached issues related
to guilt, shame and culpability, Melissa responded with anger. At one point she said

I've got very hard because of South Africa. I got to be ugly inside, when I'm normally a
kind and good person. I was angry at beggars; at every traffic light somebody was
begging there. And I stood back and said, 'This is doing something to me, I'm just so
angry all the time.' And I thought, 'I'm not me anymore. I gotta get out of here because
I'm becoming horrible. To save my own self, to go back to who Melissa is I had to get out
of that environment.'

Melissa is 'kind and good' and had to migrate to escape a malignant transformation of
character, to avoid becoming 'ugly inside.' While Sara used migration to own her 'ugliness',
Melissa attributes it to external influence and evades its persecutory presence by literally
leaving it behind.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the complex interpenetration of psychic and social factors in the
culturally located and interpersonally constituted experience of guilt and shame which, in the
case of white South African migrants, assumes unusual forms not evident in other literature
on migrant emotion. The research also supports, Ewing's (2008) contention that migration 'is
an affectively highly charged and fluid situation, which makes particularly visible the role
that social and interpretive practices play in producing specific manifestations of emotion' (p.
226).

A body of research literature is building a rather consistent portrayal of white South
African migrants as ambassadors of remorseless whiteness, who not only deny the suffering
of their black compatriots and their complicity in this suffering, but also abandon familial and
social networks with no acknowledgement of the loss they are inflicting on 'those left behind'
(Marchetti-Mercer, 2012). McKenzie and Gressier (2016), referring to these migrants'
experience of Australia as an 'Arcadian paradise', claim that they resettle easily because they
discover a sense of congruence between their worldview and 'the white nation fantasy
predominating in Australia' (p. 3). This echoes Crush's 2013 conclusions that white South

African migrants to Canada constitute a guilt-free, shameless and victim-identified diaspora, relentlessly negative about their 'dystopian' black homeland. These portrayals are not wholly inaccurate and would certainly apply to some, even many, in this migrant community. However, the purpose of our research was to illuminate and give recognition to a neglected aspect of migrant psychological life, one that problematises the dominant research narrative regarding these migrants. The whiteness we encountered in our participants is a dissonant, destabilised, profoundly unsettled whiteness (Straker, 2011), with a discernibly moral dimension. As reported in our findings, many of our participants had grappled and continue to grapple with painful feelings of guilt and shame, given specific social and cultural expression in relation to their country's aberrant racial politics. Rather than seamless acculturation into Australia, they struggle with belonging, construing belongingness in the adoptive country to imply a betrayal of the black motherland that nurtured them despite their objectionable and wounding whiteness.

This is not to imply that the self-reflection occasioned by migrant dislocation is necessarily a catalyst for enlightenment and moral renewal. Close inspection of our data reveals many markers of 'white talk' (Steyn, 2005), the largely unconscious invocation of exclusionary Eurocentric ideologies and cultural practices that function as normative guarantors of white identity privilege. However, what is interesting to see is how white talk in many interviews is punctuated, even ruptured, by discordant feelings that occasion self-reflective apertures and truth-seeking opportunities.

The contrasts between our participants and those reported in the abovementioned studies on white South African migrants, warrants comment. Many of our participants demonstrated considerable self-reflection and emotional openness in what were personally exposing and challenging interviews. Given that many of them were psychologically educated, we may wonder if their capacity for experiencing and reflecting on guilt and shame was not a product of their professional training in self-examination. Furthermore, could their guilt and shame proclivity be exceptional and derive from a heightened empathic awareness, once again related to their profession, of the suffering of black South Africans? If true, this would make ours a highly unrepresentative sample. In this regard, it is worth noting that not only did non-therapist participants report shame and guilt, but that a number of therapist participants either showed no evidence of shame or guilt or exhibited defences against these emotions.

Another possible critique of this research is that its focus on white migrant experience re-centres whiteness, is perhaps a performance of whiteness, rather than a critical

interrogation of it. This may be true in some respects, but our hope is that by opening up a space in which white South African migrants can acknowledge and explore their moral emotions, we may better face our realistically shameful history, and become more sensitized to whiteness and the racial dynamics abundantly at play in our adoptive countries.

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Table 1

Guilt and shame themes and frequencies

Main theme	Subthemes		Theme frequency
1. Migration guilt			6
	i.	Abandoning an ailing black 'motherland'	4
	ii.	Abandoning dependent domestic workers	3
	iii.	Leaving parents and friends	3
2. Migration shame			5
	i.	Being a traitor for 'fleeing' troubled country	3
	ii.	Being a racist for leaving black democratic homeland	5
3. Relational-cultural activators			
	i.	Leaving South Africa as a white 'apartheid beneficiary'	3
	ii.	Leaving after transition to black democratic government	5
	iii.	Negative responses of friends to migration decision	5
	iv.	Anticipation of racist migrant attributions from Australians	3
4. Relationship between guilt and shame			
	i.	Guilt and shame not easily distinguished	6
	ii.	Guilt and shame co-exist	2
	iii.	Shame without guilt	2
5. Managing/ resolving guilt and shame			
	i.	Long-lasting emotions that persist in adoptive country	7

	ii.	'Just sitting' with the feelings	1
	iii.	Dual citizenship appeases guilt	3
	iv.	Maintaining South African cultural identity	8
	v.	Not fully belonging in Australia reduces guilt of leaving South Africa	5
	vi.	Working through feelings by investigating others' experience of them	1
6. Defensive avoidance of guilt and shame			8
	i.	Self-reflective confrontation vs defensive avoidance	4/8
	ii.	'White talk' enables discursive rationalization of migration decision	7
	iii.	Idealizing Australia while denigrating South Africa	2
	iv.	The 'victim' of post-apartheid injustice	3
	v.	The 'good citizen' forced to leave a deteriorating society	3