
Looking to the future with the past in mind: confessions of an Afrikaner

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Abstract

According to Dent (1988), Rousseau's political philosophy is based on a conception of the ideal society as comprising two mutually reciprocal dimensions, namely the political and the pre-political, or personal dimension. Rousseau believed that, although these two dimensions are interrelated, the personal level is more fundamental than the political level. In order for the superstructural dimension to be stable and legitimate, it has to rely on the personal, infrastructural dimension. Regarding social transformation, this means that, unless South African citizens have transformed at the inner, personal level, the new, transformed society will lack stability and legitimacy. In essence, this means that South Africans need to make certain crucial 'mind-shifts'. In this article I intend to examine the process of transformation of the inner, personal self within the context of the changing South African political landscape. As a female white Afrikaner, who grew up in the heyday of Apartheid, I will also try to illuminate the complexity of such inner, personal developments and conversions by reflecting on some personal 'emotional' migrations. I will discuss this with reference to the three distinct cognitive elements of emotions as asserted by Martha Nussbaum (2001), namely its object-intentionality, evaluative belief component, and its reference to the perception of personal well-being.

Emotions, I shall argue, involve judgements about important things, judgements in which, appraising an external object as salient for our own well-being, we acknowledge our own neediness and incompleteness before parts of the world that we do not fully control (Nussbaum, 2001, p.19).

Introduction

Emotions shape the landscape of our mental and social lives. Like the 'geological upheavals' a traveller might discover in a landscape where recently only a flat plane could be seen, they mark our lives as uneven, uncertain, and prone to reversal (Nussbaum, 2001, p.1).

Martha Nussbaum's neo-Stoic account of the emotions has significant implications for social and political transformation in South Africa. Her theory, acclaiming emotions as evaluative judgements, emphasises and elucidates one of the most crucial prerequisites for the successful

transformation of the South African society. Because essential to the successful or unsuccessful adjustment by individual South Africans to all the changes in society, are the ways these uncontrollable external objects are appraised and evaluated with reference to each person's perception of own well-being. Nussbaum sees emotions as evaluative-cognitive judgments. They are our ways of registering how things are with respect to uncontrollable external items.

[T]he peculiar depth and the potentially terrifying character of the human emotion derives from the especially complicated thoughts that humans are likely to form about their own need for objects, and about their imperfect control over them (Nussbaum, 2001, p.16).

At the core of social and political transformations in South Africa then, are its impacts on our emotional lives and the above précis provides an illuminating elucidation of my own rebirth as a 'new South African' – a slow, sometimes painful and often confusing process which started some years ago, and will continue for years to come. Painful and confusing, because at the nucleus of my inner, personal self are several deeply embedded appraisals which were formed in my childhood and *strongly* cultivated by the particular society in which I had grown up. These evaluative judgements, aimed at very specific perceptions of objects, which were often also culturally predetermined, have constituted my personal and cultural identity. Expecting me to alter my judgements, perceptions of objects and ideas of own flourishing means tampering with who I am, with my identity. Transformation then becomes a daunting and complex undertaking, because it urges me to depart from the security of the known and venture into the vastness of the unknown. By sharing short narrative accounts of my personal travel through the changing landscape of a transforming South Africa, I am hoping to capture and articulate some aspects of the journey, some upheavals on the previously flat plane. My approach corresponds with Nussbaum's view that a plausible theory of the social construction of emotions should also recognize the narrative history of an individual, since specific emotional characteristics are embedded by means of early interaction with others. People cannot be isolated from their own particular cultures, and their cultures will inevitably be reflected in their actions (Nussbaum, 2001).

The personal trek: transforming the object

Emotions are not about their objects merely in the sense of being pointed at them and let go, the way an arrow is released towards its target. Their aboutness is more internal, and embodies a way of seeing (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 27).

Introduction

Transformation implies transforming elements of the past into new, transformed ones. In this part of the article, I shall contend that the transformation of a society from one political dispensation to another necessitates two distinct, although intimately connected types of modifications. Externally, the way society is organised and managed should be altered to establish and operationalise the fundamental principles on which the new envisaged society is to be built. But unless these external changes are complemented by personal changes in people's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and subsequent behaviour, the external transformations will be inauthentic and hollow, because they will not truly represent the society's inner soul, and will therefore possibly stand a chance of failure. Social transformation needs to be accepted and assimilated into the very essence of each citizen's personal being. People need to change.

Firstly, I will maintain that central to these deep transformations required of South African citizens, are changes affecting constitutive elements of their emotions. In this regard, the object-intentionality feature of Nussbaum's theory emphasises a fundamental key to our comprehension of the implications of such inner, personal transformations. I will subsequently argue that in order to ensure deep, personal transformation of South African people, the objects of their emotions need to be addressed. Emotions, according to the neo-Stoic theory, are always about something (Nussbaum, 2001). These objects are objects of thought, constructed in our perceiving and thinking. The objects can be highly particular and concrete, such as persons, things, events and places, but also more vague or general, such as 'my past' or 'my country'. Emotional or attitudinal transformation will then imply the possible modification of certain existing objects, the disposal of certain past objects, and the acquisition of some new objects.

Objects and anthologies

Past loves shadow present attachments, and take up residence within them. This in turn suggests that in order to talk well about them we will need to turn to texts that contain a narrative dimension, thus deepening and refining our grasp of ourselves as beings with a complicated temporal history (Nussbaum, 2001, p.2 & 3).

According to the neo-Stoic theory, emotions originate in childhood and are strongly shaped by the culture and the type of society in which the person grows up. Given the diverse social and cultural assemblage of the South African society, as well as its rich and violent political history, it goes without saying that the total collection of emotion objects of the South African citizens will be mammoth and significantly diverse. This argument now leads to another aspect relevant to our diverse society, namely the saliency or significance of emotion objects. Let me explain by sharing a personal experience.

I can remember very well how surprised I was when political unrest broke out in 1976. Being a naïve, cocooned second year student at one of the cradle universities of Afrikaner academia, I was totally taken aback and even indignant by the anger of the black learners of Soweto. These youths protested violently against the fact that they had to learn Afrikaans at school. (Only later did I learn that the real reason for the protests was not a mere curriculum frustration, but related to the much deeper and comprehensive frustration about the harmful and unjust political policy of Apartheid). I was surprised and puzzled by their conduct, because emotionally, we were proverbially 'poles apart'. I could not comprehend their emotions, because the objects of their emotions were completely unfamiliar to me. I have never experienced the frustration and humiliation of being denied in my own country, on ground of the colour of my skin, certain fundamental human rights. My conceptions of basic human rights and democracy were dramatically different to theirs, and the objects of their emotions therefore not part of my personal anthology. I could neither understand, nor respond appropriately, because I could not draw on any references from my own anthology. I was not acquainted with their emotion objects. The reasons for their emotional reactions were therefore obscure to me. I, among many other white people, was suddenly and unexpectedly kicked from the security of my former comfort zone. The violent emotional expressions of these people soon evoked a variety of subsequent strong emotions from me, piercing numerous new objects into my personal anthology. It was only much later, after an extended period of exposure to and confrontation with the emotion objects of these people that my own anthology

began to transform. I had to convince myself that some historical objects had to be discarded and new ones added. Other objects had to be changed or amended before they could go back into a radically reshaped and transformed personal anthology. This was an intensely dramatic and perhaps traumatic task, because it implied vivid impacts on my personal and cultural identity. I had to abandon who I was, without knowing who I was to become. Fundamentally, I had to be transformed if I intended to accept and assimilate the political and social aspects of the new South Africa.

Although my personal transformation process had a kick start in 1976, it has not yet come to a final closure. Transforming previous objects and anthologies is a slow-moving process, requiring repeated incidents of reflection. Too many perceptions of objects had been shaped and cultivated during infant and childhood years, which in my case happened to be at the heyday of Apartheid. These perceptions and beliefs had been strongly and deliberately reinforced by the social machinery of the National Party. Neither the church, schools, cultural societies, youth movements, nor the public media actively encouraged me to consider or engage with the objects of black and coloured people's emotions. My personal anthology simply did not make room for most of their salient objects, perhaps because I was subtly indoctrinated to exclude them from my deliberations. I honestly 'did not know'.

I want to return to the emotion's object-feature of externality and uncontrollability. The riots in 1976 affected me emotionally, because fundamentally, my lack of control was emphasised. These objects were external and I could do nothing to change them or make them disappear. I was extremely vulnerable and passive before them. In order to obtain some form of emotional equanimity and to proceed with my life, I had to accept my defencelessness. And it was only once I had reached this point, once my guard was down, once I was no longer opposing the presence of these new, unfamiliar and daunting objects, that I regained a form of emotional stability. This stability, although often very labile, was possible because I have made certain cognitive adjustments. I have accepted these objects into my anthology. I had to declare myself open. I no longer resisted them and they became part of my life. They became part of who I am. They constituted my own transformed South African identity.

South Africa has a relatively short, yet remarkably rich history. Particularly significant is the fact that the very same historical incidents affected inhabitants of this country in very diverse ways, generating a wide variety of conflicting emotion objects. I believe that the social transformation process in

South Africa intensely affects the object anthologies of each individual citizen's emotions, because in order to harmonize with the changed melody of the South African society, individual objects also need to blend with the collective harmonies of the transformed society. One may now argue that to alter matured anthologies will prove to be impossible, because the constitutive objects are rock-solid. They have been there since childhood years and repeatedly reinforced by the concrete of society. A common response from older citizens confronted with social transformation, is simply, "I'm too old". According to our theory we can assume that they are reluctant to empty their anthologies and compile new ones. Because emptying an anthology implies abandoning your identity and establishing a new one – a daunting task when physical and mental energies are waning. Yet, external manifestations of social transformation will increasingly be waxing. And unless such a person opts for abstinent reclusion, 'adaptation' to the various facets of a transforming society will simply be inevitable. But sheer external manifestations of so-called adaptations will be faked. They will lack commitment and sincerity, causing a constant inner, personal conflict. "I do not want to do this, yet I do it because I have no other alternative". Forced adaptation implies incessant confrontation with undesired external objects, generating an increasing repertoire of negative emotions. A person whose 'transformation' entails a mere external and reluctant adaptation to changing conditions will become a discontented citizen whose quality of life will eventually dwindle. In actual fact, the object-anthology in such a case will indeed transform, because increasingly negative objects will be gathered. Whereas those who have been transformed internally will view the implementation of strategies to redress historically imbalances as positive objects, the same external objects will generate negative images to those resisting the transformation. The very same external object can therefore have diverse images. What one sees will depend on one's belief about the object, but to this aspect I will return in a subsequent part of the article.

Conclusion

With the above I have tried to argue that external social transformation imperatively instigates some kind of personal transformation. Alterations to anthologies are inevitable. The more rigid and fixed the anthology, the more difficult it will be to transform towards an acceptance and assimilation of new objects and in this regard, we need to comprehend and accommodate elderly people's struggles and anxiety. By the same token, those whose anthologies consist of objects dramatically different from those envisaged for the new

South Africa will wrestle even more and probably resist the social transformation forcefully. Alterations to the anthologies of the younger generation may assumingly be less dramatic, however, according to Nussbaum, vital emotion objects have already been established and shaped during early infant years. Given the vast array of cultures and conditions in which South African learners' anthologies are being shaped, it would be naïve to assume that the process of social transformation will not affect children personally, too. We need to be aware of the role that education can play to enhance the compilation of individual object anthologies that will be congruent with a harmonious South African omnibus of object emotions.

The personal trek: transforming the belief

Seeing the emotions as forms of evaluative thought shows us that the question about their role in a good human life is part and parcel of a general inquiry into the good human life (Nussbaum, 2001, p.11).

Introduction

According to the neo-Stoic theory of emotions, an object does not constitute the emotion all by itself. Since the object is external, a link to the self is required. This connection between the object and the self is the particular thought or belief the self has about the object. The thought thus serves as a connecting cable communicating particularities regarding the object to the self. Without this cognitive action (the thought), there will be no emotion. Together with the object, the particular thought determines the identity of the emotion. But this thought is also in the form of a belief or a judgement, assenting instinctively or involuntary to an appearance of the object. The thought serves to assess the value of the object in relation to the self. The process of assent itself involves two phases. First, there is the mere awareness of the appearance of the object, and then follows the second phase during which the appearance of the object can be accepted, repudiated or ignored (Nussbaum, 2001). Should this thought assess that the object is insignificant or irrelevant, the object will be discarded, with no subsequent emotion. However, should the thought recognise the object as significant to the self, it will make a particular judgement that will relate the self to the object in a very specific way. In this sense, the thought can also be seen as a judgement or a belief.¹ In the second part of this article I intend to examine the implications of this

¹ In this article, 'thought', 'judgement' and 'belief' will be used interchangeably.

constitutive component of an emotion with regards to deep transformation in South Africa. I have argued that dramatic social transformation implies radical changes to objects. Radical changes to objects in turn demand urgent changes to former thoughts, judgements and beliefs.

Acquisition of beliefs

We have been put together by the many places you have claimed for us, gathered together from all the memories you have maintained for us (Krog, 2003, p.365).

When a complete society is engaged in a process of political transformation, no citizen can escape the turbulence caused by the transformation of external objects. Every individual is compelled to reconsider his or her set beliefs about these objects. In this regard, Nussbaum argues,

Habit, attachment, and the sheer weight of events may frequently extract assent from us; it is not be imagined as an act that we always deliberately perform (Nussbaum, 2001, p.38).

I now want to return to my personal experience of such an ‘extracted’ assent, namely the political unrests that started on 16 June 1976. Up till then, blacks as objects did not ‘extract’ judgements beyond those that I had been brought up with. I complied with the particular beliefs I had about them, and did not bother to reflect on them. My beliefs included unquestioned judgements about their assumed needs, competences, role in society, and so forth. To me they had a very definite identity, which was fundamentally different to my own. Reflecting on these beliefs, years later, I now experience feelings of embarrassment, guilt and remorse. Despite extenuating arguments, such as juvenile innocence and political indoctrination, the awareness of my own inability to make correct judgements about The Other is still haunting me.

But perhaps I do have a defence. Because to a large extent these thoughts had not been my own inventions. They had been strongly transmitted to me since childhood and continually reinforced by the society in which I had grown up – the school, the church, the media, political leaders and so on. Because due to the very effective political machinery of the Afrikaner government, beliefs that could contradict these acquired thoughts about blacks in particular, had been smothered and mostly eliminated before they could reach me. Should a belief perhaps escape the security net of indoctrinatory mechanisms, it had immediately been attended to by means of fierce counter-beliefs. In general, I only received belief-messages regarded as appropriate to fit my unique and predetermined Afrikaner identity. In other words, the cables that connected me to these objects (the blacks) had been tampered with. My beliefs about blacks

had been deliberately fabricated and managed to shape my identity. I had been manipulated to embrace pro-Apartheid beliefs. And my subsequent emotions corresponded with these thoughts.

False beliefs

[T]he mind has a complex archaeology, and false beliefs, especially about matters of value, are difficult to shake (Nussbaum, 2001, p.36).

But let us return to 16 June 1976. Many black people, and especially school children, died on that day and during subsequent confrontations with security forces. Hector Peterson was the first. I knew about his killing, because the photograph of his limp body, being carried by Nbuyisa Mukhubu, a horrified bystander who accompanied his traumatised sister, made headlines in local and international media. And yet, no matter how hard I now try to detect traces of possible empathy with Hector and his relatives *at that time*, I have to confess to my utter dismay that I cannot recall any. Today I am still intrigued by those wrong judgements and distorted images of objects. Where did they originate and why did they take so many years to transform? Nussbaum's theory, emphasising the crucial formative influence of society on the emotional repertoire of people elucidates my inappropriate emotional responses. In the previous part, I have argued that the specific composition of my individual object anthology had mainly been established and determined by these factors. The cognitive theory of the emotions now provides me with an even better understanding of my inappropriate emotions, because it also explains the falsity of my judgements.

Apart from the false beliefs about *blacks as objects* of my emotions, my belief system also included very distinct judgements about myself as Afrikaner, transmitted to me since childhood and continually endorsed by society. These judgements included the belief that we, as Afrikaners, were the icons of civilisation. Our forefathers had been aristocratic and noble people from Europe, who had been brought to dark Africa by an act of God. Our pious mission was to save Africa from destroying itself. The only way to accomplish this God-given task was to civilise Africa for the Africans. They needed us. We were therefore the superior and they the inferior – we, the masters and they the slaves, we the assertive and they the subservient. Above all, I was also led to believe that most of them acknowledged this state of affairs. They appreciated our presence and interference, because they acknowledged their dependence on us. They were grateful to us for rescuing them and 'lifting them from the muddy doldrums of Africa'. So there was nothing improper

about Afrikaans as compulsory school subject, the assumed cause of the unrest. Competencies in the language of the superior will in actual fact empower them and allow them to elevate themselves above their circumstances.

These were the well-established judgements that informed my emotions during the 1976 riots. Reflecting on these judgements now I am perturbed by the numerous examples of contradicting beliefs and subsequent hypocritical behaviour. Because Afrikaners' roots were supposedly anchored in the noble principles of Christian Nationalism. Love for Christ and love for the God-given country presumptuously provided sufficient raw materials with which the firm fabric of the Afrikaner's cultural identity could be woven. This fabric was assumingly guaranteed against evil external onslaughts, because its ingredients were noble and dignified. My evaluative judgements of external objects were accordingly guided by these two directive principles: As long as my beliefs corresponded with 'a love for God and a love for my country', they were noble. The fact that predominant Afrikaans churches sanctioned these 'dignified principles' furthermore confirmed Afrikaners' beliefs that their vision was legitimate. Church and state had been integrated to such an extent that political beliefs infiltrated church dogma. Reflecting on it now, it seems as if the strategy to sketch God as supporting the Afrikaner was deliberately applied to silence objections to its political policy. As P W Botha, former president, once said, "An Afrikaner does not go on his knees before people, he does it before God" (Krog, 1999, p.403). I am tempted to infer that the Afrikaner 'captured' God and made Him an Afrikaner. So despite the fact that the Afrikaans churches propagated the biblical 'Love thy neighbour', the concept of neighbour had been subtly manipulated and ideologized to such an extent that almost no questions were raised about blacks' absence at Afrikaans church activities. Blacks-as-neighbours, according to the Afrikaner interpretation of God's command, were apparently merely implied in a paternalistic way. There was nothing improper about prohibiting their presence in classrooms, churches, cinemas, post offices, parks, public toilets, benches, beaches, hotels and other recreational places, which had been reserved for whites. Disconcerting Afrikaner voices were furthermore quickly silenced, mainly by means of the shrewd, yet effective strategy of stigmatisation. The most effective and victorious strategy, was ultimately to label them as Communists, who were trying to brainwash the Afrikaners towards accepting the principles of Communism – at that particular time in history regarded as the major threat to international stability.

Reflecting on these ideological beliefs now, I realise that the Afrikaner National Party government equated nationalism with ethnicity. 'Love your country' equalled 'love the Afrikaner nation'. This reminds me of Anderson's definition of a 'nation' (1983, p.15) as ". . . an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". According to Anderson (1983, p.129), people need a sense of nationality. They yearn for ". . . the personal and cultural feeling of belonging to a nation". Cultural products of nationalism, such as poetry, prose, fiction, music, and visual arts express this love very distinctly, and come to represent a unique cultural identity. Hence, cultural products can also be 'managed' and clandestinely applied to cultivate, kindle and even enforce a particular identity. Once these cultural products furthermore comprise the entirety of one's frame of reference, one's belief system gets a very distinct shape. I now realise that Afrikaner nationalism had hijacked cultural products, the concepts of patriotism and loyalty to one's fatherland. This realisation leaves me with the disturbing awareness that my cultural identity, and my subsequent belief system as Afrikaner had been manipulated and was thus probably inauthentic.

But let me return to the riots in 1976. The significantly violent nature of the blacks' behaviour merely supported the former beliefs I had about them – that these people were barbaric, uncivilised and ungrateful. My subsequent emotional responses towards those events corresponded with former beliefs. There was apparently no reason to question their validity and justifiability. According to Nussbaum, "The fact of having an emotion depends on what the person's beliefs are, not on whether they are true or false" (2001, p.46). It was okay to be angry, disgusted and judgemental.

However, as the riots continued, snowballing through the country, novel thoughts evolved. These new thoughts entailed judgements about the objects' apparent prolonged presence and infinite residence in my anthology. The assent to the appearance was no longer a mere awareness of the objects. It included a deliberate acknowledgement of the objects' existence. I had no option but to embrace the presence of the new objects and assimilate them into my anthology, judging that they deserved my serious attention. '*These objects now concern me. My own well-being is at stake. I am extremely vulnerable*'. In that sense, the objects and their associated judgements became part of who I was. And I knew that they were here to stay. Fundamentally, the objects and beliefs that had formerly constituted my identity were beginning to transform. For the first time, I hesitantly permitted myself the liberty of cautiously investigating these objects. Yet, this time, adamantly independently and critically. I put previous beliefs on hold and attended with interest to faint

traces of new judgement-connections between the objects and me. Gradually I began to untie the knots in previous cables that had seemingly distorted former proper communication in the past. I subsequently discovered that some historical cables simply had to be slashed to release the free flow of my own newly-discovered liberated and independent judgement. Essentially, my process of personal transformation required a re-evaluation of those particular belief-cables that had previously connected me to external objects and provided me with my false security as Afrikaner.

Assessing and transforming beliefs

The goal is not to avoid pain or reality, but to deal with the never-ending quest of self-definition and negotiation required to transform differences into assets (Krog, 1999, p.449).

Releasing belief-cables is a risky task, because the stakes are high. It involves abandoning the security of inner stability and the daunting prospects of collapsing into a rudderless and uncertain being. Disconnecting holds the risk of becoming alienated from one's support system. On the other hand, to cling onto false and inadequate belief-cables also poses a danger. Inadequate cables may unravel eventually, causing severe harm to the self. The only long-term proposal will thus be to first examine and assess the true quality of existing beliefs and abandon the mere parroting of others' fallible and potentially false beliefs.

Personal transformation implies adjustments to belief networks at individual level. These acts of adjustment are sometimes performed unawares. There are also incidents when such modifications are deliberately performed, triggered by inner, personal conviction and motivation. However, profoundly fixed beliefs may frequently be experienced as armatures, paralysing the self and preventing significant progressive action. In this regard I have reason to believe that the process of transforming the personal beliefs South Africans have about one another will be prolonged and painful. The trek towards transformed beliefs will be a long, stumbling one. The South African society comprises a multiplicity of diverse cultures. Not only individuals, but cultural entities had been affected by the segregation policies of the previous political system. All these people's emotional lives had been affected by a variety of beliefs about objects. Given the multiplicity of cultures in South Africa, we have reason to assume that the current range of emotion-beliefs is still vast and very diverse.

Congruent beliefs

There remains before us the building of a new land . . . a synthesis of the rich cultural strains which we have inherited . . . It will not necessarily be all black, but it will be African (Luthuli in Krog, 1999, p.167).

Transforming beliefs is in itself an intricate process, but aligning diverse beliefs to serve the benefits of a harmonious and peaceful society is even more problematical. Beliefs most Afrikaner whites previously had (and some still have) about blacks directly contradicted beliefs most blacks had about whites (and some still have). Beliefs in this country are poles apart, or as Sachs (Goboda-Madikizela, 2003, p.vii) remarks, “Right from the other end of the moral and cultural landscape”. Referring to the meeting between Eugene de Kock and Pumla Goboda-Madikizela,² Sachs subsequently asks, “Can these two people . . . cease to be black and white, female and male, and simply be humans?” (2003, p.ix) – a question that is fundamental to the successful healing of our society.

In order to align beliefs and to direct them towards a universally shared vision, South Africans need to release their grip on generalised beliefs about one another. Because unless acquired inclinations towards suspicion, intolerance and stereotyping are deliberately addressed and contradicted, these may become momentous stumbling blocks on South Africans’ road to reconciliation. Prolonged stereotyping, for instance, is one of the most harmful inheritances of a segregated political past, because it implies continuation of an uncritical confidence in former beliefs. It also implies an apathetic languor, a blasé lethargy, and even a blatant unwillingness to acquaint oneself with the other. Without a deliberate effort to familiarise oneself with the formerly unfamiliar other in order to discover his or her true inner being, former beliefs will prevail. In the attempts to conceptualise the other, an unfamiliar outsider has no alternative but to revert to paramount impressions and acquired perceptions. The only way for South Africans to start transforming their beliefs about one another will be to reach out to another and adopt an inclusive attitude.

However, beliefs can only be modified to blend into consonant harmony once they are identified and fastidiously scrutinised. South Africans, especially those from either side of Sachs’s “moral and cultural landscape”, first and

² Goboda-Madikizela is a clinical psychologist who served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Eugene de Kock was commanding officer of Apartheid death squads.

foremost, have to engage with their own beliefs. These beliefs, many of which are background beliefs, so deeply entrenched that they had become part of our cognitive make up, need to be brought to the surface and examined. And although painful, they will have to be shared with the other. Because transforming the South African society above all means vacuuming the reciprocal communication cables to exterminate any traces of suspicion, a dense sediment still obstructing reciprocal trust. Sachs subsequently pleads for a constant search for understanding, “. . . the objective being always to find the foundations, even if slender, for repair and moving forward” (Goboda-Madikizela, 2003, p.viii, ix). Firm mutual foundations of the transformed South Africa society will have to be constructed with the best quality materials, contributed by all interested parties. In a joint search for apposite building bricks, South Africans will succeed in restoring the deterioration of its past shaky foundations – the damage caused by wrong beliefs.

Conclusion: acquiescent beliefs

Will I always be a prisoner of my past with normal vices and virtues – always with this kind of instinctive, guilty obsequiousness? (Krog, 1999, p.19).

Martin (1999, p.194) refers to ‘a continuum’ on which narratives slide between two opposed conceptions of cultural identity, namely the ‘open and peaceful’ and the ‘exclusive and aggressive’. Krog’s fervent wish to ‘wipe out the past’ (1999, p. 223) echoes a surge of remorseful regret, increasingly evident amongst those Afrikaners, who find themselves ‘sliding’ towards the ‘open and peaceful’. Yet, they are bowed down by the heavy and uncomfortable burden of their historical and cultural past, because they carry with them the grave knowledge of former false beliefs. I am one of this group of Afrikaners, and like Krog (1999), I also wish to come to terms with “. . . the fact that all the words used to humiliate, all the orders given to kill, belonged to the language of my heart”. This group of Afrikaners is grappling with new exponential beliefs, generated by former beliefs. Although inconsistent and sometimes erratic, these beliefs eventually converge into the very distinct judgement: *I was part of the single most significant false belief in South African history.*

However, Nussbaum (2001) believes that a person, who has made cognitive adjustments, has less cognitive dissonance. Emotional change is a result of a shift of propositional content. To become a truly transformed South African, I, like Krog and many others, will also have to adjust the thoughts I have about my past. On my own trajectory I will have to reach the point where the above

disturbing and paralysing judgement transforms itself into the acquiescent judgement that former false beliefs cannot be reversed. I am a product of my past, but I do not have to be its prisoner. I need to embrace the judgement that my former beliefs had indeed been false. And once I have done this, I will no longer be harassed by my own masochistic judgements. The renegotiation process of my cultural and personal identity will no longer be sabotaged by conflicting judgements about myself. I will acquiesce and reach the resting-place of emotional equanimity on my own trajectory.

The personal trek: transforming the self

The value perceived in the object appears to be of a particular sort. It appears to make reference to the person's own flourishing . . . Another way of putting this point . . . is that the emotions appear to be *eudaimonistic*, that is, concerned with the person's flourishing (Nussbaum, 2001, p.31).

Introduction

In the previous parts I have argued that inner, personal transformation implies a modification to the intentional objects of South Africans' emotions. I have also argued that the associated beliefs about these objects need to change. But an emotion also has a self-referential element. Central to these personal conversions stands the self as the agent of its own transformation process. The self's external world consists of a cosmic array of objects and the internal connection between the self and these objects are the thoughts about the objects. Only those objects evaluated as significant, due to their relevance to the self's own well-being, are attended to. The thoughts about the objects are therefore discriminating judgements, appraising the external world of objects in its relation to the self. Lazarus (1991) thus sees an emotion as a continuous affair between the self and the outside world (Nussbaum, 2001).

The social transformation of South Africa needs to occur at two reciprocal levels. In addition to the external, structural changes in political order, the inner core of society also needs to transform. And the inner core cannot transform if we don't know what it was or what it is. Especially during times of social transformation people have entangled thoughts about themselves. Their ideas about what they regard as important and valuable are often muddled and disorganised. They tend to question the validity and authenticity of their identities, and of their former notion of 'the good'. During times of transformation, these concepts need to be redefined. Before we can begin to transform, we need to know who we are.

Understanding the self

We have self-consciousness but do not always exercise it (Nussbaum, 2001, p.126).

By now I have found an explanation for my deplorable ignorance about the real life conditions of black people prior to 1976, and to a certain extent one may argue that such ignorance is excusable. Because according to the neo-Stoic theory, my emotions had been shaped by social norms (Nussbaum, 2001). We, the young and naive Afrikaner birdies, safe and secure in our snug nests, fed with the apparent nutritious ingredients of Apartheid ideology, had been totally oblivious of the well-beings of the other inhabitants of the same tree, especially those in the dilapidated nests on the shady side. We honestly did not know much about our communal tree, apart from the sunny, cosy inside of our Afrikaner nest. Because the imposed policy of ‘Separate Development’ preserved our ignorance. There was no reason to get acquainted with distant objects beyond the boundaries of our nest. Because according to the clarion call of D F Malan, Afrikaners had to adhere to only three commandments, “Glo in jou God, glo jou Volk en glo in Jouself”.³ Apartheid limited my world of significant objects to a world consisting only of those exclusive objects to be found inside the Afrikaner nest – a nest, whose boundaries had been densely woven with twigs of unquestioned rhetorical clichés. Verwoerd’s assassination in the sixties was therefore regarded as a national tragedy, participating in the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Republic of South Africa in 1971 was a privilege and to shake Vorster’s hand in my matric year was an honour. I sang *Die Stem*⁴ at the top of my voice with cold shivers running down my spine. It was great to be an Afrikaner. My evaluative judgements appraised the objects of my Afrikaner anthology as valuable and sufficiently significant for my own flourishing. Only later did I discover that this venerated nest had indeed been built on an isolated branch of a public South African tree.

Reflecting on the above I now realise that my experiences of cultural exclusivity were not merely restricted to a minority group of smug Afrikaners at the southern point of Africa. My Afrikaner past was characteristic of a general modernist trend to enclose a culture within rigid boundaries that both benefit and exclude around the criteria of race and ethnicity. Furthermore, my

³ Believe in God, your ‘volk’ or cultural group, and yourself. In this regard, I need to mention that I am hesitant to translate ‘volk’ in terms of ‘nation’, since I see ‘volk’ as more limited to the own group.

⁴ The national anthem of the former Republic of South Africa.

Afrikaner past merely represented an Afrikaner hybrid of what Giroux (1992, p.40) calls, “patriarchy parading as universal reason” and “the imperiousness of grand narratives that stress control and mastery”. At the time when Hector Peterson died, the concept of culture had been successfully manipulated and exploited by senior Afrikaner leaders as an organising principle to construct borders. These borders generated relations of domination, subordination and inequality. The dense boundaries built around the Afrikaner nest did not allow its inhabitants the possibility of experiencing and positioning the Afrikaner within a productive exchange of narratives. On the contrary, it erected boundaries framed in the language of universals and oppositions. My experiences as exclusive Afrikaner furthermore echoes Anderson’s argument (1983) that nations are communities, which are imagined as limited. Anderson subsequently argues that a nation is conceived as “a deep horizontal comradeship” (1983, p.16). In natural ties, such as skin-colour and birth-era, one senses “the ‘beauty of *gemeinschaft*’. To put it another way, precisely because such ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of distinctness” (Anderson, 1983, p.131). I now understand why I respected fellow white male students at the University of Stellenbosch who voluntarily joined the security forces in 1976 to keep the rioting blacks at bay. The fact that white male soldier friends were prepared to kill and even to die for my country on the borders of Angola, can thus be ascribed to what Anderson calls an “imagined fraternity” (1983, p.131). In this regard, I believe that the 1976 perception of my own cultural identity could also be regarded as what Castells (2004, p.8). refers to as a ‘legitimised identity’, since it had been introduced by the dominant Afrikaner institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination.

Reconciling the self

In this rhythm of embrace and denial, this uneven intermittence of vision, we have a story of reason’s urgent struggles with itself concerning nothing less than how to imagine life (Nussbaum, 2001, p.86).

I soon realised that the initial riots of learners in 1976 were merely the small beginnings of a major political revolution that the formerly smug regime would be unable to control. It was indeed a ‘Total Onslaught’ that affected my well-being and toppled my scheme of goals. It highlighted my inadequacy and it endangered my social status. But the most disconcerting and impugning evaluative judgement accused my identity of being fraudulent (Nussbaum, 2001). My personal self-examination process to detect the cause of my very

limited sphere of concern in 1976 is painfully revealing, moreover also confusing and disturbing, ripping my formerly self-sufficient condition. Nussbaum is indeed correct when she argues, “Knowing can be violent, given the truths that there are to be known” (Nussbaum, 2001, p.45). How can I live with the brutal facts of my own fallibility and venture into the process of personal transformation with this shameful and disgusting albatross around my neck? I thus share Krog’s passionate wish to “wipe the old South Africa out of everyone’s past” (1999, p.223). I wish I could depart into the new South Africa with a blank consciousness, my past wiped away by a severe attack of amnesia. Do I really know who I am? Because it seems as if I am still engaged in a constant search for my true identity, migrating between footholds in order to find the authentic one from which to depart on my explorative voyage into the new South African society.

In this regard, Nussbaum’s theory (2001) provides me with consolation and also direction. I should not strive to detach myself from my memory, since such a disconnection would be a total loss of myself. Centuries ago, Augustine also appraised the importance of memory, when he argued, “I cannot comprehend the power of my memory, since I cannot even call myself myself apart from it” (Nussbaum, 2001, p.538). I thus need to liberate myself by releasing the masochistic chains of self-accusation. And the keys to unlock these constraints, I believe, lie in comprehending the origin of the cultural identity of the Afrikaner. In this regard, Castells’s notion (2004) of a resistance identity is illuminating. He explains that ethnically based nationalisms often originate from a sense of estrangement and anger at unreasonable political, economic or social exclusion. He thus refers to the phenomenon of nationalist self-affirmation (which had been typical of the Afrikaner), as “*the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded*”⁵ (2004, p.9). In the process, a defensive identity in relation to dominant institutions and ideologies is constructed, rescinding the value judgement while at the same time strengthening the borderlines (2004). I grew up with the sombre knowledge of the consequences of Kitchener’s ‘Scorched Earth’ Boer War strategy, when thousands of Afrikaner women and children starved to death in British concentration camps. No matter how uneasy I feel about the horrific consequences of the Afrikaners’ political policy of Apartheid, I nevertheless honour many aspects of my former cultural and political past. I take pride in the Afrikaners’ bold endeavours to rise from the ashes of the Anglo Boer War

⁵ Italics according to original text.

and 1930 Depression and re-erect themselves in the first half of the twentieth century.

My cultural identity thus seems to be ambivalent. One part does indeed revere my honourable Afrikaner roots, whilst the other wishes to reject any identification with the smug, prideful and self-centred Afrikaners of the Apartheid era, also discarding images of myself as an ignorant and uninterested youth in 1976. And the only way to assimilate these two parts of my identity into a single authentic unity will be to engage in a process of reconstruction. And this transformation process, Taylor (1994) believes, cannot be socially obtained, but must be inwardly generated.

Reconstructing the self

Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself (Taylor, 1994, p.31).

In order to proceed with the narrative of the reconstruction of my own identity, I want to return to the neo-Stoic theory of the emotions and its relevance to the current process of social transformation in South Africa. According to Nussbaum, reference to the self is the most important component of an emotion, since an emotion evaluates the world from the self's own point of view. Reflecting again on Peterson's death, I realise that neither he, nor blacks in general, belonged to my own scheme of goals and ends at that particular time. And this is a disturbing discovery. In essence, I feel ashamed and guilty about my lack of humanity and compassion. I feel as if I have contributed to the Afrikaners' collective construction of South Africa's immoral and dismal past. In this regard, Nussbaum's account of the vital roles of both shame and guilt in the emotional life of human beings is relevant. She rejects shame as a potential threat to morality and to an imaginative inner life. Moral guilt, on the other hand, is seen as a noble emotion and attuned to optimism about one's own projections (Nussbaum, 2001). "[M]orality involves the use of reparation capacities, respect for the humanity of another person, and regard for the others' neediness" (Nussbaum, 2001, p.218). Morality is thus not self-centred but extends its focus to the intrinsic worth of objects outside the self, dismantling the dense boundaries of self-interest. In this sense, moral guilt protects people's inner worth and their dignity (Nussbaum, 2001). I now realise that in South Africa's current process of social transformation I have endless prospects to replace past negative perceptions of indifference and ignorance about the other's well-being with positive perceptions of compassion and interest. But in doing so, I will have to open my boundaries of

eudemonism and include the welfare of distant others as an element of value in my own scheme of goals and ends. My new cultural identity will have to be reconstructed in dialogical rapport with others. Because the way I see myself does not only depend upon my inherent cognitive, perceptual and integrative capabilities, but also on my conception of temporality and causality, and to the extent to which I see myself along with others (Nussbaum, 2001).

Conclusion

New Patriots are confident enough to understand that, in addition to national identities, they also have ethnic identities and global identities. And because they see themselves as complex fusions of the local, the regional, the national and the global, they understand, with no difficulty, that their neighbours are such complex fusions, too (Asmal, 2002, p.9).

The South African tree does indeed belong to me, but it also belongs to distant others. In order to transform the social order of this tree, we need to depart from our secluded and exclusive nests and acquaint ourselves with the other legitimate owners of the same tree. We need to share our individual perceptions of well-being and our expectations of our new society. Collectively we should then strive to establish a society in which a common scheme of goals applies, a common agreement of what it means to live well for all South Africans.

Castells explains that people construct a project identity “. . . when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by doing so seek the transformation of overall social structure” (2004, p.8). I believe that central to the social and political transformation of our country should be the construction of such a collective project identity. And I believe that such a collective identity will constitute my own personal identity, because according to Taylor (1991) one cannot define one’s identity by disregarding history, society, the yearning for camaraderie and everything that matters in one’s own life. And I can rest assured that such an identity will still be authentic, because “Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands” (Taylor, 1991, p.41). I can only discover my role in the transformed South Africa through my relationship with other South Africans. As white Afrikaner, I also need to adopt the *ubuntu* principle: *I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am* (Krog, 1999, p.166).

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