Afrikaner, nevertheless: Stigma, shame & the sociology of cultural trauma

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PART 5: Conclusion
14. The Unequal Burden of Cultural Trauma

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Dramatic political events like the end of apartheid have a long aftermath. Sociologists have long been interested in the dynamic of revolutions, wars, genocides, and democratic transitions (Hinton, 2002; Mann, 2005; Skocpol, 1994). However, recent attention has also shifted to the sociology of the aftermath of such events (Erikson, 1976, 1995; Eyerman, 2004; Kaplan, 2005; Minow, 1999; Olick, 1999; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Robben & Suárez-Orozco, 2000). I aimed to contribute to this literature.

This study presented detailed analysis of the stories of many Afrikaner men, women, girls, and boys regarding how they experienced changes after apartheid at work, at home, and in school. The focus of these stories was the central moral promise of South Africa’s transition: the ability of the white Afrikaans minority to change their racist culture, to adapt and make a home in the new South Africa. This promise of change is a central concern in the post-apartheid literature about Afrikaners, in which individual stories illuminate the cultural confusion and emotional ramifications of this moral challenge.

My goal was to examine this promise through a sociological study that explores the tensions between the various claims about the situation of Afrikaners after apartheid and ask: What is the burden of apartheid? Is apartheid even relevant in the analysis of Afrikaners? Are Afrikaners still a privileged white community or a culturally traumatized people? How are the demands for cultural change and the defense of economic privilege connected? Such inquiries reflect the close connections between questions of identity and culture and their emotional ramifications. In this study I wanted to apply the arsenal of cultural sociological theories and concepts to clarify how the apartheid past still plays a role in present-day South Africa and the lives of Afrikaners.
In chapter 2, I argued for an approach beyond the idiosyncratic individual stories and the broad societal developments: a meso-level approach. On one hand, the macro-level perspective makes broad cultural claims about Afrikaners, whether it is the economic, political, or cultural viewpoint. On the other hand, studies of individual Afrikaners treat them as agents devoid of changing societal context. An institutional, meso-level perspective is the most productive level of analysis to untangle cultural and emotional issues without losing sight of the broader political-economic dynamics.

In chapter 3, competing theories about what it means to come to terms with the past and the present provided their own theoretical conundrums. Cultural trauma theory offers a theoretical and empirical toolkit to untangle cultural and emotional issues that connect the past to the present. If used in combination with insights from race, whiteness, and postcolonial studies, cultural trauma theory provides an empirically grounded approach, if combined with the right methodology.

Indeed, while the many individual stories are the basis of my analysis, they were never idiosyncratic and unrelated. In each chapter, I analyzed these stories against the background of a specific institution and in the context of a specific group of people. The question was: How did this particular group in this institutional context experience change? These different case studies showed not only variation but also regularities. I was able to show how the experience of change shifts regularly with different perspectives, and that categories of class, gender, and generation play a large role.

Finally, in chapter 4 I contended that an intersectional analysis alone contributes little other than a direction of investigation. It only becomes productive when used in combination with cultural sociology and the sociology of emotions. By comparing men to women and the upper class with the middle class, cultural mechanisms might be exposed for being driven by emotions, and gender or racial discourses are revealed as class issues. Categories like race, class, and gender shape the landscape of culture. In a cultural analysis, however, hierarchies of class, gender, and generation are often overlooked or not taken sufficiently into consideration. My anatomy of intersections contributes to cultural analysis in a two-step process. It first provides a way to critically examine the layered character of identities, and then helps to uncover the cultural and emotional mechanisms (rather than, say, mechanisms related to masculinity or class issues) or how these mechanisms work in tandem with each other. In other words, rather than simply adding categories to an institutional or cultural analysis, it strengthens the explanatory power of such analysis.
14.2 BELONGING IN THE INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

This study juxtaposed the vivid self-images of Afrikaners against the canvas of shifting institutional landscapes in post-apartheid South Africa. But institutions were not just “background” to the stories of Afrikaners. They actively shape and constitute identities and feelings of belonging. Jessop argues that institutions stabilize the cognitive, normative, and emotional expectations of people by shaping and promoting a common worldview (Jessop, 2007; Moulaert & Jessop, 2009). Institutional change destabilizes worldviews and shapes new ones. In the previous chapters, I also studied how Afrikaners respond to multiracialism and new economic policies by the ANC, Black Economic Empowerment, and affirmative action. How do Afrikaners experience these developments in the changing neoliberal institutional landscape in the spheres of work, living, and school? In my institutional analysis, I emphasized three specific aspects: (1) the developments in the different institutional spheres after 1994; (2) the dominance of certain discursive themes related to these developments; (3) the emergence of new individual praxis.

WORK

On the institutional level, the economic agreements solidified during the democratic transition enshrined a series of neoliberal policy principles in law that have proven durable ever since: the protection of private property, participation in the World Trade Organization, the breakdown of trade barriers, debt servicing, the dominance of private-sector partnerships, and protection of intellectual property rights (Bond, 2000; Gumede, 2007). Overall, the wealthy, employed, and well-educated white population of South Africa, including Afrikaners, has benefitted financially from this arrangement (Leibbrandt, 2010). At the discursive level, I showed in chapter 4 how the Afrikaner business elite, through organizations like the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, accompanied the economic transition with a positive cultural narrative about change and pride in the transition. Moreover, in a number of strategic organizational moves (engagement with the democratic transition, a submission to the TRC, the cooperation with black business councils, and the appointment of non-white leaders), the organization repositioned itself in the political-economic landscape as an “agent of change” and has now become a legitimate partner for the ANC government. However, the AHI has never given up its Afrikaner roots or transformed its local network of business chambers, which is still dominated by white Afrikaners. In chapter 5, I showed that most Afrikaner entrepreneurs experience that praxis at work has not noticeably changed.

By contrast, institutional change has affected lower-middle-class Afrikaners very negatively. The early introduction of affirmative action in former state companies, in combination with their privatization and
restructuring, has rapidly transformed the workplace for lower-middle-class Afrikaners. Racial integration has been rapid and Afrikaners are now a minority in the company. Their daily lives have been transformed and they feel resentment. The reason for resentment is not a lack of employment but the changed experience of work. Employment remains relatively high among the white lower middle class, compared to their non-white counterparts (Habib, 2008b). In chapter 6, I analyzed how the labor union Solidarity seized on the opportunity of the threat of affirmative action and the challenge for the lower middle class to adapt to racial integration at work. Although the organization was a supporter of apartheid until the mid-1990s, it no longer practices a discourse of white supremacy. A new discourse posits the Afrikaner as a threatened minority, whose language and citizenship rights are trampled upon by a hostile ANC government, but who deserve to belong in the new South Africa.

The discursive emphasis on belonging resonates with the lower middle class who feel alienated at work because of institutional praxis changes. As I showed in chapter 7, the new norms and rules, related to affirmative action policies, challenge the men’s norms of meritocracy, fairness, and nondiscrimination. They feel their experience and skills are no longer valued. New antidiscrimination laws cause the men to struggle to socialize with their nonwhite coworkers. As companies like Eskom and Telkom struggle economically, the men no longer positively identify with their companies’ praxis.

Living
In part 3, I show that the institutional dynamic of living changed unexpectedly after 1994 for both the upper and lower middle classes. During apartheid, urban segregation was a policy enforced and sanctioned by the state. All white Afrikaners lived in a “white world” but this “world” was transformed after apartheid. However, ironically, the urban landscape did not desegregate but was resegregated by private citizens and real estate companies. As the state lost its grip on urban development, the combined forces of rising crime, privatization, and decentralization created a new fragmented urban landscape. Walls, fences, and gates have carved up the former capital of apartheid, Pretoria, and transformed the urban landscape into a patchwork of private communities. In the neoliberal era, urban segregation is reinscribed by those individuals who could bear the costs, but more so based on class and not necessarily along racial lines. Afrikaners who can afford it have moved to gated communities like Golden Sun. As I described in chapter 10, these communities are not marked by racial segregation but by a new security and aesthetic regime based on exclusion. The Afrikaner lower middle class, who are unable to afford these new lifestyle communities, remain “stuck” in the city.
Specifically, I highlighted the aesthetic themes dominant in the discourses of both classes of women. In chapter 9, I showed that lower-middle-class women’s Afrikaner discourse revolves around a city that is in decline and which has become a place that is dangerous and dirty. The women emphasize their negative experiences in public spaces and public transportation. Everything public has become “disgusting.” The upper-class women of Golden Sun also view the city as decaying, chaotic, and scary, but they are able to avoid the city altogether. Whatever they think of the city, it no longer dominates the negativity about living there. Instead, a new conversation about the importance of securitization, privatization, and aesthetic beauty dominates their discussions about living behind the gate. The women in the gated community have a positive aesthetic image of their community. Inside the gates, the world looks beautiful and cared for—a model world for the new South Africa. Most importantly, both groups of women do not predominantly discuss crime and fear, nor does the fear of crime distinguish those inside the gates from those outside, as some observers have argued.

On the level of institutional praxis, living has changed radically for Afrikaner upper- and lower-middle-class women. For the lower middle class, most changes have been negative, in the form of degradation of public space and the restrictions of movement and activities they put on themselves because of fear of crime. They have withdrawn from public spaces, they have altered their commutes to avoid dangerous situations and places, and they no longer use the urban parks as they used to. For upper-class Afrikaners, the gated community has in part solidified old apartheid practices. The tight regulations of behavior and movement in such communities eerily resemble the old apartheid laws—with the exception that the white upper class has now subjected themselves to the strict regime of security checks, use of private space, and community rules. Nevertheless, both groups of women experience home as haven. For lower-middle-class women, home is still a quiet place away from work. They feel they have control at home and can relax; they feel freed from the demands of a multicultural work environment. At home they experience a sense of authenticity, the feeling that they can “be themselves.” The upper-class women describe the gated community also as home. Inside the gate, they feel at home because the place looks beautiful, functions well, and allows them to feel carefree. Home is, for both groups, a retreat from the multicultural reality of South Africa.

School
The institutional dynamic of schools, in part 4, was discussed in terms of desegregation and integration. The two former single-medium Afrikaans schools presented two very different pictures of the consequences of these processes in educational institutions. On the surface, the schools traveled a similar path, as the two schools in Cape Town desegregated in the early 1990s and consequently became racially integrated. However, the first school, De La
Rey, is still predominantly a white, Afrikaans elite high school in Cape Town, belonging to the top schools in the Western Cape. Since 1994, it has desegregated but held control over the influx of non-white students through high school fees and preselection of students. Die Groot Trek, on the other hand, has gone through a radical process of resegregation. At the time of research there was only a small contingent of white Afrikaans students left in the upper grades.

As a consequence, institutional praxis at De La Rey has hardly changed since 1994. The quest for academic excellence and athletic prestige is still at the heart of school policies, while its Afrikaans character is proudly propounded by the staff. The hierarchical organization of classes further assures that the majority of white Afrikaans students have little to no contact in class with their colored fellow students. At Die Groot Trek, however, the consequences of desegregation have eroded many school practices, both economically and culturally, although the white Afrikaans teacher corps does everything it can to prevent this. The conditions for integration that result at both schools are completely different. But the surprise lies at the discursive level: whereas the upper-class white Afrikaans girls at De La Rey speak a new positive discourse of diversity and multiculturalism, the lower-middle-class boys at Die Groot Trek reassert the old Afrikaner ideas of essentialist ethnic identities.

**Beyond Nationalism: A Neoliberal Postcolonial Home?**

Neoliberal developments have implications for belonging, and for the politics of race and identity. Before 1994, national belonging was the overriding theme of belonging to Afrikaners. This has changed with the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism, which was the political home of Afrikaners for over 50 years. As new institutions have become more important sources for belonging, the old institutions became more fragile and unreliable sources of identification. Neoliberalism erodes what we commonly understand as “society” and remakes the familiar spaces of work, neighborhood, and school. For upper-class Afrikaners, neoliberalism provides stable new institutions, like gated communities and desegregated semiprivatized schools that are hardly integrated. These new postcolonial homes give rise to new cultural discourses about diversity, privatization, securitization, and aesthetic order. However, the old institutional arrangements of work, living, and school no longer provide a stable or certain foundation for belonging and identity for the lower-middle-class Afrikaners. Former public companies are struggling, public spaces degenerate, and poorly financed public schools are overwhelmed by the demands of racial integration.

It is against the background of these eroding institutions that we have to interpret the experience and response of Afrikaners’ lower middle class to multiracial South Africa.
Post-apartheid neoliberalism is diametrically opposed to Afrikaner nationalism, whose force was built on alliances among Afrikaners. As neoliberalism increasingly creates an unequal landscape, the lower classes of Afrikaners struggle more. Ironically, the more that former public companies, public amenities, and public education come under pressure in post-apartheid South Africa, the more the Afrikaner lower middle class resents having to rely upon them. They also resort to alternative privatized options, if they have the means. Moreover, as neoliberalism hollows out institutions, the ANC’s policies of racial redress further squeeze lower-middle-class Afrikaners. They bear the brunt of the challenge to work in newly racially integrated work environments, to adapt to overused urban services, and to open up and study together with non-white youth. The politics of identity among Afrikaners cannot be studied without the neoliberal institutional background; its impact on race, class, and generations is crucial.

14.3 WHAT AFRIKANER? AN ANATOMY OF INTERSECTIONS
This study is based on interviews with individual Afrikaners, with their individual opinions and stories, but these stories all take place at the intersection of class, gender, and generation. Apart from an institutional perspective, this study presented an intersectional analysis. Recall how I outlined in chapter 1 how class, gender, and generation matter for the analysis of Afrikaners after apartheid. Now I will systematically compare these categories.

I start this comparison with a commonality of all Afrikaners: the fixation on race. Race, for Afrikaners, seems unavoidable. Whether the Afrikaners I spoke to were rich or middle class, men or women, in almost every topic of conversation we heard the echoes of race—in the conversations about work, in their experience of home, and in their interpretation of changing schools. Afrikaners are “racialized subjects” who live race as they talk, act, and interact. Durrheim and colleagues call this dominance “race trouble,” an apt term for the constant undertow of racial anxieties in everyday life (Durrheim et al., 2011, p. 84).\(^3\) Even though Afrikaners share this fixation, I argue that it is the differences based on class, gender, and generation that present a new way of seeing the function of race in Afrikaners’ everyday lives today. Indeed, it is not the presence of race that has changed, but Afrikaners’ internalization, reappropriations, and reconfigurations of race. The intersectional analysis provides a systematic framework to analyse the experience of Afrikaners’ identities, in the context of the always-present racial other.

CLASS
The manifestation of neoliberalism in institutional change has exacerbated class differences between upper- and lower-middle-class Afrikaners. Class inequalities, Sayer argues, do not just involve differences in wealth and
income but differences in access to valued circumstances and ways of life (Sayer, 2005, p. 95). Since apartheid, the gap in wealth and income has widened between white South Africans, but valued circumstances have widened even more.4

One valued circumstance is that of control. While the upper class has been able to institutionalize new forms of social and aesthetic control, like gated communities, and therefore solidified their identities, the lower middle class feels increasingly dependent on their black fellow citizens, workers, and students. The shift from a dominant minority to a nondominant minority for them has been swift and intense. The main consequence has been that lower-middle-class Afrikaners in everyday life no longer control how they are defined, but are defined by the black majority. This is related to another valued circumstance, particularly cherished by Afrikaners, which is the escape of the burden of racial integration. The upper class has found new ways to segregate themselves from the majority of the black population, through spatial exclusion and class barriers. If racial integration happens, it is still on their terms. The lower middle class is confronted more and more with their black fellow citizens, and often lacks control over the process.

Nevertheless, when it comes to opposition to racial redress, both upper- and lower-middle-class men strongly reject affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment policies. They use similar arguments to do so. They emphasize that the measures are executed in the wrong way, that they are not fair, and that they do not really benefit blacks. This rejection of policies of racial redress confirms survey findings of strong opposition of these policies among all white South Africans (Erasmus, 2008). What my study adds is how these policies have also given rise to new racial prejudices and boundaries; i.e., the upper class sometimes makes exceptions for wealthy and educated blacks.

However, class differences exacerbate the emotional intensity of the argumentation against affirmative action and BEE. Lower-class Afrikaners are much more explicit in their rejection of policies they oppose, and they show more resentment and anger in their tone. This can be explained by four differences in the experience of class: First, affirmative action poses more of an economic threat to the lower class; second, upper-class entrepreneurs have more agency in influencing with whom they work—specifically in relation to racial integration;5 third, lower-middle-class men feel they are no longer respected for their work experience and seniority due to changes in hierarchy enacted by affirmative action; and fourth, lower-middle-class men no longer feel pride in their companies. Such differences, all rooted in the experience of class, can explain why lower middle class men express their discontent about the loss of privilege with so much more intensity.
Class and Gender

Contrary to the dramatic impact of affirmative action on lower-middle-class men, these policies pose a smaller economic threat to lower-middle-class women. Overall, women in the past were less privileged at work than they are now. Also, in comparison to the men’s stories, the female identity narratives are remarkably more reflexive about the transformation of work and more sensitive about the experience of racial integration. Therefore, class plays a role in how Afrikaners experience change, but also gender.

The lower-middle-class men’s experience of class is mixed with ideals about masculinity. Class status and masculinity work in tandem to shape the identity narratives of the men. The intense agony about the transformation at work is related to masculine ideals about strength, control, and self-reliance. Indeed, not only have these men lost privilege but they also look less in control (or “weak”). They have become much more dependent on their non-white counterparts and bosses. For the upper-middle-class entrepreneurs, these issues are hardly a problem. Women are traditionally more relational oriented, and have a better rapport with their black colleagues at work.

The tandem of gender and class affects attitudes toward racial relationships at work and at home. Instead of agonizing about their non-white colleagues, like the men, lower-middle-class women draw a strict boundary between work and home. At work, they feel that all races are equal and that they have to work together. At home, however, they feel they are allowed to choose the company of people of their own culture. In their private lives, they set their own rules and avoid the emotional stress of multicultural interactions.

My study of the individual within an institutional context reveals this compartmentalized perspective of the benefit of racial integration and the context-dependent character of racial prejudices. Lower-middle-class women are not necessarily less racist than men. While some women have developed positive racial imagery at work, their prejudice against blacks outside of work remains strong.

Upper-class Afrikaner women, however, argue that because blacks live in the estate, the community is a model for post-apartheid South Africa. They feel the estate attests to the ideal that a nonracial South Africa can function. Precisely because the estate is so separated from its surroundings, this allows them to be positive about race relations. So for upper-class women, this confirms that racial prejudice is context dependent.

Class, Gender, and Generations

The young, upper-class Afrikaner girls at De La Rey symbolize a generational break of race relationships at their school and in South Africa because of their positive perspective. While they represent “the promise of a new generation,” an intersectional analysis of the two schools enriches and complicates our understanding of this promise. Not only did I find distinct generational
differences between older and younger Afrikaners but class and gender intersected the generational divide as well. At the elite school De La Rey, girls and boys align themselves with a new identity discourse that I call “diversity talk.” They actively present the school as a diverse community that is open to all races of South Africa. They say they are proud of being a generation that is beyond race, which celebrates diversity and embraces the “new” South Africa. They actively distance themselves from the older generation, whom they describe as “stuck in apartheid.” Indeed, the diversity talk sets them markedly apart from the older generation of Afrikaners.

At Die Groot Trek, I also found that the girls used this diversity discourse. Most girls praised diversity and reported getting to know non-whites much better than before. However, the boys expressed a great interest in their Afrikaans identity. They liked to talk about “their” proud Afrikaner past. They drew strict moral and racial boundaries around themselves and were aggressive against the new non-white students at their school. In short, they opted for a rebellious stand against diversity and integration in which the Afrikaner ethnic identity played an important part. How do we explain this attitude through a generational lens? We simply cannot. The difference in identity discourse reflects the intense class experience of the boys. But the ethnic identity talk of lower-middle-class boys must also relate to gender. In chapter 13, I suggested that the differences are due to the boys’ experiencing loss and shame.

**Intersectional Analysis**

The aim of my intersectional analysis was not to demonstrate variety for variety’s sake. Rather, to show how racial relationships and Afrikaners’ identity change is related to cultural and emotional processes. This study showed that different groups of Afrikaners are presented with very different challenges after apartheid. It also showed how these divergent challenges result in different perceptions of the transition, different relationships toward Afrikaner identity, and different social relationships with the racial other. However, the contribution of the intersectional analysis really lies in how the intersection of class, gender, and generation compounded the problems of cultural change for specific groups of Afrikaners, namely lower-middle-class men (McDowell, 2003; Willis, 1977; Wray, 2006).

The intersectional analysis raises questions about the role of cultural and emotional mechanisms in identity work and cultural trauma theory. The difference between old and young Afrikaners, and then between upper-class girls and lower middle class boys provides the best illustration of how intersectional analysis exposes different explanatory mechanisms. My intergenerational comparison points to the strength of cultural change among the young as well as to the dangers of an over-reliance on cultural explanations. Young Afrikaners’ new diversity discourse in response to multiracialism is not found among the older women or the men. But an
explanation like “cultural change” does not explain why upper-class girls and lower-middle-class boys differ in their identity discourses. This difference points us not to culture but to the strength of emotional mechanisms. Indeed, without looking at the intersection of different identity discourses, we might have concluded that: (1) the “new generation of Afrikaners” practices a new cultural discourse (upper-class girls) or (2) that the younger generation is culturally traumatized (lower-middle-class boys). Instead, the intersectional analysis shows the interplay of class, gender, and generation in identity work. It is precisely this interplay that raises intriguing questions for cultural trauma theory, and how cultural and emotional mechanisms underlie identity work. Indeed, although my anatomy of intersections exposes a very complicated cultural landscape, it also lays bare more powerful explanatory mechanisms.

14.4 RETHINKING CULTURAL TRAUMA THEORY

Every Afrikaner struggles to come to terms with the consequences of apartheid, but not as a victim of crime or a survivor of war. Rather, he or she is a bearer of a perpetrators’ cultural trauma. All Afrikaners are marked by the crime of apartheid that was committed in the name of Afrikaner nationalism. They struggle because their culture was racist and their social status has fallen. They share the common challenge of negotiating and contesting the cultural meaning of being Afrikaner after apartheid. The cultural trauma label speaks to the spell the past put on the present, to paraphrase Adorno, but also to emotional anxieties that accompany cultural change on this scale. Cultural trauma connotes that being Afrikaans is a troubled condition; a condition that is difficult to resolve. The perpetrator label captures the specific emotional pattern: Afrikaners must manage the emotions of loss, guilt, and shame. They have to confront their lost social status, and the burden of stigma on their ethnic identity.

Alexander and colleagues defined cultural trauma as a feeling that is the result of an historic event that marked a group’s consciousness and memories, and changed their identity in important ways (Jeffrey C Alexander et al., 2004). The vastly different institutional landscapes of post-apartheid South Africa and the variety of cultural discourses among Afrikaners should make us suspicious of claims that Afrikaners suffer “collectively” from a trauma. This claim, at first, seems too bold in scope and too extreme in diagnosis. Not all Afrikaners are affected in a similar way by the burden of apartheid.

Instead of rejecting the label of cultural trauma, I argue for a more precise theoretical language to define what a perpetrator cultural trauma is: a theory that captures the relationship between cultural patterns and emotional mechanisms, without collapsing the one in the other.

In chapter 3, I identified three tensions in cultural trauma theory. First, cultural trauma is defined as a collective condition, while based on individual
emotions. Second, cultural trauma is described as a stigmatized condition, but
the theory offered few tools to explore how people respond and manage this
stigma. Third, cultural trauma is presented as a subjective condition, but it
is without an account of the emotions that constitute this feeling. To resolve
these problems, I made specific methodological choices: I chose a case-study
approach and put the individual at the heart of the analysis, without losing
sight of the institutional context in which the individual operates. I will now
try to resolve these tensions in the theory, and answer the questions of how
cultural reasoning changed among Afrikaners; which emotions had the most
salience in this process; and how the interaction of culture and emotion
differed among groups of Afrikaners.

The Unequal Burden of Trauma
Individualist and collectivist tensions run through cultural trauma theory,
where theorists argue that trauma is experienced collectively (Jeffrey C
Alexander et al., 2004). This study shows that a mass response to the past
does not imply that the response is “collective” (Smelser, 2001, p. 48).
Moreover, to overemphasize collective aspects of Afrikaners’ response to
apartheid would mask the stratification and complexity of Afrikaners as a
group. Divisions of class, gender and generation matter. Not just
socioeconomically, but also culturally and emotionally. Hierarchies of power
within a group find their expression; South Africa’s neoliberal society
provides different classes of Afrikaners with differential access to cultural
repertoires to represent their Afrikaner identity and emotionally manage the
burden of the past.

Cultural trauma theorists posit that culture indirectly incurs trauma. They
leap from the individual level to the collective level by presupposing culture’s
mediating role between historical experience and subjective experience. The
case of the Afrikaners confirms that culture has an important mediating
role—Afrikaners struggle continuously to make sense of everyday life.
However, culture does not operate as a grand meaning structure outside of
individuals. Societies do not have a “cultural tissue” that “ruptures”—as
cultural trauma theorists put it. Rather, culture operates as a set of problem-
solving tools for confronting the pressures and problems of post-apartheid
South Africa. New cultural discourses constantly emerge. However, the
intergroup comparison shows how different Afrikaner member groups have
different cultural toolkits at their disposal; different cultural repertoires that
are supported by institutional structures and financial resources.

In post-apartheid, neoliberal South Africa, cultural discourses among
Afrikaners emerge following institutional developments. No longer do
Afrikaners have a national political movement that dominates Afrikaner
culture, although this doesn’t mean new discourses are less political. For
instance, opposition to the policies of affirmative action and Black Economic
Empowerment redefines Afrikaners as a cultural minority with little power and in need of constitutional protection. New cultural discourses build on the international language of minority rights, civil rights, and language rights but are applied to the white Afrikaans minority. A second new cultural discourse is organized around urban order and crime. Politically, it tries to justify a large security apparatus that has reshaped the urban landscape. A third example of a new cultural discourse is the diversity talk practiced by the young upper middle class. It redefines young Afrikaners as multiculturalists so that they are no longer seen as racist or accused of racism. The new cultural discourses have superseded the old nationalistic ideology of the past and represent Afrikaners in a new way. And there are probably many more. But, these new discourses also suggest that Afrikaners have moved on beyond Afrikaner nationalism.

BEE and affirmative action policies have been met by a new set of symbolic boundaries and racial prejudices—a type of culture talk indeed. Although some of these racial prejudices are variations of the old racial stereotypes, they are also new. So, now both upper- and lower-middle-class Afrikaners say that blacks cannot do the work, that young blacks are too assertive and demanding, that blacks are not interested in working, that they rely too much on the government, and that they only work for show. Moreover, they say that these programs actually harm blacks because they make them lazy. They have slightly different strategies, with upper-class Afrikaners often making a distinction between educated and noneducated blacks. It is hard to tell if such racial prejudices are simply a product of new government policies or whether they are a continuation of the past. But prejudices did get a new twist after apartheid, and that, possibly, is still cultural change in the present.

RESPONDING TO A PERPETRATOR’S STIGMA
The second tension in cultural trauma theory is its emphasis on the collective stigmatized condition and its deemphasizing of people’s ability to manage stigma. Cultural trauma is defined as an end condition by Alexander and colleagues, but it is not some definite or final subjective state. Afrikaners’ collective identity was marked after apartheid, and this had a stigmatizing effect. Most every Afrikaner struggles with the stigmatized image of their group. Indeed, both upper- and lower-middle-class Afrikaners are vulnerable to stigmatization, being part of the white minority, although not to the same degree. However, Afrikaners are not passive in accepting the “mark” of apartheid—they have agency. Afrikaners continuously work to lift the stigma of the past, and they try hard to redefine themselves. The Afrikaner identity is as much about aspiration and becoming as it is about the marks of the past. Ultimately, a perpetrator’s cultural trauma is about acquiring a stigma and about the process of the cultural and emotional management of the stigma.
My study shows how South Africa’s neoliberal society provides different classes of Afrikaners with differential access to cultural destigmatization strategies. Stigmatization studies have long shown that the consequences of stigma are context dependent (Goffman, 1963). More recently, Lamont and colleagues showed that people have different cultural resources for managing and responding to stigmatization (Fleming, Lamont, & Welburn, 2011; Lamont & Bail, 2007; Lamont & Mizrachi, 2011). They emphasize the range of destigmatization strategies that minority groups mobilize, and how these strategies are enabled and constrained by cultural repertoires, institutions, and national ideologies.

My institutional and intersectional analysis affirms the insight that destigmatization strategies vary between groups of Afrikaners, depending on institutional context and access to cultural repertoires. For instance, economic resources allow the upper class to continue segregated living in different form, away from the non-white majority. The stigma is reduced by avoiding contact with blacks. What my study adds to the stigmatization literature is how new destigmatization strategies emerge out of institutional developments and new cultural repertoires. The physical separation and aesthetic beauty of the gated community allows upper-class Afrikaners new, positive cultural discourses around diversity and racial integration. These discourses rebuild the positive self-image for Afrikaners, first toward themselves but also to the rest of South Africa.

Some argue that stigmatization can foster cultural bonding and community. Feelings of belonging and familiarity do not have to be about positive characteristics of a culture. For instance, anthropologist Michael Herzfeld’s concept of cultural intimacy suggests cultural bonding also happens over embarrassing cultural traits. Cultural intimacy, for him, is “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered sources of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation” (Herzfeld, 2005, p. 4). Cultural intimacy, Herzfeld says, can offer a sense of defiant pride in the face of a more accepted morality and, sometimes, of official disapproval as well. Afrikaners display this defiant pride in various forms; they express self-stereotypes ostensibly at their own collective expense and they engage in forms of rueful self-recognition.

Nevertheless, I argue that Herzfeld’s reading of the relationship between stigmatization and cultural intimacy is far too positive and narrow. Stigmatization goes beyond embarrassment, as it leads to shame and anger. A major finding of my study is how the Afrikaner lower middle class not only feels trapped in fragile institutions they no longer identify with, but men in particular struggle to manage the emotional burden of coming to terms with
the past and the present. It is because of volatile emotions like shame and anger that they are unable to speak the new cultural discourse of diversity and find their way in the new multiracial South Africa.

**Emotions in Cultural Trauma Theory**

The third tension within cultural trauma theory exists between cultural analysis and emotional explanations. In this study I analyze emotions at the level of institutions. I looked at specific emotions and made a distinction between emotions and the management of them. Although such a distinction is not always easily empirically drawn, it is analytically important because some emotions are much more difficult to manage than others. Throughout my case studies, I pointed out how specific emotions like pride, loss, shame, and guilt play a role in the experience and cultural discourses of Afrikaners. Below, I argue that the relationship between loss, stigma, and shame is particularly salient among Afrikaners.

**Loss, Stigma, and Shame**

This study locates the feelings of loss in concrete, daily experiences of Afrikaners—experiences that deal with the changing institutions of work, living, and school. I found that feelings of loss are unevenly divided by class. Neoliberal policies have hollowed out institutions like public space, formerly public companies, and public schools. For many lower-middle-class Afrikaners, school and work no longer provide a stable source of identity and belonging. Moreover, lower-middle-class men manage their feelings of loss of concrete institutions more poorly than their female counterparts. They seem to lack insight about why things have changed for the worse. Many use the language of alienation to express their sadness. The fragility of their male identities is evident in their constant affirmation of pride in their work. The men find few resources to feel pride in their company, work, or status as seniors in the company, and affirmative action only worsens this problem. The young lower-middle-class boys display a similar sense of loss about their school, which no longer provides a solid basis for belonging or building male identity. Compared to the apartheid era, all Afrikaners have lost a position of privilege, but some classes of Afrikaners have lost much more than others.

Afrikaners are stigmatized after apartheid—justifiably or not—and this stigma leads to shame. They are seen as racist and as perpetrators by other South Africans. Shame is the prevalent emotion among Afrikaners regarding their Afrikaner identity and the apartheid past. The emotion of shame is not just about embarrassment, or the public exposure of a wrongful act, but goes to the heart of Afrikaners’ identity. Recall how I connected shame in the first chapter to feelings of inadequacy of the self and a sense of failure where one expects one’s self to be adequate and in control—an emotion that is
worsened by public exposure of one’s weaknesses and inadequacies, although not caused by it (Lickel, Schmader, & Barquissau, 2004).

The majority of Afrikaners I interviewed feel that, personally, they had little control over the hideous acts of the former political system given their age, position, or political orientation. Therefore, they do not feel responsible for apartheid’s crimes. However, they do feel shame for its outcome because once the crimes of apartheid were publicly revealed it portrayed Afrikaners as weak and inferior. Shame follows events that lower one’s position within the social hierarchy. This is precisely what happened in post-apartheid South Africa. Shame about apartheid is thus more closely connected to a loss of stature than to feelings of moral responsibility. For Afrikaners, the public loss of respect often overrides private pangs of conscience. The intensity of shame is exacerbated by the loss of power after 1994. Afrikaners are now depended on the ANC government. They no longer feel in control of their destiny, and this makes them more susceptible to shame. Moreover, some Afrikaners still hold untenable ideals about their group—cultural ideals about control, self-sufficiency, and independence. These unachievable ideals make them more likely to feel inadequate and experience shame.

Shame is more prominent than guilt among Afrikaners, but it is not equally distributed across the population. My study found important differences in shame experience and intensity among Afrikaners, related to class, gender, and generation. Lower-middle-class Afrikaners feel more shame. Why is this so? First, because the lower middle class are more stigmatized; they are less able to avoid it. Second, they have fewer resources to destigmatize their identities. Third, they have lost more status. Fourth, they specifically feel they had little control over the hideous acts of the former political system, given their position. Guilt does play a role among Afrikaners, but more among the upper class. The Afrikaner upper class has more institutional and cultural resources to destigmatize their identity, which prevents shame. They are also more susceptible to guilt about their privilege, as we saw with the women living in the gated community and the young women of the upper-class high school.

How does shame shape the cultural patterns of the lower middle class, and explain the incongruities of their cultural discourses? Shame leads to anger and narcissism—often in a vicious cycle. Lower-middle-class Afrikaners direct their shame-based anger both against Afrikaners and against blacks. For instance, Solidarity’s members are angry both at the National Party and the ANC government. In terms of action tendencies, shame in psychology is linked to avoidance behaviors including withdrawal. Sociologically, the link between shame and withdrawal is evident in the feelings of alienation and isolation among the lower middle class. Shame makes one feel incompetent and dependent and instigates an urge not to be seen as weak and dependent (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004, p. 29). Recall Solidarity leadership’s
ambivalence about wanting to belong and fiercely declaring their independence and claim to self-sufficiency. Shame also promotes a desire to distance oneself from apartheid, the emotion-eliciting event. Shame is related to phenomena like denialism and silence after historic crimes (Cohen, 2001a; Zerubaval, 2006). Finally, the experience of shame discourages reparations and connection to other racial groups. Instead, it leads to narcissism and a focus on the self.

Shame is a deeply problematic emotion, and reinforces the dire position of the Afrikaner lower middle class. The hold of shame on lower-middle-class Afrikaners is worse for men than for women. Research shows that men are more shame prone than women (Pennebaker & Roberts, 1992; J. Tangney & Dearing, 2003). Shame is connected to the ideal state that one fantasizes oneself, development psychologists’ show. The emotion is thus difficult to manage. In short, the history of patriarchy has a destructive influence on the emotional life of Afrikaners (Gillian, 2008). In the traditional Afrikaner patriarchal rigid family structures, there is often little room for the necessary playfulness and creativity to learn one’s incompleteness and overcome one’s primitive shame. All this is not to say that the lower middle class, and particularly men, never feel guilty about the past. Rather, for lower-class Afrikaner men, shame overrides private pangs of conscience. Stigmatization and the loss of status results in shame that is a more salient emotion than guilt. In the social world, guilt over apartheid is almost always hidden behind shame—shame about apartheid that is more connected to a loss of stature than to feelings of moral responsibility. This sociological finding stands in contrast to what psychologists Branscombe and Doosje argue. They say that groups that have victimized others, like Afrikaners, are likely to feel collective guilt and moral responsibility for the harm they inflicted. Shame, according to them, is the prominent emotion among victims (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). My conclusion is the opposite. Because Afrikaners are stigmatized due to their history, those who have the least resources to destigmatize will feel shame.
Epilogue

It is clear that Afrikaners are in a moral transition. However, what remains in question is: how do Afrikaners become more compassionate and what must their morals become? Moral questions, I argued, should be confronted with hesitation by sociologists. But what if, at the end of this study, I put on my philosopher’s hat? As a sociologist, my interest was not primarily in moral change as a philosophical question but moral change as an empirical question. However, now that we have a much clearer picture of the socio-economic conditions of Afrikaners and their cultural struggles, I want to address the moral transition of Afrikaners from a normative perspective. Specifically, I want to explore the role of shame in the moral transition.

Some South Africans advocate shame as an appropriate response to white privilege after apartheid (Vice, 2010). My analysis challenges such straightforward claims about the normative benefits of shame. In the case of trade union Solidarity and the lower middle class, shaming actually had many negative side effects. It actually prevented them from making a definitive shift from resentment to legitimate politics of recognition. The dominance of the emotion of shame among lower-class Afrikaner men, and its many problematic consequences, does not imply that there is no moral shame. There is a type of shame that can play a positive normative role. No moral questions I raise here have clear-cut answers. Still, my empirical study illuminates various social aspects of this moral transition that can point us in the correct direction.

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A comparison with the debate about post-war Germany is illuminating. Like Afrikaners, post-war Germans were confronted with the question of collective guilt. After 1945, many social philosophers and sociologists participated in a debate about whether ordinary citizens were collectively
accountable for state crimes and how they should respond to the legacy of past wrongs. The philosopher Karl Jasper, for instance, made a distinction between moral guilt and metaphysical guilt. He argued that Germans who had not directly participated carried no moral guilt, but they did carry metaphysical guilt, which is a type of guilt that stressed the need to show solidarity with a fellow human being. He urged Germans to undergo a process of moral purification. By contrast, Hannah Arendt argued that purification by public apologies or expressions of guilt are often hollow acts for who was to judge the sincerity of such confessions? (Schaap, 2005) In South Africa, the debate about moral transition has been driven by propositions that hardly confront the reality of Afrikaners’ denial of guilt. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee prescribed a religious-like ritual of repentance and forgiveness for Afrikaners to come to terms with the past. Writer and Nobel Prize winner J.M. Coetzee famously critiques this approach in his novel Disgrace, in which he explores the possibility of sincere repentance and the impossibility of white South Africans taking collective responsibility. However, neither the TRC nor Coetzee address denial of guilt as a moral problem.

In this study, I connected Afrikaners’ denial of guilt and the struggle to come to terms with the past with the prevalence of “primitive shame”; an emotion that related to fantasized ideal states and narcissistic failure. I emphasized that whereas guilt is generally a productive emotion that fosters reparation and taking responsibility for your wrongs, shame is mainly destructive and leads to narcissism. Empirically, I concluded that shame dominates guilt. Shame is most disruptive among the lower middle class, particularly men, who carry the heaviest burden of the moral transition, although they have generally profited less—at least financially—from apartheid. If we assume that a moral transition toward more compassion and empathy is good and necessary, the moral transition among Afrikaners can be hastened in two ways. One way would be to foster a more productive kind of shame, “moral shame,” and not destructive “primitive shame.” Another way would be to nudge Afrikaners from shame to guilt. I will discuss and illustrate both routes with practical policy examples.

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Shame, at times, is a morally valuable emotion; it helps people to reconsider who they are. But it has its destructive sides too. The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that if injustices are the result of deeply rooted and long-standing patterns of thought and commitment in society, an apology for this or that harmful action is insufficient. Rather, she argues for individuals to search inside and reexamine cultural habits and character (Nussbaum, 2006). This productive type of shame or moral shame is distinguished from the
dangerous kind (primitive shame) because moral shame reflects individual complicity or collaboration with a bad communal norm. Moral shame is felt because the individual was inattentive to the problem or too little engaged with the problem. Moral shame represents the experienced discrepancy between one’s character and one’s ideals; ideals which are shared across racial and political lines and connected to valuable moral and public norms (like equality and social justice). Nussbaum writes, “Accepting these ideals and feeling shame at their nonrealization in oneself does not reinforce primitive shame; it actively works against it.”

Moral shame can put Afrikaners on the path to more compassion and empathy for their fellow South Africans. It pushes Afrikaners to be more open to racial integration, reparation, and reconciliation. However, invitations to feel moral shame, Nussbaum stresses, should always be noninsulting, nonhumiliating, and noncoercive. In other words, moral shame should never be enforced by law but should be the result of an open invitation.

In Antjie Krog’s book *Country of My Skull*, Krog reports on the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s proceedings over two years (Krog, 1999). However, Krog’s objective is not limited to simply report or give a personal account of the TRC. Instead, her book is her personal account of the realization what it means to be an Afrikaner after apartheid. Coming to terms with apartheid, she implies, is a collective responsibility and she consistently ties herself to “the men of her race.” For Krog, being Afrikaans is inescapable and so are its responsibilities. She writes intimately of the perpetrators at the TRC and asks herself what she has in common with “the men she hates most” (Krog, 1999, pp. 92,96; Sarah Nuttall, 2001). Krog argues that an apology for apartheid is far from enough; only publicly lived shame can renew Afrikaners’ right to belong to the African continent. She writes, “We are so utterly sorry. We are deeply ashamed and gripped with remorse. But hear us, we are from here. We will live it right—here—with you, for you” (Krog, 1999, p. 99). Furthermore, Krog creates two fictional psychologists. Krog invents characters that suggest that shame might be the appropriate emotion to feel—they invite the reader to feel shame—because one cannot sit comfortable with it; the characters encourage new Afrikaner leaders to demonstrate how to live anew; and they stress that coming to terms has to be done in one’s personal way (Krog, 1999, pp. 245, 247, 248). The fictional characters serve as neutral messengers—the indirect suggestions invite shame without humiliation or coercion. Thus, Krog encourages her readers to introspection and self-examination via shame. As she prods her intimate relationship to Afrikaners and their history, she invites the reader to examine him- or herself.

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Shame can never yield productive results if it is directly tied to identity markers such as whiteness or being Afrikaner *sui generis*. Here is a small example; in 2011 Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu proposed a “wealth tax” on white South Africans for the benefits they received from apartheid. Such a measure could give Afrikaners a practical way to recompense and resolve their guilt. However, because the measure is coercive and includes such a strong identity component it will provoke primitive shame. To achieve moral shame, Tutu could invite all wealthy South Africans (the majority of whites and a small number of blacks) to feel shame about their greed and the belief that the poor (black) cause their own poverty.

Another example: Samantha Vice, a South African philosopher, recently stated the importance of feeling shame as a white South African. She issued a public invitation for more self-examination among white South Africans and further inward focus to repair their “damaged moral selves.” It is useful to see the emotion of shame as an expression of aspirations: white South Africans are not who they can be. However, Vice argues that whiteness itself is implicated in the injustices that the black majority continues to experience. She relates shame directly to being white, which is problematic. Vice understands patterns of white privilege in terms of habits, but she suggests these bad habits are so ingrained (or “unconscious”) that they are impossible to change. Shame, then, becomes an identity issue and whiteness itself fuels the unjust system. She suggests that whiteness places a moral burden on all white South Africans to cultivate humility and silence (which she equates with shame) given their morally compromised position in the continuing racial and economic injustices of this country (Vice, 2010). It may be helpful to invite Afrikaners to feel ashamed about their cultural habits and norms that sustain racial inequality, promote or justify greed, and prevent redistributive taxation; but Vice never explicates these bad habits. Furthermore, it is unclear to me how silence can benefit communal self-examination.

The alternative to moral shame is to nudge Afrikaners to feel guilt that propels them into reparation and moral action. Such efforts present their own challenge. For example, privileged Afrikaner women experience more guilt than shame. Indeed, the Afrikaner women in the gated community and the privileged girls in the upper-class school were both preoccupied and troubled with guilt from their privilege. Their “white outlook” was defined by the negation of their privileged position. The women in the gated community experienced a solid sense of community and viewed their estate as a model for how cultural diversity in South Africa should be lived. The upper-class girls expressed a confident identity discourse about the value of being part of a generation that values diversity. Their secure identities were not threatened by their direct surroundings or dependent on being Afrikaans. Guilt among these women and girls prevails not only because of their secure identities but also because women are less shame prone. Guilt impelled them to project the
image that they were not withdrawing from South Africa or racist against their fellow black South Africans. However, the social and physical neoliberal context in which “white guilt” operates put limits on its efficacy. If guilt only makes the women greet the black employees of the estate, the parking guard or the golf caddy nicely, clearly guilt does not result in effective moral action. Guilt about privilege will only spur moral transition if the women reflect more deeply on the privileged structured in which they operate.

Let’s explore one more concrete policy example. Affirmative action policies in the United States and South Africa have been debated by philosophers and legal scholars. They argue about whether such policies are justified to compensate for past wrongs, or promote diversity (Dworkin, 1977; Kennedy, 1986; Sandel, 2009). In South Africa, where nonracialism has long been an ideal for its own sake, people like Neville Alexander fear that the discourse of affirmative action legislation perpetuates and reinscribes racial identities through the social practices and intergroup dynamics these policies give rise to (N. Alexander, 2007; Iheduru, 2004). Alexander is concerned that white people’s racial identities will be strengthened rather than weakened because of affirmative action, as it will give rise to opposition and resistance. In the United States, where nonracialism was never a popular ideology, similar debates often emerge about whether affirmative action policy provokes resentment among white ethnic groups. This study does not solve these moral questions, but it does add another perspective from the sociology of emotions. Affirmative action policies do not necessarily reinscribe racial identities, but they do make identity policies the basis of redress. Identity policies easily foster the wrong kind of shame, an emotion that does not contribute to reconciliation or propel people to make amends. Rather, it compels avoidance and denial of the past, and a narcissistic focus on self-suffering. Policies of racial redress could compensate for past wrongs and promote diversity. However, they are unlikely to contribute to a sense of collective responsibility for the past among Afrikaners.

A public debate about the previously listed shameful lifestyle choices and the cultural norms of wealthy South Africans (not only Afrikaners and not only whites) could be a route to moral shame and ultimately moral transition. Within deliberative democracy there is room for dialogical moralizing. What is more, a public debate about privilege and inequality could also address a few topics of discussion that are central in this study but are rarely mentioned in the media: the implications of new gated communities on its mostly black employees and local state finances, the privatization of urban services and education services, and the decay of public space. Intensive public debate could also foster a new language for the Afrikaners and all wealthy South Africans—a cultural language that is not rooted in assumed privilege and cultural superiority but in concerns about social justice and deliberative democracy. This language cannot be created in silence but must emerge out
of public discussions about, for example, the origins of inequality, the negative consequences of gating, and continued segregation in education. I don’t argue that race and identity do not matter when it comes to these issues; I argue that inserting race and identity often causes unproductive primitive shame that prevents public engagement and action needed to repair what is broken.