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Contesting the Politics of Negative Emotions in Educational Policy-Making: A Case of Asylum Seekers' School Visit Ban in Finland

Authors

Pyy, Iida; Leiviskä, Anniina; Mansikka, Jan-Erik

Abstract

In this article, we analyse a recent case of educational policymaking in the city of Oulu in Finland. The case concerns a ban on asylum seekers' visits to local schools and day-care centres. Our primary aim is to study the role that negative political emotions play in the decision making process of our case. We primarily utilise Martha Nussbaum's work on political emotions as our analytical framework. We propose that our case exemplifies a type of backlash politics, where policymaking is motivated by negative emotions and based on ethnic or racial group stigmatisation, with the result of abandoning collectively established democratic values and guidelines. Our case also illustrates how, by creating a culture of fear, the type of policymaking exemplified by our case can significantly diminish the possibilities of democratic institutions, such as the comprehensive school, to reinforce social cohesion and reduce social inequalities in society. Accordingly, we suggest that negative political emotions might have problematic consequences for democratic values and decision making processes. Finally, we propose an alternative course of action for addressing asylum seekers' visits to Finnish schools: we particularly emphasise the importance of following established democratic procedures in political decision making and also argue for the reinforcement of positive political emotions as a long-term educational objective.

Keywords: democracy; education; Nussbaum; political emotions; politics of negative emotions

Introduction: on the banning of the asylum seekers' school visits

Finland is a small northern European nation of only 5.6 million people with a rather homogenous population. It has a relatively strong welfare model, resulting from and intertwined with a social and political development in which the comprehensive, state-run education system has played a crucial role. Especially during the last decades of the 20th century, high-quality public schooling for all citizens was effective in levelling out social and economic differences in Finnish society (Sahlberg 2015). However, in recent years, the political climate in Finland has been strongly influenced by global phenomena such as the immigration crisis and changes in the global economy. As in other European countries, one of the distinctive features of this political change has been the rise of right-wing populism and the emergence of nationalist movements. The parliamentary election in March 2019 demonstrated the force of these movements in Finland, as the leading anti-immigration party, the Finns Party, came very close to winning the election, losing only by one seat to the Social Democratic Party. The political rhetoric of the Finns Party, and anti-immigration parties in general, is often characterized by an appeal to negative emotions, which are typically directed against immigrants and asylum-seekers who are perceived as a threat to the prevailing national identity as well as to the stability of society (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Kinnvall 2018). Accordingly, a recent survey shows Finland to be one of the more racist countries in Europe when it comes to racial discrimination and harassment speech experienced by people of colour (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018).

In this article, we analyse a recent case of local policy making in Finland that is strongly affected by the expression of negative emotions. Our case is situated within the field of education and concerns school visits that are a very common practice in Finnish comprehensive schools. Schools get visitors from all around the world, from academics to politicians and businesses, and they are also places for civil service and social impact work of the third sector. Our case example¹ deals with the asylum seekers' visits to local schools and day-care centres in the city of Oulu in Finland, which were organized by Red Cross Finland and a local non-profit social work organisation. The

¹ In this article, we limit our sources of information to online news of Yle (Finnish Broadcasting Company) released in the period between January and March 2019. Yle is a public service broadcasting company that is 99.9 percent state-owned and tax-funded. It is politically and financially independent, but governed by the Act on Yleisradio Oy, thus its primary role and objective is to act as a supporter of democracy in Finland (Yle, 2019c).

original purpose of the visits was to encourage mutual reciprocity: for the asylum seekers, the visits provided important learning experiences in terms of language and integration; for students and teachers, they were a way of actualising the goals and aims of global citizenship education and intercultural education established in the Finnish National Core Curriculum. According to the representatives of the school staff and the employees of the non-profit organisations, whom were present during the visits, the visits had provided for students opportunities of learning about different languages and cultures, among other things. The visitors were both men and women and well-known by the staff of the organisations involved.

Already in 2018, city councillors of the Finns Party had initiated a complaint to the city council concerning the asylum seekers' school visits. At that time, however, the initiative was dismissed as it was viewed as problematic in terms of the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act. In the turn of 2019, the police in Oulu made an announcement about suspected sexual assaults and abuse cases of minors taking place in the region in the summer and autumn of 2018. Some of these cases involved suspects who were asylum seekers. This announcement was followed by heated public and social media discussions in the Oulu region after which the city administrators received several complaints regarding the visits. Thus, the issue was reviewed in January 2019, and the city of Oulu decided to 'temporarily discontinue' (i.e. ban) all school visits of asylum seekers and refugees. The ban was not put on vote in the city council but the decision was made instead by a single official, the city's Head of Education and Cultural Services, to 'quiet things down for a while' (Yle 2019b).

This case can be seen as an example of backlash politics in the context of educational policy-making. Aoki (1995) describes backlash politics as 'lashing back' at those who have wronged you but points out that there is also a more subtle meaning to the term; namely, the idea of 'backlash of 'getting back to,' 'returning back to,' or 'restoring' a real or imaginary status quo ante of a simpler time, before those that prompted one to 'lash back' were on the scene' (1468). Through our case example, we argue that negative emotions might have problematic consequences for democratic values and political decision-making in liberal democratic societies. We propose that the ban on school visits in our case is a typical example of policy-making motivated by negative emotions and based on the stigmatisation of a group of people by ethnicity and race, which often (as in our case) leads to abandoning collectively established values and democratic guidelines. Our case is also illustrative of the way how, by creating a culture of fear, the type of policy-making

exemplified by the ban significantly diminishes the possibilities of democratic institutions, such as the comprehensive school, to reinforce social cohesion and reduce social inequalities in society. As a theoretical framework for our analysis, we will primarily utilize Martha Nussbaum's writings on political emotions, and especially *The Monarchy of Fear* (Nussbaum 2018) in which she discusses the potentially harmful effects of negative political emotions for democracy and democratic institutions in the context of a polarized political culture. Although Nussbaum's work on political emotions is not without limitations and has also been subject to critiques (e.g. Srinivasan 2016, 2018; Cherry 2019; Gleason 2018; Harphap 2002), Nussbaum's work provides a particularly fruitful analytical tool for both understanding the consequences of politics of negative emotions and for indicating alternative ways for addressing the political issues associated with the case of Oulu.

We will first outline the ongoing theoretical discussion on the significance of emotions in politics with a specific emphasis on negative emotions in backlash politics. As Nussbaum's work has a particularly central role in our case analysis, a large part of this section addresses her theory of political emotions. Then, utilising Nussbaum's work as our primary frame of reference, we move on to analysing our case example from the perspective of negative political emotions and their potentially destructive consequences in democratic politics. Finally, we propose an alternative course of action for addressing the visits of asylum seekers in Finnish schools; one which takes the following of democratic procedures as its starting point and suggests the reinforcement of positive political emotions can strengthen democratic citizenship in the long-term. This suggestion would be in line with the objectives of Global Citizenship Education, promoted by both UNESCO and the Finnish national core curriculum.

The role of emotions in anti-immigration and populist movements

The role of emotions in politics has received increasing attention in the social sciences since the 1990s, and it has been studied from the viewpoint of various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, neurology, philosophy, and political theory (Cossarini 2014). In political theory, the significance of political emotions was for long a widely disregarded topic. This is largely because in the predominant liberal and deliberative traditions emotions were considered as potential threats or disturbing factors to reasoned debate (Hall 2002, 2005; Mouffe

2000, 2005; Nussbaum 2013) and inferior to the faculty of rationality (Ahmed 2004). However, this opposition between reason and emotion has been challenged by demonstrating the interconnected nature of rationality and emotions in political decision-making and moral judgment (De Sousa 1987; Nussbaum 2001; Muldoon 2008). Several political theorists have argued that emotions are in a vital role in the formation of collective identities and in social life more generally (Ahmed 2004; Mouffe 2000, 2005; Nussbaum 2001). In addition, there has been a growing interest in the nature of affects as ‘public feelings’ (Berlant 2004), meaning that emotional states are seen as shared and communal experiences rather than personal or private sensations (Ahmed 2004; Butler 2004; Ngai 2005).

Along with the increasing interest in the role of emotions in politics, a branch of research focusing on negative political emotions has emerged (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Banks 2014; Petersen 2010). Particularly relevant to our case are the works examining the role of negative emotions in the so-called backlash politics, especially anti-immigration parties and right-wing populism (Alexander 2012; Kinnvall 2018; Latif, Blee, DeMichele et al. 2018, Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018). In these studies, negative emotions, including fear, anxiety, anger and resentment, are seen as dimensions of political action, which enable defining grievances and translating them into collective mobilization. In the case of right-wing and anti-immigration parties and movements, this mobilization typically occurs through the rhetorical invigoration of a national identity, founded on the idea of national greatness and nostalgic visions of the past (Ahmed 2004, Kenny 2017; Kinnvall 2018; Latif, Blee, DeMichele et al. 2018). For instance, in her article on the emotional appeal of populism, Catarina Kinnvall (2018) examines how the populist rhetoric engages in the discursive construction of fear, anxiety and threat in relation to immigration, and further supplies a promise of relief and redemption by the restoration of national values and idealized images of a past order. Moreover, populist rhetoric typically also channels anger and resentment though indicating who is to blame for the current predicaments (Kinnvall 2018). In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed describes in a similar way how negative emotions such as hate and fear operate as devices in cultural and political processes of marginalization and othering. For instance, she illustrates how the anti-immigration rhetoric utilizes hate to portray immigrants, asylum-seekers and other people appearing as ‘foreign’ in some way as illegitimate intruders and as threats to the existence of an ‘I’ or a ‘we’. Hate is thus employed to legitimize actions against these perceived threats (Ahmed 2004).

While the aforementioned literature discusses how negative emotions are constructed and contained by populist movements and anti-immigration parties, the work of Chantal Mouffe focuses on the ontological analysis of the role of emotions (or ‘passions’, Mouffe 2005, 24) in the formation of ‘the political’ (Mouffe 2005, 8) and thus provides a deeper understanding of the emotional dynamics involved in political life and identity formation. Mouffe’s work is also particularly important from the viewpoint of our case because it provides an explanation for the emergence of right-wing populist movements in Europe and sheds light on how the negative, antagonistic emotions associated with these movements might be channelled and contained democratically.

According to Mouffe (2005, 24–25), political emotions are the motivational forces that allow people to identify with collective identities that are central to their sense of self. Furthermore, she argues that political identification involves establishing a boundary between ‘we’ and ‘they’ and thus it always includes a possibility of antagonism and the emergence of friend/enemy relations (Mouffe 2005, 11). However, Mouffe (2005, 25) emphasizes that a sufficient degree of polarization between different identity groups is the very condition of possibility of political mobilization because, without opposing political camps, political emotions required for such mobilization cannot arise. According to Mouffe (2005, 69–70), the conditions that enabled the rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe resulted precisely from consensus-oriented politics and the lack of sufficient political alternatives of political identification. Populist movements were able to offer an emotionally appealing alternative to the homogenous ‘establishment’ and thus provided for people the channel of political identification that was missing from mainstream politics (Mouffe 2005, 70). In Mouffe’s (2005, 70) view, these developments highlight the need to recognize the affective dimensions of politics and create more channels for the mobilization of political emotions within democratic politics.

Another scholar who has recently addressed the significance of negative emotions in populist politics and political polarization from a philosophical perspective is Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum’s work has particular relevance to our case as she has provided broad and detailed discussions of the significance of political emotions in democratic politics and, in *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018), she especially focuses on the role of negative emotions in the American polarized political culture. Nussbaum is a representative of the so-called cognitivist account of emotions in

which emotions are seen as intimately associated with cognitive, evaluative judgements or at least partially composed of judgements (Srinivasan, 2020, Hunt 2006, Harpham, 2002). However, in her theory of political emotions, which she has elaborated in several of her works over the years (Nussbaum 2001, 2004, 2013, 2016, 2018), Nussbaum also strongly associates the importance of emotions in politics with their motivational force. Nussbaum (2013, 11; 2001, 31) points out that political emotions are ‘eudaimonistic’ in the sense that they are connected with the experiencing person’s viewpoint and her view of a worthwhile life, and therefore pure reasoning or abstract principles alone rarely provide sufficient motivation for political action. Moreover, for the same reason, emotions are important for guiding political arguments and judgments. Accordingly, Nussbaum (2012, 232; 2013, 4) criticises the earlier tradition of political liberalism for not sufficiently recognizing the epistemological value of emotions in democratic politics.

Nussbaum argues that supporting the construction of a decent, well-functioning democratic society requires that political emotions are connected to a normative vision of a good life (e.g. Nussbaum 2013, 6), which gives justification to political emotions and thus makes certain emotions more desirable and worthwhile than others (e.g. Nussbaum 2013, 2). Nussbaum stresses that even though this vision is always incomplete and under constant redefinition, it must be grounded in a common ‘set of normative goals’ with a ‘definite moral content’ (Nussbaum 2013, 16). For Nussbaum (2013, 16), this content includes equal respect for persons, a commitment to equal liberties of speech, association, and conscience, and a set of fundamental social and economic entitlements. Nussbaum defines her own understanding of this normative vision as a form of ‘political liberalism’ (Nussbaum 2013, 6), which derives from her theory of justice, the *Capabilities Approach* (CA) and belongs to the same ‘family’ of liberal political conceptions of justice as Rawlsian political liberalism (Nussbaum 2013, 118). Nussbaum’s CA can be understood as a ‘partial and minimal account of social justice’ (Nussbaum 2006, 71), which entails the following central normative assumptions: first, societies should provide for individuals opportunities to achieve well-being and, second, well-being should be understood in terms of capabilities, i.e. people’s real abilities and freedoms to achieve valuable functionings. These features of CA illustrate Nussbaum’s vision of justice to which public emotions and their expressions should be connected (Nussbaum 2013, 16).

Another important insight in Nussbaum's theory of political emotions is that emotions are not simply a fact of political life but shaped by social contexts and norms (e.g. 2018, 12). Moreover, emotions can either destabilise a community or produce better cooperation and enhance justice, and thus Nussbaum argues that influencing the formation of desirable political emotions is a way of constructing a healthier democratic culture (2018, 12). Accordingly, Nussbaum carefully distinguishes between different types of emotions – positive emotions of compassion, love, and hope, and negative emotions of fear, anger, disgust and shame – and discusses both the pernicious and constructive consequences that emotions can have in political life (e.g. Nussbaum, 2013, 201-202; 2018, 12-13). Nussbaum's central concern therefore is not whether emotions play a significant role in democratic politics but, rather, how different emotions should be addressed and dealt with in democratic societies. Since emotions have a strong motivational force, Nussbaum warns that they can also be easily exploited and monopolised by people with 'less appetizing' aspirations (2013, 256). Accordingly, Nussbaum highlights that while recognising the significance of political emotions for democratic politics political theorists should also acknowledge the potential dangers associated with them. In her own words, '[e]motions can be very bad; but they are an essential part of human life, including the struggle for justice, so we should try to imagine how they can become the best that they can be.' (2012, 250).

In her book, *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018), Nussbaum elaborates on the aforementioned remarks through her discussion on the role of negative emotions in populist politics in the United States under the Trump administration. While the book focuses on the American context, the phenomena that Nussbaum addresses, including political polarization, populist rhetoric, xenophobia and political exclusion, are currently being witnessed in democratic societies all over the world, especially in association with right-wing populism and anti-immigration parties. Nussbaum (2018) pays special attention to fear as the root of other negative emotions and demonstrates how fear undermines citizens' capacities for constructive deliberation across the different poles of the polarized political culture. Moreover, Nussbaum (2018) provides elaborate analyses of how fear and the derivative emotions of anger, disgust and shame become manifest in populist politics, taking the form of islamophobia, racism and misogyny. Importantly, she suggests that negative emotions may be countered through the cultivation of more constructive, positive political emotions, and that this cultivation must be accompanied by appropriate institutional arrangements, which Nussbaum exemplifies through the idea of a reformation of American public schools. This

role of education as an institution that is particularly crucial for reinforcing democracy is also relevant to our case.

Nussbaum's work on political emotions has also been subject to several criticisms. Due to space limitations, we are unable to address all these critiques, and many of them also lie beyond the scope of this article or have little relevance to our case example. However, there are also several critiques that are relevant to our analysis. These critiques suggest that Nussbaum's theory of political emotions is too optimistic and limited by an individualistic liberal mindset due to which it disregards the political realities of today's societies (e.g. Srinivasan, 2016; 2018, Gleason, 2018, Wierzbicka, 2003). It has also been argued that the full eradication of negative emotions, especially anger, from politics is not advisable, especially from the perspective of minority struggles, where anger often functions as a crucial motivational and mobilizing force (e.g. Bell 2009; Cherry 2019; Srinivasan, 2016, 2018). Moreover, cultivating compassion and other positive civic emotions has been seen as insufficient for resolving the issues of an already polarized political culture. We will address these critiques in the following section, where we discuss our case example through Nussbaum's theory of political emotions.

The case of Oulu: negative political emotions in action

In this section, by utilising Nussbaum's work as our primary analytic framework, we shed light on the problematic consequences of negative emotions in the processes of political decision-making in the case of Oulu and demonstrate how education can contribute to the construction of a healthier democratic culture through the cultivation of positive emotions. We begin by analysing, what kind of emotions were at play in the political decision-making in our case and how these emotions might have contributed to the decision to ban the school visits.

As we indicated in the introduction, the asylum seekers' visits in schools were infrequent, supervised and they served the aims of intercultural and global citizenship education established in the Finnish national core curriculum. The visits were organized by well-known NGOs, welcomed by teachers, students and parents, and announced as free of security risks by the police. However, after the announcement of the suspected sexual assaults in Oulu, online discussions were fuelling fear and hatred towards refugees and asylum seekers. Instant connections were made between the investigated sexual assaults and the school visits. The actual conditions of the visits

were largely disregarded and even a fake photo of one of the suspects visiting a local school was posted online. It was later discovered that the photo had been taken at a public event in a different location (Yle 2019b). Due to the heated discussion, the city administrators received several complaints regarding the visits from people claiming to be concerned parents.

According to the city's Head of Education and Cultural Services, parental concerns were the major cause leading to the decision on the ban. However, he also admitted suspecting that many of the comments and complaints came from outsiders. Namely, the complaints were not in line with the information received from the schools, which stated that the feedback from parents had been positive and that families and students had hoped for more visits in the future. No negative experiences or incidents were reported. The police also confirmed that they had not been informed of any safety risks related to the visits (Yle 2019a, 2019b).

One of the members of the city council, who signed the original plea for the ban in 2018 and was supportive of the decision in 2019, pointed out that the concerns about the school visits were not directly associated with the fear of sexual abuse. Apparently, a greater worry was that visits encouraging cultural exchange would obfuscate the 'real differences between cultures' (Yle 2019b). A specific concern had been expressed over different 'roles of women' in these cultures (Yle 2019b). Moreover, the council member in question suggested that a 'more Western-minded multicultural education' could be taught at school. He suggested that it would be better if the visitors were already Finnish citizens or originally from European countries as such visitors would more likely share the values of the Finns. The council member also pointed out that the critics had been concerned about asylum seekers 'forming relationships' or networking during their visits in schools and day-care centres (Yle 2019b).

Rhetoric of populism: misinformation and the construction of fear

The school visit ban in Oulu can be seen as exemplifying the type of discursive construction of fear, anxiety and threat in relation to immigration, refugees and asylum-seekers, imbued by populist rhetoric, which has been described by Kinnvall (2018), Ahmed (2004) and Nussbaum (2018) among others. It is also an example of the type of stigmatization where the actions or attributes of one or few members of an ethnic, religious or racial group are extended to concern

the whole group with the result of diminishing the individuality of the representatives of the group (e.g. Parekh 2012).

The school visitors were not among the suspects of the assault cases; rather, they were people who were well-known and trusted by the NGOs that were organizing the visits. Hence, rather than being based on the facts concerning the assault cases or the conditions of the visits, the fear expressed by citizens and the members of the city council seemed to result largely from stigmatization, prejudice and superficial generalizations. The decision to ban the school visits might have involved many different types of fears: the fear of the unfamiliar (cultural differences), fear of sexual abuse actually happening, fear of continuous complaints and discontent among citizens or fear of further right-wing radicalisation in the area if the city did not demonstrate that the problem of sexual abuse and assault cases was taken seriously.

According to Nussbaum (2018), fear is a primordial feeling that often has little to do with rationality. Our case example would seem to demonstrate this as the judgments were hasty and the process of decision-making did not include considering other possibilities or conclusions. Fear thus functioned in our case as a ‘narrowing emotion’ (see Nussbaum 2013, 320–322), especially regarding rational deliberation. Considering both, the fact that the concern expressed by the parents was said to be the main reason for the decision to ban the visits while the decision-makers were actually unsure of the real source of the complaints, and the received positive feedback from the school communities regarding previous visits, the decision on the ban seems lacking rational justification. First, the decision was rushed through and was not put to vote in the city council. Second, the fact-based arguments against the ban that were considered salient a year before (January 2018), especially the fact that the ban would offend the Non-discrimination Act, were dismissed. A reasoned process of political decision-making would have involved addressing the relevant laws and the facts concerning the visits and, for instance, calling different stakeholders to discuss the future of the visits as well as the safety of the schools. In this case, fear seems to have been the motivating force leading to a premature decision on the ban.

Nussbaum (2018) admits that fear itself is not necessarily problematic (it has had an important evolutionary purpose, among other things, e.g. 2018, 5, 44) but in the context of politics, fear often creates unproductive distrust and disrespect among citizens and thus might lead to stigmatization and othering (e.g. 2018, 1–3, 7–8). As indicated by Kinnvall (2018), it is particularly characteristic

to populist rhetoric that it addresses people's fears through indicating that social stability and well-being can be regained through the restoration of national values and the social order that prevailed in the past. Accordingly, it typically portrays people appearing as 'foreign' as a threat to the unity of the nation (e.g. Ahmed 2004). This type of idealization of national values and the representation of a homogenous national identity was also clearly present in the case of Oulu and particularly exemplified by the comment of the city councillor who suggested a 'more Western-minded multicultural education', involving visits from Finnish citizens or citizens of other European countries. However, this type of Eurocentric citizenship education would be in clear contrast with the goals of global citizenship education as expressed by the Finnish national core curriculum (EDUFI 2014, 16). Moreover, the councillor's suggestion seems to be based on a deeply problematic assumption that interactions or 'relations' across cultural and ethnic boundaries are somehow inherently harmful (e.g. abusive), which is also indicative of racial stigmatization and prejudice, both rooted in fear.

Anger as a political emotion in the case of Oulu

In addition to fear, the sexual assaults associated with our case evoked outrage and feelings of anger among the citizens of Oulu. As indicated above, Nussbaum sees anger as one of the negative political emotions typically having detrimental consequences to democratic politics. Nussbaum's critical perspective on anger as a political emotion follows a long line of thought that derives from Seneca (1995) but is also followed by more recent thinkers such as Glen Pettigrove (2012). Nussbaum (2016) has argued against anger for its moral wrongfulness, for it being a barrier to reasoned judgement, and – perhaps most importantly – for its unproductivity when it comes to establishing friendship, co-operation and a future-orientated mind-set in the context of democratic politics.

Nussbaum sees anger as a particularly problematic political emotion because it can result in unjust and wrongful actions due to its interference with reasoning (Nussbaum, 2016, 29).² Anger often

² Nussbaum lists three key ways anger might lead us astray: the 'obvious error', when anger is misguided because it is based on wrong information; the 'status error', when the relative status of a particular value is seen as hugely important, and the 'payback error' involving irrational thinking (magical fantasies of divine justice and 'closure', (Nussbaum 2016, 29) and retributive thoughts that distract us from our orientation to future and the opportunities of influencing this future (2018, 80–81).

focuses narrowly on one's own relative status in society and thus seeks for retribution by lowering the status of other persons or groups (in this case, immigrants and asylum seekers) in order to raise one's own status (Nussbaum, 2016, 20-21). Nussbaum refers to this form of anger as 'status anger' (e.g. Nussbaum 2016, 21, 55, 92, 107). Sometimes anger also involves a direct desire for the misery of others, and thus takes the form of retributive anger (Nussbaum 2016, 21-23). Nussbaum argues that this 'payback anger' (e.g. Nussbaum 2016, 55) is 'especially poisonous when people use it to deflect attention from real problems that they feel powerless to solve' (2018, 69) such as in our case the broader issue of immigration and the successful integration of immigrants in society.

In our case example, the ban itself and especially the heated discussions that preceded it can be seen as displaying both 'status anger' and 'payback anger' as their focus was on the suspects' ethnic background. These discussions can be seen as lowering the status of immigrants and asylum seekers in society with the consequence of elevating the status of Finnish citizens, instead of focusing on the actual harms caused to the victims. The ban perhaps created a soothing yet deceptive feeling that at least something had been done to the issue even though the abuse cases had no real connection to the school visits. It is especially noteworthy that the council members of the Finns party and the citizens initiating the complaints wanted to ban *all* asylum seekers' visits to schools and day-care centres regardless of their former activities, gender, occupation or criminal background. This indicates that every person being part of this group was seen as a threat, simply by the quality of being an asylum seeker. The ban thus highlights the distinction between Finnish citizens and asylum seekers and indicates that the latter do not have the same status or deserve equal liberties and rights in Finnish society. Moreover, the ban can also be viewed as a sign of payback or punishment to the asylum seekers who were denied access to one of the central institutions of the Finnish society, and thus prevented from becoming better integrated to society through interactions with Finnish citizens.

Furthermore, one of the most problematic features of the ban is that it can be seen as validating hate speech as a form of legitimate speech in democratic politics. Following Bhikhu Parekh (2012), hate speech can be defined as a form of speech that presents an individual or a group as an enemy and as a legitimate object of hostility. It defiles the dignity of the members of the target group by reducing their personal features to uniform characteristics of the group in question. Hate speech is likely to have long-term consequences for the public political culture because by stigmatizing the members of the target group and refusing to accept them as equal members of society it encourages

a political climate where discriminatory treatment progressively becomes customary. Thus, it affects public opinion and denies the very possibility of inclusive and equal public sphere, which is a crucial constituent of liberal democracy. In our case, individuals who committed crimes belonged to a certain ethnic or cultural group, and the crimes committed by particular individuals led to the stigmatization of an entire group and their banishment from public schools.

However, while anger clearly had a negative influence on both public discussion and the processes of political decision-making in the context of our case, labelling anger as inherently detrimental to democratic politics oversimplifies the complexity of the role of anger in politics more generally perceived. In fact, the understanding of the significance of anger in contemporary political theory is far from unified: in recent decades, several feminist scholars have defended anger and other negative emotions as politically and morally appropriate responses to oppression (Bell, 2009, 167). Anger has been defended as a mode of protest against oppressive structures because it enables recognizing the wrongs and helps the subjects to maintain their self-respect (Bell, 2009, 168; see also Murphy 1988, 17; 2003, 77). Some feminists have also highlighted the direct or indirect epistemic value of anger: anger can be seen as an indicator of the type of knowledge that only the oppressed group has of their position (Narayan 1988) or, alternatively, by observing how their emotions are received by others, the subordinate group may indirectly gain awareness of their position in the moral community (Frye, 1983; see also Bell, 2009, 168). It has also been argued that anger is important and morally valuable insofar as it bears witness to injustice, even in cases where protest turns out unproductive or fruitless (Bell, 2009, 168). Furthermore, it has been suggested that anger can be seen as valuable and justified if it helps generating social change (Lorde 1984). Similar ideas on the justifiability and usefulness of political anger have also been presented by Cherry (2019), Jackson (2018) and Srinivasan (2016, 2018, 2020) among others.

Some of the critiques have also been directed directly to Nussbaum: as a response to Nussbaum's *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016), Jackson (2018) points out several theoretical difficulties, one of which is Nussbaum's claimed tendency to equate anger to hatred, revenge and retribution. Against this interpretation, Jackson holds that anger can be either virtuous or vicious (2018, 753–756, 766), virtuous anger playing an important role in the struggle for social justice and the maintenance of civil society (Jackson, 2018, 749). Jackson (2018) and Srinivasan (2016; 2018) both argue that Nussbaum's defence of positive political emotions might even result in furthering injustice, because by denying the significance of anger she conceals the fact that anger is unjustified only

from the perspective of the privileged groups, as it threatens the status quo that secures their privileged position. Srinivasan (2016; 2018) thus fears that Nussbaum's criticism of anger presents unjust features of political life as inescapable and neutral, and thus risks aggravating the very injustices she is sought to resist.

While we agree with these critiques in the sense that political anger can in many cases serve an important purpose in struggles for social justice, we would also like to point out that these critiques disregard an important distinction that Nussbaum makes between different types of anger. Although Nussbaum seeks to demonstrate the moral dubiousness and potential harmfulness of status anger and payback anger, which were primarily manifested in our case example, she also recognizes a third form of anger that can be seen as politically productive and morally justified. Nussbaum refers to this form of anger as 'transition-anger' (2016, 35–40; 2018, 74–75). While status anger and payback anger typically manifest in hate speech and stigmatisation³ in the way exemplified by our case, transition-anger can be described as a desire for fairness, as it transforms negative emotions into indicators of injustice and thus might result in positive action. Hence, its focus is not on wishing harm to other groups of society (2016, 35–37).

However, in our case example the anger expressed by citizens took a detrimental form of status and/or payback anger; a productive transition-anger would have involved a detachment from the outrage that followed the abuse cases and replacement of this outrage by the intention to move forward, toward correcting the problems that gave rise to the emotion in the first place (Nussbaum 2016, 28–31, 33, 93; 2018, 75–77). In our view, Nussbaum's transition-anger exemplifies her more general outlook on the role and significance of political emotions in democratic politics and the way these emotions should be addressed. Namely, transition-anger receives its justification from being closely tied to a set of normative goals and a moral content – the respect for persons and the improvement of society – and it converts negative, detrimental emotions into rational, fact-based and future-oriented decision-making (2013; 2016; 2018). Negative emotions that are not associated with normative goals, such as retributive anger, do not receive such justification and thus their expression should be suspended in democratic politics. Hence, taking into-account

³ Nussbaum subsumes these under her concept, 'radical evil', referring to human beings' tendency to exclude, subordinate, stigmatise, and to inflict shame upon others (due to hierarchisation, disgust, and envy). (e.g. Nussbaum, 2013, 3,9)

Nussbaum's distinction between politically harmful forms of anger and the justified transition anger, the contrast between Nussbaum and her critics diminishes.

Moreover, also the critics of Nussbaum see potential dangers in the normalization of anger in democratic politics, and especially recognize the potential misuse of unjustified anger (see Srinivasan 2016). We suggest that our case exemplifies this kind of misuse because the anger is directed to an unprivileged minority by the members of the majority. As Srinivasan (2016) aptly points out,

it is also a feature of our political reality that many confuse their misplaced rage for justified anger. Those galled by the loss of white privilege, or who blame immigrants for their poverty, are an obvious case [---] the right to voice justified anger will inevitably be abused by those without justification. This is perhaps the most plausible case for restricting the place of anger in our public discourse, and for praising the virtues of civility and calm: A normalization of anger in the public sphere might lead to a general and violent degradation of political life. Indeed, we might think this to be the case today.

The ban's incompatibility with education guidelines and democratically established principles

As our case demonstrates, the particular risk with political decisions that are reached because of negative political emotions is that they might be incompatible with and thus lead to a rash rejection of democratically established laws and procedures and educational policies or guidelines. Accordingly, such decisions gradually begin to undermine democratic core values and principles. From this point of view, it is highly problematic when established laws, policies and guidelines are prematurely overruled because of negative emotions, even if those emotions were provoked by events such as those exemplified by our case. Instead, such events should lead to careful assessment of emotions before acting on them or using them as grounds of policymaking. Hence, while it is important that citizens have the opportunity to participate in municipal decision-making, this participation should take place through certain politically established channels, such as city council hearings and elections.

In our case, the decision to ban the visits was made by a single official under pressure from certain voices from the public. Even more importantly, the ban violates several general policies and principles that have been established through democratic processes, such as the Finnish Non-discrimination Act, the Finnish National Core Curriculum, and the aims associated with

UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education (GCE) framework. GCE has been formed to guide and orient civic education in educational systems globally, and one of its central purposes is to encourage intercultural dialogue in a non-hierarchical manner (see e.g. UNESCO, 2014; Wintersteiner & al. 2015). GCE is also closely linked to the values expressed in The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The cultural rights and integration of immigrants and other minority groups are among the core themes of GCE.

Although UNESCO's GCE is not legally binding on the level of individual states, the member states' governments are expected to strive to implement its central aims through national legislation and policies. Accordingly, in addition to GCE guidelines, the policymaking involved in our case example is also in contrast with the aims of intercultural education established in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. This contrast is exemplified particularly well in a paragraph under the heading 'Cultural diversity as richness':

In basic education, people from varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds come together and get to know many different customs, communal practices and beliefs. The pupils learn to look at issues from the perspectives of other people's life situations and circumstances. Learning together across the boundaries of languages, cultures, religions and beliefs creates a setting for genuine interaction and communality. Basic education lays the foundation for global citizenship that respects human rights and encourages the pupils to act for positive change. (EDUFI 2014, 16)

Evidently, documents such as GCE and the Finnish National Core Curriculum are policy documents rather than philosophically justified normative visions in Nussbaum's sense. Nevertheless, they represent the results of careful policy planning and have been established with the general good and welfare of society and people in mind. This does not mean that they should be immune to criticism or revision. This criticism, however, should be founded on fact-based evaluation and carried out with the assessment of the wider, long-term goals of the democratic society in mind.

An alternative to the ban: Strengthening democracy and giving value to positive emotions

We have indicated that emotions can be more or less constructive or destructive for the community and its sense of togetherness. From a Nussbaumian perspective, negative emotions such as those associated with our case example – fear and retributive anger in particular – should either be

transformed into transition anger and the striving for social justice or replaced with political goals that might benefit the whole society in the long run. But what would this mean on a practical level in the context of our case? Is appealing to civic compassion or to the aims of GCE futile or inefficient in the kind of polarized political landscape as exemplified by our case? Is the polarization irreversible? In what follows, we will address these questions through our critical engagement with Nussbaum's proposal for a politics of positive emotions. We propose alternative courses of action for handling the case of Oulu and offer two suggestions that could be useful for reinforcing democracy in cases such as ours. The first proposal concerns an alternative course of action for the ban and emphasizes the need to follow democratic procedures, established laws and principles. The other suggestion focuses on long-term development and highlights the role of education as an institution that can support the generation of a less polarized political culture.

As indicated earlier, Nussbaum sees the cultivation of positive emotions as having a central role in the productive transformation of the democratic culture. In *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018), she portrays love as the opposite of anger, as it 'consists of seeing the other person as fully human, and capable of some level of good and change' (2018, 216–217). Thus, political love primarily refers to the idea of treating others as fellow human beings and seeing others as equals regardless of their different views and is thus connected to the recognition of common humanity. Accordingly, love is an emotion that allows people to work towards common goals with an orientation to future.

In both *Upheavals of thought* (2001) and *Political emotions* (2013) Nussbaum discusses compassion⁴ in detail and defines it as vital for promoting equality and inclusion in society.⁵ Nussbaum's idea seems to be that political love and compassion enable the understanding of individuality of other persons and thus prevents the stigmatization of an entire group based on actions of individuals. Accordingly, compassionate citizens would perhaps be less likely to resort

⁴ Nussbaum distinguishes between compassion and empathy. She holds that even though compassion (brotherly love) is closely related to empathy, it extends from it. Compassion is something that one feels for a person who suffers through no fault of their own. Thus, according to Nussbaum, one can be empathetic without being compassionate, for instance, by understanding the experience of someone without having compassion for the person's trouble. (2001, 302; 327–329).

⁵ Nussbaum further differentiates between 'extended' and 'limited' compassion of which the latter is often awakened by an individual narrative of distress. This narrow or limited compassion can be harmful and misleading, especially if it draws attention away from generally accepted and recognised principles. The former refers to preferred, more general, civic compassion (2013, 317).

to cultural essentialism, stereotyping and hate speech or be led by fear and anger in the way as exemplified by our case example.

In addition to love and compassion Nussbaum (2018, 203ff) also turns to hope. She mostly focuses on the cultivation of hope as an opposite to fear (2018, 203-205, 211). Nussbaum also emphasizes that for democracy to operate, citizens need to trust one another; they need to have an orientation to the future and a will for action, both of which are central aspects of hope. Hope is associated with the uncertainty of the future but involves the expectation of a positive outcome. Hope is first and foremost not about individual aims but intrinsically social in nature and wrapped up in the web of our social relations (cf. Jacobs, 2005). In Nussbaum's version, it is also connected to the 'Socratic virtue' of critical self-examination, involving the challenging tasks of taking personal risks, searching for critical arguments, and making uncertain initiatives in the quest of finding a common cause with one's political opponents, even if one does not share or accept what they believe in (Nussbaum 2018, 213–215).

However, as already pointed out, Nussbaum's appeal to love, compassion and hope can be challenged for being insufficient for addressing the reality of democratic politics. It has been suggested that Nussbaum's work is overly optimistic about our capacity to create and sustain institutions of liberal justice despite the realities of oppression (Srinivasan 2017, 1) and is also strongly influenced by the Anglo-American ethos of optimism, search for happiness, and individualism (Wierzbicka 2003, 598). From the perspective of Mouffe's (2005) agonistic pluralism, Nussbaum's politics of positive emotions is based on an inadequate understanding of the nature of the 'political'. Political polarization – a distinction between 'us' and 'them' – is, according to Mouffe, at the heart of all political action and thus negative emotions can never be fully abolished from politics. The primary task of democratic politics is therefore the sublimation and channelling of destructive emotions to forms that are more compatible with central democratic values (Mouffe 2000, 2005). Gleason (2018) makes a similar point by drawing attention to the nature of contemporary populist politics which, according to him, resembles a 'wrestling match' rather than reasoned argumentation, and thus he challenges Nussbaum's belief in respectful argument and people's willingness to work for a common cause.

The aforementioned critiques thus question from different perspectives the applicability and plausibility of Nussbaum's politics of positive emotions in the context of contemporary democratic

societies. While we clearly recognize that Nussbaum's suggestions are demanding and do not provide 'quick fixes' to the current issues of contemporary societies, we still suggest that there should be a conscious effort to put some of Nussbaum's ideas to practice through democratic politics. It is detrimental if democratic institutions fail to perform the tasks that allow citizens to trust these institutions and have faith in the democratic society in general. In our view, the situation is not likely to improve through democratic politics that seeks to normalize polarized conflict and the expression of negative emotions. Rather, such politics is likely to increase the polarization and instability of society and create more permanent barriers between different groups of people. What is required for the stabilization of the democratic culture is citizens' commitment to at least some overarching and common political goals and visions.

Our first suggestion on the alternative handling of the case of Oulu particularly questions the implementation of the ban. We suggest that instead of immediately banning the school visits, the city administrators should have followed ordinary political procedures in their decision-making. This would have involved a temporary suspension of judgment, followed by public discussions and hearings and, finally, putting the ban on vote in the city council. Following official democratic procedures would have allowed hearing and taking into consideration different views and perspectives concerning the ban as well as considering other possible courses of action. Concerning the sensitivity and controversiality of the issue, public discussions and hearings could have been organized where different aspects of the case, including facts and emotions, could have been discussed. This could have opened the possibility of forming common and more justified views regarding the case and how it should be addressed. It would have also enabled a more extensive participation of the citizens of Oulu, which would have further strengthened the democratic legitimacy of the decision. Moreover, the negative consequences such as the loss of the benefits brought forth by the school visits and the potentially increased juxtaposition between the asylum seekers and the majority population could have been avoided.

We evidently do not suggest that all negative political emotions can or should be suppressed or that people should simply be able to replace them with positive emotions. But we do not think that Nussbaum's theory of political emotions requires this⁶; rather, it must be recognized that changing

⁶ Also, Nussbaum acknowledges that it would be too optimistic to believe that a loving vision of a society would be enough; the society needs structures, institutions and laws in protecting democracy and its central values. She writes:

the course of the political culture's development is a long-term process, which brings us to the second important point concerning the alternative handling of this case. Evidently, positive emotions are not wonder remedies to a polarized political culture that is already inflicted by fear and anger. They, however, have a significant role in citizenship education. Fostering positive political emotions can promote a long-term process of transforming the political culture toward a healthier and more co-operative form. The school visits, which originally provided fruitful opportunities to reduce group stigmatization and establish trust between asylum seekers and the residents of Oulu, is a good example of the kind of concrete educational and institutional practices through which positive political emotions can be cultivated. Thus, we share Nussbaum's view that educational institutions can, at their best, encourage people to become more compassionate and virtuous if they are genuinely guided and oriented by a comprehensive normative vision of a just society (e.g. Nussbaum, 2013, 3; 1997, 14). However, we do not wish to underrate the difficulty of producing such a vision that would permeate all political parties.

Conclusion

In the past few decades, emotions have received increasing attention in the social sciences, and several political theorists (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Mouffe 2000, 2005; Nussbaum 2001) have argued that emotions have a crucial role in the formation of collective identities and in social life more generally. At the same time, many Western democracies have become characterized by political polarization, linked to the rise of backlash movements with nationalist sentiments.

Our case example demonstrates how negative emotions can be central motivators for political decision-making and how they can thereby deteriorate citizens' mutual trust and prevent co-operation that is required to sustain a democratic society. As the interviews and news addressing the ban show, the sexual assault and abuse cases were utilised to justify the political decision-making that rested largely upon xenophobia and prejudice and the associated emotions of fear and anger. Furthermore, the decision also sends a signal that hate speech and prejudice can be accepted as legitimate grounds for political decision-making. We suggest that the ban does not remedy the fear of some of the citizens of Oulu, but rather reinforces it by stigmatizing a group of people,

'We certainly don't want to wait until most people love each other before we protect the civil rights of the vulnerable.' (Nussbaum 2013, 315-316)

possibly giving a signal that the fear and anger towards asylum seekers was justified. Thus, by reinforcing a culture of fear, the ban significantly diminishes the possibilities of schools and other democratic institutions to reinforce social cohesion and reduce social inequalities in a manner that has historically been characteristic to the Finnish comprehensive school.

Following Nussbaum, we have emphasized the importance of fostering positive political emotions such as civic love, compassion and hope, which are important for a healthy democratic culture. However, we also recognize the critiques directed to Nussbaum's theory, and thus we have stressed the need to acknowledge the central significance of democratic institutions and education for reinforcing a healthier political culture. Attention should be paid, first, to the protection of the prevailing democratically established procedures, practices and principles, including the laws and institutions of the democratic society. While societies should engage in the continuous pursuit of social justice and emotionally healthier political culture, certain democratically established policies, procedures and principles provide protection from the destructive effects of negative political emotions in political situations such as the one we have introduced through our case. In our case, these policies, procedures and principles include laws such as the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act, educational policy documents such as the Finnish National Core Curriculum and UNESCO's GCE, and democratic procedures through which political decisions are typically reached on a municipal level in Finland, all of which were disregarded in the decision-making process in our case.

Secondly, much more work can be done in the educational institutions to develop a form of global citizenship education that involves a clear focus on political emotions supporting co-operation and the pursuit of common visions. Dewey (1997, 87) already claimed that democracy is about 'conjoint communicated experience' where 'each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own', which breaks down 'barriers of class, race and national territory' (Dewey 1997, 87). Such a conception of democracy, still relevant today, is not given but something to strive for. It cannot survive by itself but requires an educational practice that is flexible and adjustable to the changing circumstances of society. The reality of political polarization and the increase of negative emotions in politics must thus also be recognized and addressed in educational institutions through an appropriate form of citizenship education.

Even the relatively homogenous Finnish society will face the need to address an increasing amount of issues concerning immigration, diversity and pluralism in the future. Democratically established laws and principles are required to safeguard the rights of minorities. However, what is needed even more is citizens' motivation to follow these principles. In this quest, both discussing emotive politics and seeing the value in positive political emotions that are required for co-operation are crucial.

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