

Hiding behind culture: Using social defence systems to explore the malaise of the “old guard” in post-apartheid South Africa

Abstract

This paper focuses on the experiences of a group of white, Afrikaner, male, former South African Police members who sought psychotherapy during the post-apartheid period. A case study illustrates common themes and explores the applicability of social defence systems theory as a framework for making sense of their symptoms of emotional distress in the wake of threats to their established identity positions. Core findings reflect the painful divergence of psychic and social experiences and the undermining of defensive systems supported by apartheid social values.

Introduction

The general public – informed by the media and crime statistics – tend to view police work in South Africa as brutal and bloody. As a result of this general perception I (first author¹) was initially unsurprised to be referred a large number of police members with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder when I started my private practice in the late 1990s. While some of these members were able to work through their experiences, many remained fragmented by symptoms of trauma, while seeming resistant to help. So began my interest in understanding this group of policemen, who shared similar physical, socio-economic and cultural characteristics and who seemed to have made no significant progress, despite medium to long-term engagement in weekly psychotherapy.

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Given they appeared largely resistant to help, their seeking therapy was surprising as it appeared out of character. They shared characteristics typified by hyper-masculinity and self-sufficiency. Throughout their long and successful police careers they accepted horror and violence as *par for the course*. They were from white, Afrikaans-speaking upbringings, joining the police under the apartheid regime and remaining after its demise – the so-called “old guard”.

Two questions guided my curiosity: (1) Why did *these* individuals present themselves for therapy? (2) Why did they present at *this* particular time?

From a psychoanalytic point of view, it was apparent that the old guard had difficulty expressing and communicating emotional states that remained largely unconscious. They also seemed to be rigidly entrenched in their own viewpoints and struggled to understand their situation from other perspectives. Although, in the nearness of the clinical encounter, these observations were useful, my intrigue with this group of patients took me beyond the consulting room and into the conditions of the physical, social, cultural, historical and political world in which they lived. Drawing on Dimen (2011: 3), I recognised that I needed to “consider psychoanalysis’ conventional subject-interior life as steeped in socio-political forces”. In other words, circumstantial aspects needed to be attended to before I could fully grasp the old guard’s difficulties as presented in the therapeutic context.

My attempts to understand the old guard’s difficulties led me to pursue doctoral studies. Utilizing case study methodology (Edwards, 1990), I attempted to capture the flow and ambiance of the old guard’s therapeutic experience, by providing a thick and richly detailed description of each case. Retrospective triangulation - via reports from psychiatrists, GPs (general practitioners), and my supervision and session notes – enabled multiple perspectives. Although case study research has limitations in terms of not allowing anything unequivocal to be said about the identities and subjectivities of the broader group, its strength lies in the in-depth analysis of experience and the issues influencing that experience.

From this exploration I came to realise that a key to understanding the old guard’s presentation had to do with the fundamental socio-cultural and political changes occurring in South African police culture post-1994, and the loss of routines, supports and a sense of identity steeped in apartheid values and ideals.

Although the old guard’s work in the South African Police² exposed them to many

² The South African Police was established with the Act of Union in 1910. Its members combined the role of law enforcer and soldier. With the rise of the National Party in 1948, and the movement towards South Africa’s independence as a Republic, the South African Police was used as a political instrument to maintain and uphold the violent and oppressive apartheid system. With the dawn of democracy in 1994, the South African Police added the word ‘Service’ to its title. This was an attempt to move away from paramilitary law enforcement towards community policing.

traumatizing experiences, their involvement appeared cloaked in a sense of camaraderie, self-worth, belonging and purpose. In addition, the old guard's emotional encounters and behaviour appeared to reflect a police culture entrenched in apartheid racialized and gendered ideologies. In fact (as will be explored more fully in the discussion) their psychic and social lives could be said to have mirrored one another pre-1994, helping the old guard deal with life's existential questions in an affirming, straight-forward, unambiguous and predictable manner. Under these circumstances the old guard appeared better able to cope with the distress of their job.

Life post-1994 heralded a totally new and foreign police culture for the old guard. Within this new order their police participation no longer seemed to fulfil their needs, or validate their self-worth, as it had during apartheid. In the cases I treated, the parallel between the old guard's psychic and social lives seemed to gradually collapse, threatening and undermining their taken-for-granted ways of affirming their identity. This appeared to leave the old guard disorientated, anxious and distressed, with no internal resources to cope with police work, the losses they experienced or the changes they faced.

In this paper we document these observations through the lens of a single case that typified this group of old guard policemen and illustrated the main themes that emerged across cases. The paper's title, "Hiding behind culture", alludes to the old guard seeking shelter behind their white, Afrikaner, apartheid culture, entrenching themselves in their "old school" stories, and enacting ways of being which had previously defined them. At the same time they obsessively tried to engage their crumbling social defensive systems without reflecting on the distress and loss that change inevitably brings. Here "culture" is used broadly to refer to a system of ideas, beliefs and behaviours linked to white police culture with its Afrikaans, Calvinistic and apartheid roots. While this case does not allow us to say anything unequivocal about the broader group of old guard policemen, it can be used as a starting point to think about the old guard, while recognizing individual differences.

We draw on ideas that highlight the "mind-society synapse" (Dimen, 2011: 4), and the concept of "normative unconscious processes" (Layton, 2007: 4). We also highlight Layton's idea that identities are built in relation to other identities, in terms of the mutual construction of meaning in the analytic dyad. Here reflection on the therapist's positioning in the process of engaging and understanding the subject is seen as essential (as will be developed in the case presentation). From an object-relations point of view, social defence systems theory is used to understand the management of unconscious processes across the internal-external context. A focus on defensive systems appears to be a useful addition to understanding the employment and influence of normative unconscious processes.

We begin with a brief outline of literature exploring the relationship between social context and intrapsychic processes.

The internal-external context

A number of seminal contributions from sociology, psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies have attempted to explore the relationship between the internal and external world. Gramsci (1988), Williams (1979), Laclau & Mouffe (1985), Burr (1995), Connell (1987), Hopper (2003), Mitchell & Harris (2004), and Layton (2007), amongst others, have begun to make space for intrapsychic processes in the social construction and regulation of identity.

Gramsci (1988), the Marxist theoretician, expands the concept of hegemony (previously used by Marxists to denote the political leadership of the working-class in a democratic revolution) to include an understanding of the ruling capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) establishing and maintaining control through ideology (as well as through political and economic oppression and violence). With Gramsci's elaboration of hegemony, the bourgeoisie, through ideology, develop a hegemonic culture which spreads its own values and norms (through institutions, social relations, and ideas) to the point where they become "common sense" (they become naturalised). According to Jones (2006) Gramsci's opening up of hegemony in this way allows other forms of social and cultural relationship (such as gender, race, sexuality and religion) to be analysed (along with class). In so doing Gramsci allows for an understanding of how social and cultural relationships can overlap in different historical circumstances (Bennett, 1986). Thus, Gramsci's work facilitates the exploration of how individuals and groups are positioned by hegemonic practices. His work also enables the consideration of how people establish identities within and against a hierarchically ordered society (Jones, 2006).

Building on Gramsci's theories, Williams (1979), the British literary theorist, suggests the concept "structure of feeling" (1979: 132) to highlight the relationship between social conventions and written texts. Here, Williams is concerned with the social acceptance of certain literary conventions (for example, a fable is expected to have a moral, a television series is expected to end with a cliff-hanger). Like Gramsci, Williams sees hegemony, as "common sense" (or the dominant way of thinking in a particular time and place), but argues that it can never be total. He suggests that there is a space – or, put another way, an inner dynamic – through which different ways of being emerge. Structure of feeling, therefore, refers to the varying ways of being, vying to emerge at different moments in history. Williams understands structure of feeling as appearing in the space between official discourses, the dominant response to these official discourses, and how it is captured in written texts. He uses the term 'feeling' rather than 'thought' to describe this space, in an attempt to suggest that

what is referred to may not yet be fully articulated, but rather has to be inferred by reading between the lines. More recently Williams' claims about the contextual basis of feelings have been supported by the likes of Barrett (2006).

Laclau and Mouffe's book **Hegemony & socialist strategy** (1985) moves further in the post-Marxist tradition. They see Gramsci's theory of hegemony as establishing politics as "articulation", or a "logic of the social" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 87). Here Laclau and Mouffe understand subject positions and social groups as tied together within a historical context (for example, in modern societies there are social groups and identities which include feminism and veganism). Jones (2006) sees Laclau and Mouffe's use of Gramscian theory as an important contribution to the understanding of how hegemony might operate in modern democracies. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe do not hold that new social movements are inherently progressive. They develop Gramsci's notion of the opposition between common sense and good sense, by arguing that "new social movements exist in multiple forms which may be shaped through hegemonic struggle to progressive or reactionary ends" (1985: 169). Thus Laclau and Mouffe do not see new movements as "absolutely radical and irrecoverable for the dominant order, [none] constitutes an absolutely guaranteed point of departure for a total transformation" (ibid).

Picking up on the idea of positioning (again from a social constructionist perspective), according to Burr (1995: 140) positioning is the "process by which our identities and ourselves as persons come to be produced by socially and culturally available discourses". In other words, the positions we take in our social discourses direct the kind of experience we can engage in. Frosh et al (2003: 42) build on Burr's ideas, to suggest that: "While culture makes available the subject positions we can inhabit, the 'investment' or 'enjoyment' that people have in these subject positions is not necessarily captured by the articulation of the discourses themselves; rather, it may hinge on unspoken and at times unspeakable events, experiences and processes, all of them 'cultural', but also deeply embedded in subjectivity". Given that Frosh et al are interested in the application of psychoanalysis to social issues, their argument raises useful questions about how unconscious psycho-social processes help account for the investment and delight we take in engaging in socio-culturally available discourses.

The sociologist R W Connell (1987) delves into the relationship between psychic processes and socio-cultural context through the meaning a person attaches to his or her actions. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005: 842-3) explain this by saying: "One is not free to adopt any gender position in interaction simply as a discursive or reflexive move. The possibilities are constrained massively by embodiment, by institutional histories, by economic forces, and by personal and family relationships".

Hopper (2003) goes further, drawing on sociology, psychoanalysis and group analysis to emphasise the power of unconscious forces. He suggests that the construction of identity is constrained both internally (by internalized objects and other internal dynamics) and also externally by our socio-political context. He develops the term “social unconscious” (Hopper, 2003: 126) to refer to the social, cultural and communicational constraints – what he terms “the historical and political dimensions of human experience” (ibid). He focuses on how we are organised by our socio-political context as well as how our internal world organizes our experience.

In terms of recent developments in psychoanalysis, the interpersonal being seen as co-constructed, and the mind being viewed as simultaneously social, individual, public, and private are foundational philosophical ideas of contemporary relational psychoanalysis (Mitchell & Harris, 2004). Relational psychoanalysis sees the primary motivation of the psyche as being in relationships with others. As a consequence, early relationships are felt to shape our expectations about the way in which our needs are met. This means our desires and needs cannot be separated from the relational contexts in which they arise. We are seen to attempt to re-create (or enact) early learned relationships in ongoing relationships, in order to satisfy needs in ways that conform to patterns developed during childhood.

Within the relational tradition, and from a psychosocial perspective, Layton (2007) continues to explore the relationship between unconscious psychic processes and socio-cultural context by looking at the way identities are constructed in relation to dominant cultural norms and ideals. Layton suggests that class, race and gender hierarchies tend to privilege certain subject positions and vilify others. She sees social norms as dividing subjectivity into class, race and gender categories, making certain experiences shameful and humiliating and others affirming and supportive. In other words, Layton highlights how identities are formed by cultural demands to dissociate from ways of being human deemed “not proper” for certain social positions. Thus, her relational model stresses that, via processes of identification and dis-identification, identity becomes entwined between “me” and those whose identities have been rejected as unacceptable and “not-me”. Layton (2007: 4) uses the term “normative unconscious processes” to describe how psychosocial operations push to consolidate “proper” kinds of identity. In terms of the therapeutic setting Layton sees normative unconscious processes occurring when therapist and patient unconsciously collude in sustaining some of the very cultural identity norms that cause psychic distress.

From an object relations point of view, social defence systems theory extends the basic psychoanalytic premise that we, as individuals, unconsciously defend ourselves from being overwhelmed by anxiety, terror and helplessness (giving us the illusions of certainty

and safety), to the idea that whole communities, acting collectively and unconsciously, can defend themselves against such vulnerabilities within an organisation or society. As such, this theory may be a useful adjunct to understanding the management of unconscious processes across the internal-external context, leading to a clearer view of the employment and influence of Layton's (2007) normative unconscious processes. For example, one of Layton's main points is that identity formation in the face of normative unconscious processes is always fraught with conflict. In other words, like Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), and Hopper (2003), Layton sees identity formation as not simply the easy appropriation of roles. Here, social defences may offer useful ways of understanding the management of these conflicts.

As opposed to Layton's emphasis on basic categorical differences such as class, race, and gender, social defence theory emphasizes the role defences play in warding off persecutory and depressive anxieties. Whereas unconscious normative processes highlight nonconscious categories of experience, social defence systems theory outlines how social groups and institutions defend and maintain such norms. Work by Jacques (1955), Menzies-Lyth (1988), Hinshelwood and Skogstad (2000), and, within the South African context, Mnguni (2012), provide useful insights into this theory.

Jacques' (1955) puts forward the idea that social systems can often serve to defend against persecutory and depressive anxieties. Through the analysis of unconscious institutional dynamics, Jacques proposes that social defences bind the institution together *against* unthinkable anxieties. In this way he envisages institutional practices and unconscious defences becoming entwined as social defences. Defensive systems of this nature tie the individual to group ideologies that serve to resist change for both unconscious and conscious reasons.

Elaborating on persecutory and depressive anxieties in relation to social defences, Menzies-Lyth (1988) highlights the effect that the main task of the institution has on the development of such primitive anxieties and the social defences against them. Exploring institutional-individual dynamics in a hospital setting, she demonstrates how social defence systems physically, psychologically and symbolically work to distance nurses from patients in order to avoid anxiety provoking emotions that might emerge. In describing this she says the nursing staff: "develop some form of relationship that locates madness in the patient and sanity in themselves, with a barrier to prevent contamination. Such an arrangement allows the nurses to stay in the situation without feeling that their minds are being damaged. It justifies the use of control by the nurses, entitles patients to care and refuge, and is a virtual guarantee that they will continue to be thought ill and therefore will not be sent outside" (Menzies-Lyth, 1988: 604).

Menzies-Lyth's ideas are reiterated in the anxiety-culture-defence model described by Hinshelwood and Skogstad (2000). This model proposes that anxieties, originating in people's responses to their work tasks, stimulate primitive collective anxieties within the organisation (or society) which, in turn, lead to collective defences. These collective defences become part of the culture and structure of the organisation. That is, they become part of the way people do things – part of the social norms and values of the organisation.

Mnguni (2012), looking at the unconscious dynamics of public service work in South Africa, explains that there is generally a fit between individual and collective defences within an organisation, because work settings seem to attract people with similar emotional needs. When the fit is good-enough, identity tends to fuse – or become “wedded” – to the organisation. In such cases differences between individual and social identity are lost. Alternatively, those individuals whose defensive profile does not fit within the dominant collective are more likely to experience the organisation as threatening and destructive.

Drawing on this body of literature we now explore how a focus on defensive systems may enhance an understanding of the employment and influence of normative unconscious processes in a veteran member of the South African Police.

Case³

Hendrik, or Hennie as he preferred to be called, came to the clinic at the end of 2000. The clinic was located at a medical centre in a lower middle class suburb. It attracted many police members (as well as other state employees) as it was contracted into state medical aids and accepted injury on duty claims. I worked at this clinic between 1999 and 2006, but had no particular affiliation with the South African Police or South African Police Service.

Hennie was a 34-year old Warrant Officer in the Rapid Response Unit. His work included combating serious and violent crime, such as cash-in-transit heists and armed robberies. He obtained my name from one of his old guard colleagues. The colleague gave him the name of two therapists – the second being a white, Afrikaner, male clinical psychologist – but Hennie chose to contact me.

In terms of socio-cultural context, Hennie learnt about the world through the Christian National educational system, the Dutch Reformed Church (with its patriarchal rituals and cultural ideals surrounding birth, marriage and death), Afrikaner cultural

³ I have confined myself to clinical material from a patient who has finished his treatment and from whom permission for publication has been sought. Pseudonyms have been employed and place names changed.

institutions and South African Police culture. Much of his education was about preparing for life within structured apartheid institutions, while his public and private life was shaped by the workings of apartheid political institutions. For white, Afrikaner, men such as Hennie, compulsory governmental conscription⁴ appeared routinized as a “rite of passage”, bonding them together in a military fraternity endowed with solidarity and power. Complying with such apartheid orchestration of life was fortified by decisions not to undertake National Service being met with prison sentences and social ostracism. Apartheid socialization meant that almost every aspect of life was specified and regulated, from where Hennie lived and worked, whom he related to and how, and so forth.

In terms of his family of origin, Hennie was the eldest son of seven children. As a child Hennie’s father was frequently away from home working as a railway engineer. His father also often left the family to attend compulsory National Service camps. Hennie seemed to think the world of him, yet, given the large size of the family and his father’s recurrent absences from home, it appeared that Hennie never actually got to spend much time with him. Similarly, Hennie seemed to feel he had a close relationship with his mother. However, when asked to describe their relationship he did so in generalised terms. For instance, he described her as a “pretty” women who “did her best” for him and his six siblings. During his time in therapy Hennie would frequently visit his parents, explaining that it was his “duty” to do so.

As a child Hennie would often entertain himself with his toy soldiers or play “cops and robbers” with his brothers. At school he took an active role in cadet training. He always aspired to being a policeman and his parents encouraged him in this endeavour, bringing him to their local Dutch Reformed Church in his uniform upon his graduation from Police College. Hennie had elected to join the police for his National Service and remained after its completion. He was promoted quickly to the rank of Warrant Officer.

Pre-1994 the South African Police’s primary role entailed upholding and implementing ideologies strongly linked to racism, sexism, elitism, patriarchy, Calvinism, militarism, conservatism, nationalism and hyper-masculinity (**Sevamus**, August 1990). In keeping with these agendas, police culture also reflected racist, white ideals: Police were trained either on the job or through South African Police training centres with little input or exposure to alternative perspectives from outside. Simultaneously, the closed nature of the South African Police helped cement a sense of solidarity, enhanced by police living in dormitories or flats often attached to police stations (**Sevamus**, November 1990). Community links were further curtailed by the South African Police’s practice of not

⁴ Under apartheid, all fit white, male, South Africans were liable for service from 18-55 years of age. National servicemen were conscripted initially for two years full-time into the South African Defence Force or four years full-time into the South African Police.

deploying police where they were recruited. Policemen were also often transferred to other parts of the country on promotion (Buchner, 1992).

The medium of instruction and operation within the South African Police was predominantly Afrikaans. The loyalty of white police to the National Party was encouraged through an Afrikaner cultural organisation known as Akpol. Although apparently concerned with promoting the use of Afrikaans, and Afrikaner art and culture, Akpol spread the message of Christian Nationalism, the ideology of the National Party (Cawthra, 1994). Right-wing attitudes amongst police were, therefore, overlaid with a Calvinist belief that the will of God legitimised the law and the state, and that the task of the police was thus God-given.

Social norms were also influenced by the strong Christian National ideology prevalent in the police, reinforcing patriarchal beliefs concerning marriage, the family and the home. These norms may have helped “standardize” particular gender roles. For instance, wives were assigned an “important” role by the South African Police, forming part of the police culture. A 1990 article in the South African Police journal, **Servamus**, had this advice for them: “It is true that your husband may be in the front line of the attack on the very fibre of our ordered society, in the heat of the battle, but you must be that quiet, unseen source of his strength for that battle, from you must flow the strength that he needs to come out of that battle, unscathed and victorious” (**Servamus**, August 1990: 14). Such apartheid normative processes advocated a nurturing and stoic position for women, disparaging any alternative position as unloving, irresponsible and negligent.

As a result of such social norms, being a member of the South African Police during apartheid appeared to be associated with specific socio-cultural tools and resources in relation to hegemonic apartheid masculinity. These tools and resources appeared to open up certain experiences and opportunities for Hennie and other old guard policemen. These policemen seemed to have been interpellated as burly, self-sufficient, practical, resourceful and unemotional individuals. Consequently, anxiety, uncertainty, emotionality and dependency were rigidly designated “feminine” (see Chodorow, 1978) and, thus, disavowed.

In keeping with this, during our sessions Hennie described numerous instances that demonstrated a strong identification with an Afrikaner “cops and robbers” view of police work. He enjoyed having a high-speed vehicle with which to apprehend suspects. Carrying a firearm and posing as the ‘strong arm of the law’ also appeared to be firmly wedded to his sense of self. However, since the transition to the new post-apartheid South African Police Service, Hennie had failed to be promoted, his car and equipment had not been updated, and he no longer worked with colleagues who were

trained the same way he had been. Hennie frequently spoke with great bitterness and resentment about the transition, specifically directed at the South African Police Service. He felt that standards had fallen and he was being prevented from doing his job to the best of his abilities.

In terms of the presenting problem, Hennie was suffering from what he described as “work stress” and “insomnia”. He experienced a range of general anxiety symptoms which he felt were linked specifically to the mismanagement of the South African Police Services. However, it seemed to me that Hennie’s engagement in therapy had the feel of some sort of kudos being achieved. It appeared that the old guard colleague who had referred Hennie to me had given therapy legitimacy and a sense of “coolness”.

This sense of kudos was also present in his physical appearance. I was struck immediately on meeting Hennie by his imposing presence. His physic reflected that of a body builder. He accentuated his muscular tone by wearing tight fitting clothes. His hair was kept in a gelled, military style (short-back-and-sides). Overpowering to the sense of smell was his liberal application of aftershave and deodorant. He seemed the very poster-child of a man’s man, or, for that matter, a lady’s man.

Despite his remonstrations about “work stress” and “insomnia”, throughout Hennie’s initial sessions I puzzled over what he was *doing* in therapy. While I sensed Hennie’s general malaise, he brought little content to sessions, save for talk of his concerns about his wife and daughter’s wellbeing and security. His affect appeared restricted to a cool, calm and collected façade, no matter what material was being discussed. While Hennie’s family were often on his mind, his interaction with them also appeared superficial and distant. He would spend his time following them to work and school to make sure they arrived safely. This seemed to help him affirm himself as a man and protector, while reducing his wife and daughter to helpless dependants.

I thought about my positioning in the therapeutic relationship and how this contributed to the unfolding of the treatment process (Layton, 2007). As a Northern Irish, female, therapist I have a noticeable accent and do not speak, or understand, Afrikaans. This makes me perceptibly “foreign” and “different” in terms of the socio-cultural history of South Africa. This may have made Hennie’s choice of me over my Afrikaner male colleague significant. I mulled over the following questions: Did Hennie perhaps wish to avoid the chance of being judged by another Afrikaner and/or another male? While there was a poverty of clinical psychologists in the police, did Hennie perhaps wish to maintain a separation between his public and private worlds? As a female was I perhaps viewed as potentially caring? If so, did Hennie set therapy up to reaffirm his macho sense of masculinity?

After engaging in twelve sessions of psychotherapy Hennie's state medical aid was exhausted and he disengaged from therapy. I felt that our sessions had achieved little except for highlighting Hennie's need to reinforce his sense of self as a brave, chivalrous, protector and provider. He seemed to have internalised a set of principles about what it meant to be a man in a concrete way. He had little reflective capacity. Other perspectives, or reflections on his sense of self, were met with incredulity. Looking generally at Hennie's therapeutic narratives, he devalued any emotional responsiveness or practical support his wife offered. She was cast in the role of fragile dependent, needing a good night's sleep to enable her to get the energy reserves to care for their daughter. Hennie was then able to cast himself in the role of the "principled husband-protector" who could deal with life single-handed. The stock form of his narrative left me wondering whether Hennie could still be a "man" if he allowed his wife (or his therapist) to support him. Instead of exploring this Hennie played on his grim life experience in the South African Police/South African Police Service and stayed emotionally and physically distant from his wife, thereby keeping her beholden to him.

Interestingly, Hennie re-engaged with treatment two months later. He did so after he and his "crew"⁵ were wounded in the line of duty. Unlike his initial presentation, Hennie now filled sessions with detailed descriptions of his symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (including insomnia, outbursts of anger, hypervigilance and flashbacks) and the serious incidents he had been involved in throughout his long police career.

During this time he described many horrifying events he had witnessed and endured in the police force, involving the death of others, and situations where his life was threatened with serious injury and death. His descriptions of these incidents were an ever present part of sessions after re-entering treatment. However, I was increasingly struck by the way in which Hennie narrated these serious incidents. Despite the traumatic implications, he appeared enthralled by his daring apprehension of suspects. As the sessions progressed I came to realise that Hennie's descriptions, while conveying his pride and excitement, were derelict of any other emotions. For example, several times Hennie spoke of an incident in which he and his crew had been involved in a horrific high-speed freeway chase which culminated in a bloody gun battle. The content of Hennie's narrative reflected the seriousness of the incident. However, as was usual with Hennie, the emotional atmosphere was one of pure exhilaration. In terms of countertransference, I was left feeling shocked and terrified. Rather than being traumatised by this near-death experience, Hennie appeared full of boastful pride. He had accrued another "war story" to tell which bolstered his image of being a tough military guy. This caused me to think about how police members, and other first

⁵ Hennie used the term crew in a unique way. For him it did not refer to a group of people assigned to a particular job, but rather one colleague who worked closely with him.

responders, deal with distressing emotions. As a policeman on active duty it appeared appropriate to suppress upsetting emotions and focus on the task at hand. However, the degree and frequency with which Hennie appeared to deny and split off any painful emotions seemed extreme.

When pressed in sessions, Hennie could acknowledge many losses during his long police service. Amongst these was the loss of old routines, old guard rationales for policing and the bravado that came with upholding apartheid ideals. However, Hennie (like other members of the old guard) failed to engage any further with such losses. I recalled Levy and Lemma's (2004) chapter which highlights how defences against loss ultimately reduce the ability for imaginative and emotionally fulfilling contact with self and others, the chance of psychological recovery and the working through of the past. Certainly, the concrete and one-dimensional nature of Hennie's therapeutic interactions reflected such defensiveness and resulted in his limited ability to creatively and expressively engage with me in sessions. However, while this insight was helpful in understanding the dynamics of Hennie's personality, it did not seem to fully account for his presentation or all the changes and difficulties he was encountering regarding the shifting social-political context. Put another way, the loss Hennie was confronted with appeared more deeply linked to a profound loss of self in relation to the changing social-political context.

This link appeared to be evocatively conveyed in a dream Hennie reported: "I was working night shift. We had a routine call out to one of the hostels ... I went in looking for suspects. All around were cars ... But when I got into the hostel the mood changed ... It became tense. The suspects were violent. I was on my guard ... It became like a 'Western' movie. There was someone with me, my crew [*his colleague, Jan*]. I was comfortable with him. I sensed the suspects had done something truly despicable ... I had to shoot first ... I did ... I shot them in the face. That way I knew they were dead. It felt good. Their faces were obliterated. [*He smiled.*] Then there was a call from Radio Control. They wanted me to attend a scene. It was just around the corner from where I was. I walked there with my crew. There had been a shootout. I called for backup ... The Task Force arrived and took up position ... One of the Task Force members shot me in the face ... That's when I woke up sweating ... See, just a dream ..."

Hennie tried to dismiss his dream as something irrelevant to therapy and his life. Taking the dream seriously would have meant embracing the meaning it held. To me Hennie's dream seemed to be filled with symbolic images that suggest persecutory anxieties and the processes of projective and introjective identification. The first part of his dream sounded routine, an average night shift. He went and did his job, appraised the situation and reacted to it. He "wiped out" the enemy. Hennie did not have to think, he simply reacted – an ideal symbol of apartheid order and control. The enemy was described

as violent and “despicable”. This perhaps made it permissible for Hennie to destroy them – he shot them in the face, perhaps symbolically obliterating their identity. As the hero of his “Western movie” Hennie seemed to feel affirmed and justified as the all-good hero. As the violent and “despicable” enemy, the suspects were depicted as the incarnation of evil. To me, this reflected Hennie’s defensive manoeuvres of splitting and idealisation. Familiar aspects of Hennie were portrayed in an idealised good way while other aspects were rejected as evil, unidentifiable and unknowable.

In the second part of the dream, Hennie was called to a scene. He was familiar with the territory and simply walked round the corner to attend to the incident (just as he felt in familiar territory moving from the South African Police to South African Police Service). He appraised the situation and called for backup from the Special Task Force (the *crème de la crème* of the new South African Police Service). However, unlike the first part of the dream, where Hennie relied on familiar support and affirmation from his old guard colleague, in this second part of the dream there was no support or affirmation. Rather, the new elite South African Police Service unit annihilated Hennie.

This dream, along with Hennie’s anger and bitterness about the post-apartheid changes suggested a profound loss of identity inextricably linked to the demise of apartheid and hyper-masculine imperatives. In the discussion to follow we draw on Layton’s (2007: 4) “normative unconscious processes” and social defence systems to develop an understanding of the emergence of obsessive defences we believe were aimed at protecting Hennie, and the old guard’s, crumbling sense of identity in the new South Africa.

Discussion

In terms of William’s (1979) structure of feeling, referred to earlier, Hennie’s early life experiences suggested that military discourses (amongst other apartheid discourses) were not only part of his daily routine from birth, but were also experienced as natural, boyish fun and games, a way of relating to friends and family. They were also awarded the prestigious status of a “righteous vocation” within his family and community. With this in mind, and reflecting on Frosh et al’s (2003) ideas about the investment and delight we can take engaging in our socio-culturally available discourses, it is also noteworthy to mention that Hennie expressed a calling to join the South African Police at a very young age. His conviction had almost a religious fervour. Being a policeman appeared an ideal to which he aspired. He was passionate about being an apartheid policeman.

It appeared that the bureaucratic routines and practices of the South African Police, in which Hennie was embedded, may have represent aspects of Jacques’ (1955) depiction of a social defence system. Here, routines and practices seemed to have a defensive

function which served to bind Hennie and the old guard together as ‘brothers in arms’ within the “family” of the South African Police. Social defences working as a system comprised many aspects of Hennie’s reality. Unconscious defences, such as splitting, projection, denial and idealization, seemed to become entwined with institutional practices. For example, splitting and idealisation were clearly evident in Hennie’s ‘all good/all bad’ thinking about the old and new guard. His denial of the reality of democratic change also appeared to be a desperate attempt to cling to “old guard” realities. As social defences this system further manifested itself in the depersonalization, detachment, and ritualized task - performance at play in the apartheid police’s militarized hierarchical structure, its racial and sexual segregation, its inter-unit rivalry, and its emphasis on physicality and firearms proficiency.

This social defence system seemed to bind Hennie together with his peers while also physically and psychologically distancing him, not only from the victims and criminals he encountered in the line of duty, but also from his spouse and other civilians around him. For example, Hennie tended to socialize exclusively with work colleagues, claiming that his wife’s “delicate sensibilities” could not stomach “boys’ talk”. Hennie and his colleagues routinely met after their shift for a drink and a meal, where they would egg one another on to talk about their police “escapades”, often competing to see who had the most brutal encounter. This support system promoted hyper-masculinity and cut off any potential spousal perspective or care. The purpose of such a system appeared to detract from any anxiety that may have arisen from reflecting on, or contemplating, the police task from an “outsider’s” perspective.

Following Layton (2007), normative unconscious processes might be understood to have led to the consolidation of a “proper” identity moulded by “Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity”. Here, anything associated with designated “feminine” ways of being were censored, ensuring that hyper-masculinity was exalted over other gender patterns. Displays of such normative processes were apparent in sessions when Hennie gave enthralling descriptions of incidents he had participated in while maintaining his cool, calm and collected façade. To be sure, other patterns of masculinity existed and were available for Hennie, however, they did not attract the same respect. For example, throughout his career Hennie could have sought solace by sharing his experiences and feelings with his wife. However, doing so would have not only potentially brought him into contact with vulnerability he may have projected onto her, but also undermined his macho way of affirming and identifying himself. This may have made him “less of a man” in his eyes, and also in hers.

The internalization of apartheid social norms, which privileged patriarchy and hyper-masculinity, helped make experiences like being vulnerable, uncertain, emotional

and dependent, shameful and humiliating, and other experiences like being courageous, independent, aggressive and assertive, more desirable and affirming for Hennie and the old guard. Normative unconscious processes pushed to consolidate this idealised old guard identity. For example, Hennie spoke about joining the Rapid Response Unit as the culmination of all his hopes and aspirations. This was an elite unit which enabled Hennie to engage in activities which strengthened his placement in military, hyper-masculine, Afrikaner patriarchal and Christian National apartheid narratives. He had access to fast cars, a military uniform, firearms and a crew. He was his own boss and made split second decisions. He enjoyed the thrill of the chase, protecting the “good and the virtuous”, and fighting for his country. While such dynamics are common in police cultures throughout the world, it seemed that Hennie’s emotional encounters and behaviours were more embedded in motives which drew on broader societal imperatives in South Africa pre-1994. In fact, Hennie’s endeavours appeared to reflect a police culture entrenched in apartheid racialized and gendered ideologies. His actions seemed to reflect how he was shaped by apartheid social ideals, and how these social ideals simultaneously helped validate his self-worth, fulfilled his needs and affirmed his macho, military identity. Thus, Hennie’s case illustrates how both the internal and external world supported one another in ways that made internal and external influences indistinguishable. Hennie’s displays of hyper-masculinity and Afrikaner patriarchy were perhaps reflective of the give-and-take nature of ties between the internal and external world for the old guard pre-1994.

In keeping with these social ideas, the “apartheid police culture” appeared to be an essential source of self-esteem for Hennie. Here, the social category of “white, Afrikaner male” stood as a signifier of power and privilege. Drawing on Mnguni’s (2012) work on the unconscious dynamics of public service work in South Africa, there appeared to be a fit between Hennie’s individual defences and the collective defences within the South African Police. His identity seemed to become wedded to the organisation, and any differences between his individual and social identity were lost. As an enforcer of apartheid, the police culture confirmed that Hennie was the embodiment of apartheid cultural ideals – recalling the case presentation, he did not have to think, he simply reacted.

As therapy progressed I came to realise that Hennie was in a quandary post-1994. His South African Police social supports and social defence system had positioned him in such a way that he felt manly, brave and virtuous going about his police work. Under apartheid the old guard had served with, and under, colleagues who came from the *same* socio-cultural background and who had undertaken the *same* training. This meant that they did not have to deal with differences across race or culture in a meaningful way. For example, the harmony and cohesion of Hennie’s experience as a member of the

old guard was often expressed in a sense of kinship and shared aims about how he went about his work and life before 1994. His South African Police “family” positioned him as powerful in a highly stratified social system. Within this, Hennie did not need to question his own potency or belonging. Supported by the apartheid social norms, social defence system and social order, Hennie seemed able to effectively split off any distressing emotions and revel in the sensational aspects of his experience and its associations with bravery and apartheid “morality”.

Post-apartheid, Hennie’s social world was turned on its head. It no longer exalted the narratives of the past. His recognisable touchstones – the South African Police culture, assured promotions through the ranks of the police, and the esteem he was held in by the white society he protected and served – no longer affirmed him as they once had. Difference, in terms of an integrated democratised world view, appeared to threaten and undermine his old social defence system (Mnguni, 2012). With the change to the South African Police Service, not only did the old apartheid South African Police social supports begin to crumble, but new socio-cultural challenges opened up. The police service was re-organized on a civilian basis, which enabled members to forge relationships, partnerships, and a sense of collaboration with the community. This was a far cry from Hennie’s “apartheid mentality”, posing often insurmountable difficulties for the old guard. The crumbling of the old guard’s apartheid South African Police social supports, and the perceived threat presented by new socio-cultural challenges, seemed to stir up great anxiety and uncertainty (Mnguni, 2012). It seemed that in this confusing and complex situation, new socio-cultural challenges were experienced as counter normative processes, threatening the old guard’s way of identifying and affirming themselves to the point where the old guard’s social defence systems began to fail. Under these circumstances managing excessive anxiety seemed to become more important than rationally responding to the new socio-cultural challenges. One way Hennie and the old guard seemed to defend against this sense of overwhelming anxiety was to project it outward. Hennie appeared to accomplish this by raging against the perceived “failures in professionalism” of the new guard, rather than engaging with the socio-cultural changes he faced, or reviewing whether or not he wished to remain in the police. He often spoke with great bitterness and resentment about what he termed “the falling standards” of the new South African Police Service and spent many sessions fuming about his mistreatment at the hands of the new dispensation. Hennie had black superiors whom he was required to respect but instead used their perceived “failures in professionalism” as an excuse not to engage in any dialogue with them. By disparaging the new guard, Hennie and the old guard could distance themselves from the vulnerable feelings the new guard ‘held’ for them. However, this desperate attempt to return to hiding behind his cultural heritage simultaneously limited any support the old guard could potentially get from the new police culture.

In the face of such threats it appeared that many of the old guard also turned to alternative sources of control to compensate for the mismatch between their sense of identity and the new post-apartheid police culture. It appeared that, for Hennie, having external control during this post-apartheid transition – control of his body size and strength, seeing himself as a protector and provider – made him feel better about himself as a man, in the face of the collapse of his previous social support routines and the apartheid regime. These desperate attempts to maintain his crumbling social defences may have been an effort to avoid the task of mourning the loss of his old guard identity. However, with these attempts he appeared to morph into a caricature of an apartheid policeman, full of false bravado and external behaviour which he desperately hoped would return him to his glory days.

Hennie also appeared to adopt other strategies in an attempt to cling onto his old guard persona post-1994. Although he had had a choice of being treated by a male colleague, I often felt like he had chosen a “foreign” woman to avoid the challenge of a male therapist from the new post-apartheid socio-political order. Thinking about normative unconscious processes and how Hennie’s identity may have been formed by apartheid cultural demands to dissociate from ways of being deemed ‘not proper’ for a man of his social position, my being not of his culture and a woman may have facilitated this dissociation. In other words, my being a “foreign” woman may have made the process of identification and dis-identification more straightforward for him as there was a tangible sense of “Hennie” and those identities which he rejected as “not-Hennie” (foreign and feminine). Certainly Hennie’s attempts at preserving his bravado seemed to be evident right from the beginning of therapy. His courtesy towards me seemed to go beyond the point of good manners. He seemed to use me to bolster his swagger, insisting on always holding my consulting room door open for me, making small talk on the way to the consulting room and buying me a rose on Valentine’s Day. It became apparent that Hennie also seemed to use such acts of bravado to bolster his self-esteem and sense of manhood following challenges to his sensationalistic depictions of distressing events. However, when these acts of bravado and protection failed to impress, he missed sessions rather than face reflecting on his actions and their meaning. After one such session, Hennie missed the next four (cancelling telephonically with the receptionist, just before each appointment, without leaving a message). He then, in his Rapid Response vehicle, passed me walking along the road to the clinic. He did a U-turn, making a show of driving up with lights flashing and sirens blaring, said hello, enquired as to my health, bid me a nice day and then drove away. He then returned to therapy with another daring tale of his apprehension of a suspect during his glory days. It appeared that Hennie could only return to therapy once he had made a protective show of escorting me to work, and once passing time had created a space between any perceived challenge to his machismo and the confusing emotions this may have brought to the surface.

Hennie also attempted to obsessively recapture a sense of past bravado at work. Post-1994 an Afrikaner hyper-masculine persona tended to be openly derided in the South African Police Service. However, Hennie took it upon himself to exercise twice a day in an attempt to correct this “error”. When his physical prowess failed to be noticed at work, he became subdued and withdrawn for several weeks. He then volunteered for extra shifts, making a show of telling colleagues about his impressive suspect apprehension tally, and spending many hours after work keeping his Rapid Response vehicle in “tip-top shape”. When these old school “tried and tested” routines once more failed to impress his new colleagues, and Hennie was yet again passed over for promotion, he seemed to become disorientated, confused and paralysed. This manifested itself in sessions with Hennie falling into a stupor. He was unable to elaborate in any detail about his feelings or difficulties. In terms of countertransference, I felt overwhelmed and confused. I felt that Hennie’s feelings perhaps resonated with a profound and disorientating loss he was trying to defend against. When I attempted to interpret these feelings to him, Hennie met my reflective comments with incredulity: “I’m not sure what you mean”, became his routine response at these times. His lack of self-reflection ultimately translated to an immovable and inflexible sense of Hennie in sessions.

Thinking about Mnguni’s (2012) comments about the consequences of a disjuncture between the individual and the available social supports, resignation from the South African Police Service appeared impossible for Hennie. Such revision perhaps required reflection and acknowledgement of vulnerabilities incompatible with apartheid inspired bravado. Hiding behind the apartheid hegemonic culture of white, middle-class masculinity, Hennie knew how to present a confident image, how to make his body look strong, how to smell like a man and how to be a strong male protector. However, this was all he knew. He did not seem to be able to leave the police, or his old guard ways, because it meant leaving himself behind and facing an unbearable, irreconcilable loss.

Socio-political transformation seemed to force an unwelcome differentiation between Hennie’s previously merged psychic and social imperatives. This appeared to lead to an undermining of unconscious normative processes and socially sanctioned defences as outlined earlier. I often wondered why Hennie did not just resign and get a job in the private security industry. However, it seemed that resigning from the South African Police Service would have stirred up a cacophony of unbearable emotions formally dealt with by being unconsciously split off and projected as “not proper”, given Hennie’s socio-cultural standing and position.

In terms of the mirroring of psychic and social life, becoming a policeman as a young man helped Hennie answer difficult questions about who he was and what he wanted

from life. However, while it seemed to answer questions, it did not open up a space for Hennie to review the man it made him. It defined him as a strong and virile man, whose role was to serve and protect. He embodied this role. However, he was unable to explore who he was either inside or outside of this. Hennie had not developed other ways of knowing himself beyond military and hyper-masculine practices. His way of engaging with life was with no awareness or ability to deal with emotions or conflict. As a man he felt valid and alive when he engaged in military and macho practices. However, post-1994 this left him with little social life, emotionally estranged from his wife, and able to relate to his daughter only through appearances.

In Nelson Mandela's words, "... the SAP (South African Police) was developed, established and trained to defend white supremacy" (**Weekend Argus**, 18 September 1993). Vastola (in Marshall, 1986: 280) describes the police personality as "a reflection of the dominant cultural personality of the citizens with whom police primarily interact". Hennie epitomised the apartheid, white, masculine ideal. As such, he and other old guard members like him may have become the "symptom bearers" (Nel, 1994: 37) for a society faced with the painful prospect of giving up the recognisable and affirming touchstones that had previously defined their lives. Perhaps, as white society's protectors, Hennie and the old guard could not leave the police post-1994. Instead, by becoming "diseased" they continue to carry unconsciously the violence, anxiety, instability and trauma of a society now coping with the difficult process of societal transformation.

Conclusion

Following 1994 various structural and political changes left a group of old guard policemen lacking the socio-cultural supports and defences previously relied upon to preserve self-esteem, purpose and personal integrity. In considering the old guard's socio-cultural and political context we hoped to illustrate the importance of exploring historical narratives and their links to defensive systems and the inner world. Hennie's account also demonstrates the reciprocal nature of ties between the internal and external world, both supporting each other in ways that make internal and external influences indistinguishable. In this way "old guard" understandings of social categories such as gender, culture and race can be seen to be deeply reinforced post-apartheid, albeit it in a desperately shrinking world. This kind of "mind-society synapse" (Dimen, 2011: 4) allows us to talk of apartheid as a psychological structure as well as a material one grounded in culture and in historically-specific institutions and practices.

By entering therapy, Hennie and the old guard appeared to be engaging with, and working through, their distress. However, rather than reflecting upon their distress and

working through the loss that change inevitably brings, they avoided reflecting on their old apartheid narratives and defences or engaging, learning and growing from new post-apartheid ones. Instead, they hid behind white, Afrikaner culture and became dogmatic, entrenching themselves in their old guard stories and obsessively trying to engage their social defensive systems, making their worlds small and becoming caricatures of their former selves.

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