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‘The Aggressive Potential and Yellow Anger’

Abstract

Few expressions can be as powerful as her anger in disillusioning the solace illuminated near the racial stereotypes of Eastern femininity. Juxtaposing historical analysis and lived experiences, I cast light on the specific social condition that has been put in place for the Asiatic womanhood and the social effects of this on the subject. Working with critical theory and Winnicott’s theory, I explore anger and its potential in the cross-racial encounters as oppositional forces against certain cultural representation of yellow women. I argue that aggression is not only a ‘life force’ but it is also imbued with political value that may be deployed so that the yellow woman can venture a break from the grip of colonial fetishisation and reclaim her voice and sense of agency.

Keywords: aggression, psychosocial, Winnicott, Eastern femininity, anti-colonialism

'Would you say that... you are an angry person?' was hesitantly uttered with a big audible gulp of tea, half-sentence, on hearing her vague account of this project. A 'political studies of my anger as a yellow woman' might be what she said eventually. Looking sideways, she added that this work had been sizzling in her mind for some time only to be intensified by a recent event in which she was made a target of social shaming. Her (white male) companion was seemingly taken aback – giving the impression that this clearly was not what he had in mind when he inquired about her current research. The vibe felt spoiled at the instance when the syllable was spelled out. Anger. The word which makes a chunky part of 'dangerous'.

The contribution below is her best attempt not just to 'stay with the trouble', but to stare it in the face, and to trouble the trouble.

Making a psychosocial inquiry of anger

Anger is relatively under-explored in psychosocial studies. It is also susceptible to reductive readings in certain strands of psychoanalysis that routinely divorce emotion from reason, human relations from historical contexts (c.f. Yate's (2018) critique). Outside psychoanalysis, anger is particularly subject to discourses of emotional management and behavioural governance in organisational and education settings (Henderson, 2008; Lindebaum & Geddes, 2016; Gagen, 2019). These rationalist discourses tend to conform to the majoritarian ideology which is anxious to stamp out emotions that may disrupt the status quo. The view that anger has no place in democratic process, as Henderson (2008) argues, 'stems from a tradition which considers emotions to be disruptive of, rather than collaborative with, reason' (p. 31).

In ordinary social interactions, anger is often avoided as a disruptive emotion as, functionally, it signals to its intended recipient or audience that a wrongdoing has occurred and redress is sought by a specific individual or group. At cross-racial encounters, as the opening scene

shown above, anger can exert even more powerful divisive pressure by instantly locking the receptor of anger and the one who expresses it into a struggle of 'doer and done-to' psychodynamics (Benjamin, 2018). My white male companion was clearly caught off guard by my anger. At an implicit level, my anger, framed within the personal encounter with racism, also made psychological demands on him as a white man for recognition or/and reparation that he was not sure how to give or if it was his to give at all. As our respective individuality as two unique persons became eclipsed by historical malice of racial privilege and oppression that came before us, we came under siege, 'mutually implicated' (Layton, 2009) in its troubling aftermath that neither of us dared to fully confront.

What was missing but implied in my company's response, perhaps, was: am I *naturally* an angry person? His resorting to personal attributes as the fundamental source of my anger and my fears of meeting him in the eyes as I claimed its origin to be fully political exposed the mounting pressure we had both felt internally in the face of anger's divisive disturbance. Through taking a flight into each end of the nature-culture divide, we had sought to keep each other's discomfort and pain at bay: whilst I tried to disavow my vulnerability by amplifying my anger, my companion was put on the defensive by disinvesting himself of the troubles I had confided in him as the receptor of the projective identification.

It is risky to plunge readers into such an affective ride right at the start. I am aware that anger, as my account unfolds and deepens, can equally divide you and me or drive you away. Nevertheless the opening vignette is meant to serve as a backdrop against which the pivotal question of my inquiry may be presented at the outset: how the historical construction of Asiatic womanhood plays out in the on-going present and what are its *social effects* on the yellow woman. In other words, *how the outside gets inside and sometimes stays there*¹. This is an

¹ With thanks to the reviewer for this beautiful yet effectual line.

ambitious, if not a daunting, task. As this also demands an examination of how racial dynamics may be internalised in ways that lead to mundane projection, projective identification and doer/done-to mentality as described above.

Instead of trying to justify my anger as a yellow woman, the purpose of this work lies more in staying with anger in order to stay curious about how anger is stirred up in various cross-racial contexts in specific relation to ‘yellowness’ as assigned to my flesh by Anglo-modernity. In order to reveal how self experience and political subjectivity cannot be divorced from its wider cultural context (Yates, 2018), I will speak as a yellow woman and invite readers into my life-world through three further vignettes. These will foreground the yellow woman’s struggles with the relational barricade placed before her and the charges, prohibitions, and, finally, explosion of anger in the face of racial oppression.

The theoretical discussion will elaborate on the less-explored areas in Winnicott’s work on aggression and the aggressive potential. In order to complicate the meaning of anger I adopt a psychosocial vista through linking Winnicott’s theory to the historical trauma suffered by East Asian women and their collective developmental task to strive against the on-going racist malevolence. However, story comes first, theory later. Foregrounding my narrative itself speaks to my relational striving to get personal, reach out, and be heard. I feel Winnicott, who theorised delinquency as signs of hope, would be forgiving. This is also a political choice against the routine omission of yellow women in critical race theory which appears to have colluded with the far-reaching impacts of depersonalisation of yellow women that her history should remain hidden and her voice inconsequential. As Cheng (2019) observes: ‘the critical impoverishment’ within critical race theory is particularly ‘concentrated for the yellow woman’ which re-enacts the exclusionary tension that dismisses her suffering as a case of ‘complicated

privilege of injury' (Cheng, 2019: x; italics original) Similarly, Colleen Lye's (2008) 'the Afro-Asian analogy' and Okihiro's (1994) 'Is Yellow Black or White?' both take on this theoretical blind spot as an issue of systemic exclusion against east Asian people in critical race scholarship.

The structure of this paper is as followed:

My opening vignette has troubled that anger is more than an individual attribute and the temptation to reduce it to such in the face of anger's divisive pressure. What follows is the second vignette which will locate my lived experiences of exclusion and invisibility within an analysis of socio-historical intersection of gender and race subsumed under the identifier of 'yellow women'. I call attention to the social condition of yellow women as theorised by various authors and proliferated through cultural representation. The third vignette is embedded in the organisational psychodynamics within the university in the aftermath of a de-colonialising curriculum I had delivered. I then present an extensive discussion of Winnicott's theory on the aggressive potential, his development of the theory, as I relate theory to the ontological struggles of yellow womanhood and her ongoing developmental task. The final vignette draws this together, featuring a moment when my anger bursts through the cracks of composure with an overwhelming intensity at an anti-racist forum, in the wake of a public shaming incident. This is then followed by final reflexive comments on my anger in light of Winnicott's theory.

Methodologically these vignettes are autoethnographic by nature and are fictionalised as 'truth told as fiction' (Ketelle, 2004; 2008). They are firmly grounded in the subjective past-present life-world and in the unfolding political contexts. Fictionalizing lived experiences not only allows me to protect the identity of the people who participated in my life-world. But it also, as Ketelle (2004: 453) notes, 'affords an opportunity to attend to everyday experience in a new

way, to revisit particulars that may have escaped notice the first time around'. Put differently, this device enables me to pay attention to how a story becomes a world and how the subjects become implicated (Haraway, 2019). Careful work has been done to re-arrange the settings, the sequence of the events, and the encounters to foreground the cross-racial elements for exploration, whilst letting other somewhat minor gestures fade into shadow. Furthermore, these vignettes are retold in a third-person narrative in order to reflect how, as a yellow woman, 'she' is often left out in social interaction. Working this way allows me to re-create an 'atmosphere' in which the ineffable and what is 'larger than and beyond the control of the knowing subject' (Grosz, 2005: 5) may show itself.

The ghost-like other

In *The Newly Born Woman* (1994), Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement famously remarked that: 'Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought.' (p. 39). However, the same cannot be said about a yellow woman. A more fitting description, to paraphrase Cixous and Clement (1994), would be: 'Whether a yellow woman is passive or not she does not exist. Nothing left of her is unthinkable, unthought.' Never quite a bodily existence, nor a mere material artefact, the yellow woman exists in the phantasmic realm like a ghost-like other, who, under the colonial gaze, 'switches between the thingness of persons and the personness of things' (Cheng, 2017). Asian American scholar, Anne (Anlin) Cheng, whose work grapples with the troubling entanglements between aesthetics, bodies and political subjectivity, describes that the racialising apparatus of Eastern femininity conforms to a decorative grammar through which 'she denotes a person but connotes a style, a naming promises but supplants skin and flesh' (Cheng, 2018: 415). The gendering of races targets the yellow women who are then stereotyped as the 'feminine ideal', due to the cultural representation of their demure, concealed and submissive racial 'essence'.

Unlike a white woman, Eastern femininity is qualified not by its embodiment of passivity, but by the very possibility of embodiment as a form without flesh, a style without substance. Even when she *becomes* a body, it is a body that is routinely dematerialised by orientalist projection which relates to her body as a mere synthetic invention – a porcelain shell that is aesthetically furnished but ontologically vacant (Cheng, 2017). If passivity marks the ancient struggles for a white woman in her becoming recognised, artificiality is what then marks those for a yellow woman in her becoming real. What is inside the shell? It is to this question that I now turn.

We are now at a research symposium, in dire need of a tea break after the first afternoon session. You will find me sitting in the corner at the far end of an area designated as the conference's designated 'social space'. This is a site organised by power differentials that determine who speaks to whom and who gets to the email exchange stage.

Her blazer failed her. The extra dosh was not worth it. It does not matter what she puts on herself. There is no outfit in the world that is resistant to her hair colour, face, accent, mannerisms that always succeeds in scorching through the fine fabrics of any professional attire measured to her petite contour. No exception today. By early afternoon they are scorched through and through, leaving her bare in her intolerable yellowness.

All day long she has been trying to join the exciting intellectual exchanges unfolding before her, only to find her voice hitting against the invisible wall separating her from others. As the sessions progressed, participants became increasingly animated by the back and forth

discussions, she remained on the side-lines, making little impact on the ongoing discussion. Her accented remarks reverberated into the void.

By midday her social appetite has waned as the morning has suffused her with fragmentary sound bites that she had in mind to say but had not managed to verbalise. When she approaches the black woman scholar, whose work on racism has been the focus of morning's discussion, it is with the hope that solidarity would make her hungry for food and for human connections again.

She drags her weary body in the direction of the half-sealed crowd where the black woman scholar is standing. She carefully crafts an expression of appreciation in the hope that it could be converted into a ticket for lunching with them. She senses that she has been heard, as they all stop to look at her. "How do you find the conference so far?" the black woman scholar asks her as the yellow woman anxiously edges further in. Before the yellow woman could go on to elaborate, the black woman scholar blurts out: "I don't know what 'interesting' means". Her yellow cheeks turns red by a slap of embarrassment. But she must blame it on her apparent struggle to be standing, eating and talking all at once. On balance, she thinks that any kind of reply is better than none at all. She weighs up how much she should confide her true feelings to people she have only just met. Her worry of offending her new acquaintances is to be short-lived, however, as her arrival triggers the group to be split up into multiple groups.

Left alone with the intended confidante, she takes the leap of faith to say how her day has truly been like, whilst her companion is clearly distracted by the sight that those who have gathered around her are drifting away. All of a sudden the eminent scholar points at a set of paintings hanging on the wall they stand facing, declaring: 'Aren't they just fascinating? The colours,

the shapes, and perspectives...’ Realising that she has been upstaged, yet again, and this time by a series of paintings, she dutifully looks up at the wall. ‘For sure, interesting paintings!’ She has meant this as an affirmation, but immediately regrets her choice of the word ‘interesting’. For that seems to all together set her companion off in the direction of others, her people, leaving her on her own with an explosion of her futility.

Re-creating the above vignette revives feelings of frustration, alienation, and anger as it calls forth a more reflexive understanding of what might be transpiring underneath social interactions between members from different ethnic groups and the possible intersectional process beyond the blanket term of ‘Woman of Colour’ (WoC). ‘Colouredness’ has become a powerful political locution that sums up the ‘long histories of brutal denigration and relentless prurience’ (Cheng, 2018: 416) inscribed on the coloured bodies in surviving white supremacy. The term ‘Woman of Colour’ has gained political prominence in the wake of anti-racist feminism and has served as a necessary and effective discursive strategy in uniting the intersectionally discriminated subjects into an oppressed collective for political activism.

Ironically, however, this fugitive abstraction of ‘colouredness’ also brushes over the *specificity* of the cultural and social meanings of a particular racial stereotypes that shape the subjective experience of racial issues. It is in this light that Yuval-Davis (2006) emphasises the importance of addressing the “different kinds of differences” in critical race study in order to avoid conflating power positionings and nuanced experiences of racial inequality, oppression and marginalisation into an hegemonic account of what it means to be a Woman of Colour. Whilst it is beyond the scope to investigate the qualitative difference in the discursive construct of

respective forms of racialisation, the above vignette illustrates that solidarity can hardly arise from analogical approximation through the identifier of colouredness. While any racial indexing is ‘wholly promiscuous in application’ (Cheng, 2018: 416), the pungent rhetoric circulated and amplified through culture, media and politics continues to ensure its operative (highly unconscious) hold on how we see (or do not see) and meet (or do not meet) each other in cross-racial encounters.

This vignette highlights my initial sense of hope, albeit somehow unrealistic in the first place, that my experiences of alienation and exclusion should be understood and validated between us as two members from different ethnic minorities. The anger that I felt, as derived from such hope being castrated, perhaps has the quality of what has been theorised as the ‘narcissistic rage’ (Kohut, 1972). In this sense, seeking narcissistic merger with the black woman scholar on the ground of colouredness might have stemmed from a desperate need in me to defend against the angst of disintegration in the face of heightened distress from the prolonged experience of exclusion and invisibility. I might have, in Kohut’s words, resulted to seek urgent validation of my ‘aliveness of self and body’ (ibid: 361) through seeking mergence with an idealised self-object who is seen to be similar yet more powerful. This was, however, bound to be a doomed venture in the face of “different kind of differences” such as the hierarchical aspects of academia that create different power positionings and levels of recognition. In hindsight, my hope that the black woman scholar would ‘meet’ me might have generated implicit demand on her to renounce some of the recognition she has gained. Her needing to break away from me might have been an expression that this encounter was not perceived as one that would serve us equally.

‘Exclusionism’ (Saxton, 1995, as cited in Lye, 2008) is the name of the invisible wall for the yellow people. To be excluded, is to be denied one’s ontological status as a valid partner in social interaction and political participation. For yellow women, this experience of exclusion is further compounded by the issue of depersonalisation so she is not misrecognised, but unrecognised all together as a human being. Locating the mundane experience of exclusion and invisibility within a historical analysis may lead us to see how these issues concerns a larger issue of how Asiatic womanhood has been intersectionally discriminated. The perceived lack of ontological gravity of a yellow woman may not be addressed by the growth in academic credentials. For the specific racialising logic here relies on her ‘ornamental/surface/portable’ (Cheng, 2018: 416) thingness that marks her racial essence. This ‘thingness’ is routinely evoked as racial affects associated with the enduring fantasy of her ‘doll-hood’.

Through historical analysis, Erica Kalnay (2020) reveals how the 1927 doll-exchange between US and Japan in a bid to alleviate military tensions, have spawned lingering synthesis of the child-like (or ‘cute’) Eastern femininity, the aesthetically-dense ichimatsu doll, and the colonial fantasy into a unique form of racial imagination. This synthesis is, as Kalnay asserts, out of the patriarchal manipulation ‘to strengthen and expand their imperial power at the expense of Asian girls and women.’ (p. 95) The doll exchange was a fatal success but barely the premiere. The Far Eastern dream in the Anglophone sphere had materialised through the cultural production such as Puccini’s *Madam Butterfly* (1904) and Clive Holland’s *My Japanese Wife* (1902). These early 20th century fantasies, as Kalnay (2020) remarked, ‘created a template for imagining Asian girlhood that has been difficult to entirely discard’ (p. 96). It is no surprise that we see the troubling racial fetish of yellow women climaxed, half a century later, with James Bond’s notorious articulation: ‘Why do Chinese girls taste different from all other girls?’ in *You Only Live Twice* (1967).

Robin Zheng's (2016) paper: "why yellow fever isn't flattering" further demonstrates how racial discourse overwhelmingly overlooks the racial oppression of yellow women by brushing off the phenomenon of 'yellow fever' as merely a preference, disregarding the pernicious system of its social meanings. Drawing on the subjective voices of some Asian American women, Zheng reveals the disproportionate psychological burdens on the yellow women who are routinely targeted as 'sexual model minority'. For example, we hear one of the women who said: 'I never felt that I was being complimented for being myself or the way I looked, but rather for being an Asian female who looked exotic' (p. 408). Why should yellow women feel flattered, as Zheng protests, when yellow fever brings about daily crisis of feeling depersonalized and homogenised?

The colonial grip that holds eastern femininity as its fetish object lives on. Today we see this being exemplified by the street fashion, such as Lolita or Kogyaru styles, espoused by some young Japanese women. The appeal for innocence and cuteness that are in highly sexualised form in the presentation of the self raises interesting questions about how these ideals have been internalised and circulated through popular culture. We see also how this conflation of eastern femininity and artificiality collapses into a prototype of techno-orientalism where her yellow race-body makes convincing the future of fem-bots that perform to slavery functionality. Think, for example, the portrayal of Asiatic women in 'Cloud Atlas' (2012) and 'Ex Machina' (2014). What is alluring cannot be found *in* her but *about* her, refracted in the lens of the "commodity aesthetics" (Kalnay, 2020: 97) that concerns not her personhood but her playthingness. Nothing left of her is unthinkable, unthought.

What is inside this doll-like, unfeeling ‘thing’ held in the clutches of the colonial conceit? A yellow woman and her mundane yet chronic crises of losing the ontological boundary of the personhood and objecthood. A yellow woman and her annihilating pulses to break out of the shell, out of the ‘entanglement between living and living as thing’ (Cheng, 2018: 441). A yellow woman and her throbbing rage at the time-worn curse that seals her in the aesthetic congealment that deems her devoid of real affect and a voice of her own.

She should have resisted that hug. It was imposed on her; she never wanted it, never asked for it.

Above all, she resents herself for being so small, vulnerable and tearful in that meeting. What could the worst possible timing to give the impression that she could not fend for herself.

What happened to the rehearsal when she practised at home how she would stand her ground and do herself justice?

The room in which the meeting took place was of a size of three, or perhaps two, tatami mats; she couldn't be sure as it shrank in size as she tried to recall what had just happened there.

One white woman, one white man, and a yellow woman. The yellow woman, on the other side of the table, was being investigated for ‘fomenting racial tension’ in class, triggered by complaints from her (white) students ².

² See Pirrie, A & (author of this paper) (forthcoming) for an alternative account which pursues a critical discussion through this incident on lived realities and ethical struggles in delivering anti-racist curriculum in the neo-liberal university.

'What exactly have you taught?' 'We never had a situation like this before.' 'They have been a lovely bunch, you know.' 'Such a terrible timing with the NSS coming up.'

So far, she had admitted to reading out a section from the book – 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race' (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). She was made to reflect if she had 'gone too far' this time, having two sessions on colonialism on a difference and diversity course in counselling training - not one but two! And alas, was it true that she went ahead and taught the second session despite the fact that a few students had emailed her to raise their concern about the session being too unsettling? What letter, the white woman asked. And, with that question, she was made to read it out from her phone screen:

Dear [first name of the author of this paper],

My point was that you succeeded in raising awareness of 'othering' but only from the point that it's white people doing it to other races and your material and leading questions were suggestive. The point of the lecture was to realise there 'is no race' and 'skin colour doesn't make us different' but I was made to feel ashamed because of mine.

The Britishness I refer to is my ethnicity, and yesterday I felt as though I couldn't be proud of that in the same way others in the room could be proud of theirs. My example of singing the national anthem was merely an example to aid you in understanding my points. I won't be there next week.

Thanks.

When she came to the last few lines of the letter, she burst into tears, so the words became slurred and stammered with intermittent sounds of her gasping for air. They had more questions, but she could no longer respond. She could no longer bear being there with them anymore being pinned down to a place of repentance and submission. She was too suffocated to speak. The white woman and the white man exchanged a glance, before the white woman

exclaimed to the white man: 'I told you to book a bigger room!' They were nodding to each other.

As she left the meeting, tumbling into the hallway, the white man caught up with her and cornered her. With 'aw, come here!' he forced the tearful thing into his sweaty embrace and the half-dried tears on her face stamped slight marks on his already damp shirt. She stood stock still, frozen with every last bit of dignity. He forced into her ear, 'it's not always people of colour who suffer, you know. A white man can be bullied in school.'

The aggressive potential and yellow anger

Before we arrive at the final vignette where aggressive impulses morph into clear-sighted rage, attention must be drawn to the place of aggression in Winnicott's theory. The extensive thinking Winnicott devoted to the indispensable place of 'environment' lends it much more political capability of responding to the question of 'what life itself is about' (Winnicott, 1971: 98; cited in Elkins, 2017: 39). This emphasis on environment is much indebted to the long-standing Darwinian influences since his days at Cambridge as a young student (Ferruta, 2016). The originality of his relational thinking, developed at the time when the instinctual theory reigned, sprung from his consideration of the Darwinian idea that all living organisms develop by adapting to the demands of the outside world. Valuing the outer space led him to hold a critical view of Melanie Klein and her metaphysical conception of analytic thinking. In a talk addressing the candidates of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society, two years after Klein's death, Winnicott was to speak in an uncharacteristically unreserved manner about his criticism of Klein. Towards the end of the talk, he criticised that Klein 'claimed to have paid full attention to the environmental factor', yet, in reality, he deemed her to be 'temperamentally incapable of this' (Winnicott, 2016[1962]). But, despite Winnicott's Darwinian preoccupation with the

shaping power of the environment, his thinking also fundamentally addresses what Darwin did not have time to revise prior to the rushed publication of *The Origin of the Species* (Ferruta, 2016; 2019). How he did it was through recasting human subjectivity as imbued with creative potential in the light of its constant interaction with the environment. The human subject not only thrives in the abundance of nature but who also strives in the face of the environmental deficiency (or ‘impingement’). The human subject’s inherent capacity for striving, framed as ‘motility’ (Elkins, 2015; 2017) in Winnicott’s vocabulary, allows the individual to test the environment which is never static, never discovered *par excellence*, but created and recreated in dynamic *reciprocity* with human activities. Motility concerns the primary form of aggression which is best described as a self-making movement. Motility gives relational value to aggression by making the subject aware of the somatic pulses against the breach of ‘what it means to live an authentic life in relation to others’ (Elkins, 2017: 38).

As Adam Phillips (1988) notes, the co-constitutive interplay between subjects and nature in the name of reciprocity is a Winnicottian contribution to addressing Darwin’s theory of evolution. Reversing the equation that environment demands adaptation, authentic selfhood in human development, to Winnicott, develops more through ‘ruthless struggle against compliance with the environment’ (p. 5). The reactive response to the impinging environment can be seen as a spontaneous refusal to develop as an extension of the environment. For Winnicott, the self that adapts too successfully to the environment evolves as false self – who grows in inhibition of the self at the cost of authentic and zestful living. Aggression, reframed by Winnicott as imbued with creative potential, is a ‘life force’ (Winnicott, 1985) that aids the subject in pushing back (or ‘opposing’) the environmental impingement experienced as what feels at odds with the subject’s hopes and desires. Aggression, as a life force, is what affords

the experience of this active opposition, allowing the subject to further establish the boundary of what is *me* and *not-me*.

In the paper '*Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development*', which is a collection of three of his talks given between 1950-1955, Winnicott (2016[1958]) links aggression with creativity, asserting that aggression is "not even organized to destruction, but it has value to the individual because it brings a sense of *real* and a sense of *relating*" (p. 344; italics added). He went on to argue for the 'social value' of aggression on the grounds that it *enables* the subject to realise what is 'worth preserving' and the external forces that seem to threaten their vitality (ibid). Perhaps it came with no surprise that a few years later we see Winnicott make an open refutation of Freud's much more destructive view of aggression – 'I simply cannot find value in his idea of a Death Instinct.' (Winnicott, 2016[1962]: 330).

As Jeremy Elkins (2017) points out, Winnicott has shown us a direction rather than mapped out a programme on how to live authentically. There can never be a programme suitable for all precisely because in his theory 'being' is not an ontological given but an event open to nuanced possibility. The question of 'being' as a matter of human development marked the primary concern in Winnicott's theory as well as guiding him to review the ruling passion of psychoanalysis in identifying neuroses and defences. In a later account he spoke about the latter with an unmistakable tone of caution, 'we seldom reach the point at which we can start to describe what life is like apart from illness or absence of illness' (Winnicott, 1971: 98; cited in Elkins, 2017: 39). Whilst mostly speaking with a high level of diplomacy within the often conflict-laden psychoanalytic circle (Kahr, 1996), we find the most original, most poignant, and most personal of Winnicott reaching us in moments when his voice finds alignment with the personal pulses to convey what has truly mattered to him. Such pulses are indispensable in

his thinking on how one may truly come to live an authentic life. Indeed, Winnicott believes that these impulses originate first and foremost from the place of ego spontaneity. In the false-self presentation, where adaptation has to be constantly made to the environment at the cost of personal development, we see a hyperactive inhibition of ‘personal impulsiveness’ (2016[1958]: 348) which results in the minimal experience of pushing back. The lack of the psyche-soma movement of opposition risks keeping intact the blurred boundary between *me* and *not me*. Without the ego-boundary being established, what ensues then is “the result of a loss of sense of real” (ibid). In other words, a dissolution of what makes the person who they are as defined by what matters to them and who they seek to become.

Winnicott’s psychoanalytic endeavour and its resonances with psychosocial communities thrives on questioning the status quo established through the enshrinement of orthodox legacy. The authentic self is born when it breaks out of the encapsulation within the environment, out of the complete identification with its agenda, needs and desires. Linking this to the concern of this paper, the yellow woman can only and truly become real, or least explore what this ‘realness’ feels like, when she dares to act in oppositional pulses of ‘developmental struggle’ (Eigen, 1981) against the capture of cultural complicity that seeks to hold all its beauty and ugliness within the inorganic, epidemiological shell. Aggression, in this sense, is a potential that needs to be considered from the political angle of ‘what it can afford the subject’ and ‘how it can allow the subject to become’ as a creative impetus. Nothing less than opposition is required in order to subvert ‘the apparent gestures of mastery and certitude behind every production and assertion of the stereotype’ (Cheng, 2006: 101).

We are now on the second day of another research symposium, twenty minutes into an anti-racism forum as part of the conference programme. The forum was triggered by the recent

police brutality against black people and the global surge of anti-Asian racism due to the pandemic. So far it is only white people that have been talking whilst the racial others sit in silence.

Fuck. It.

That is the moment when she realises enough is enough. The politeness in the room has been squeezing her chest so tight that she finds herself held immobilized in its clutch. Amongst white people, so far, the ‘difficult’ conversations on race and anti-racism has been toned down to ensure it is still possible to lean into the comfort of British identity upheld by one’s good manners. ‘I care about anti-racism, one of the white people begins to say, ‘but I don’t want to get hurt by getting too involved’. The other participants are nodding in agreement.

This politeness offends her. In her racialised head this politeness has begun to morph into a distressing brute of White equilibrium³. It is threatening to put racism in place thereby ensuring that the white people retain control of how far we should go with the anti-racism agenda.

Fuck. It. All.

She could no longer contain her incandescent anger. Just yesterday this demonstration of good manners was certainly not on offer when she was attacked for ‘taking too long’ to say her

³ In his book *White Fragility*, DiAngelo (2018: 2) made a similar observation that this “white equilibrium” in response to racism has a defensive function against anxiety and discomfort. They serve to “repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy”.

reflection following a seminar presentation. The torrent of hostility pronounced itself clear through incoming comments from several white people that questioned the worth of her words and demanded her to be muted. How dare she take so long? How dare she have an opinion of her own?

Anger propels her to break this paralysing politeness. She finds herself in tears recalling yesterday's incident and the faces of her students who saw their lecturer being publicly shamed. These are tears of fervour as stoked by countless encounters with microaggressions and racial oppression.. Her spluttering out of provocative impulses knows only one goal – to burst this white bubble of complacency. A few people comment in response to her rage: 'why are we talking about racism as something that happened somewhere else, but it is right here, right amongst us'. Others chime in, 'but if we had noticed, why did no one say anything?'

She, who started the fire, sees it make its way through the thickets of white solidarity and politeness. Her rage sets the discussion ablaze on how anti-racist agenda seemed elusive when everyday racism continued to be faced with complicity. As the fire burns bright, re-kindled with every 'fuck it' that comes out of her mouth, her anger makes its way through the old growth of colonial fetishisation that prefers her to stay put, be cute and voiceless.

Fuck that.

A final (reflexive) remark: beyond personal inadequacy and pathology

What had gone into me? Was it really necessary to swear? Could there have been a more appropriate expression of anger? Is it a Taiwanese thing where I came from? Scottish where I now live? I was challenged by these questions after a seminar presentation based a version of this paper. These questions, as I saw it, came from a place of genuine curiosity mixed with a tinge of anxiety that I might be perceived as 'acting out' more than 'working with' anger. These

questions were hard to address then, as I don't normally swear and certainly had not *planned* to beforehand. The swearing occurred, I had thought, symptomatically as vehement punctuation of my struggle to speak out at the anti-racist forum, having only been targeted for social shaming the day before. Whilst I had believed that my utterance of 'fuck' served as a self-reassuring mantra against my anxiety about speaking out. Through this paper, I have become more convinced that what provoked my repetitive utterance of 'fuck' was also pumped by a rush of defiant blood that sought to make demands on the uncaring environment. If I had denied any conscious intention to intimidate the fellow participants through such foul language, I now think otherwise.

Reframing the incident psychosocially, it now appears to me that it is precisely the 'nuisance value' (Winnicott, 2016 [1956]: 155) in the anti-social act of swearing that I had unconsciously leaned into. The disturbing quality of the term became the source of empowerment: it promised to call to attention the environmental failures through racism and to call on white people as the privileged ethnic group to meet the foul effects of racialisation on the yellow woman. In other words, my utterance of 'fuck' might have stemmed from an unconscious endeavour to radically transform the experience of my subjectivity from 'the fucked' as a human-thing lying docile in the orientalist fetishism, into the 'fuck-er' who actively destructs the eroticised fantasy and its harmful impacts on her sense of agency.

Finally, Winnicott reminds us that even though the antisocial tendency stems from deprivation, it signals the dawn of hope. My final vignette shows that despite that there are those who struggle to treat me as equals, there are also those who care to try despite not always knowing how. My initial reaction was one of resentment towards the sentiment of 'not getting too involved to avoid getting hurt' as what seemed to gain collective consensus of the white people present. At the time I had read this as a clumsy affirmation of white privilege. However, the

expression became a more complex statement when taking into account the intersubjective context of: ‘who is speaking, to whom, about what, and why now?’ (Bollas, 2018: 78). The context that this was said at an anti-racism forum for which people had to sign up to attend made possible an alternative reading: it might have come not so much from a place of complacency as much as from a place of vulnerability, fears, inadequacy and perhaps guilt and/or shame in the inconsolable aftermath of Black Lives Matter. Thinking with Winnicott, it might have been, paradoxically, the very demonstration of white clumsiness in not being able to make oneself clear that had done the work of generating a sense of mutual recognition of ‘inadequacy’ that we, the white people and racial others, had both felt in meeting each other. For it then seemed to have given rise to a hopeful moment where the environment finally felt ready to ‘be tested and retested in its capacity to stand [my] aggression, to prevent or repair the destruction’ (p. 158).

Throughout this paper, I have sought to locate the yellow woman within its specific historicity. Just like my blazer served as a resistance to the racial stereotypes of Asian women, my ‘fuck-it’ was also an attempt to refute the cultural representation that served only the colonial gaze. It has become increasingly clear that psychosocial questioning is at risk of being confined to a limited conceptual vista if it settles too readily on a normative framework within a particular theoretical home (see also McLaughlin, 2019). I have, therefore, evoked a more nuanced application of Winnicott’s theory as a political theory to improvise a different view on aggression and aggressive impulses. I argue that, exerted necessarily as the psychical labour to break out of the shell, aggression is imbued not only with ‘social value’ (Winnicott (2016[1958]: 344) as creative, subversive forces against the representation bar placed before the yellow woman that excludes her from social participation and relational engagement. But also, it is imbued with *political* value - as what provokes the subject into pushing back against the institutional, environmental and historical impingement that threatens to disavow her

separate personhood in favour of the homogenous control of her as a lifeless, voiceless collectible. This is what prompts urgent pulses in her to act on anger against the devastating consequences of oppression, marginalisation and objectification. This is what sparks political hopes for revolution, rather than evolution, towards re-organising the social, interpersonal and institutional latitudes into democratic spaces so that *all* yellow women can exist in our own right ‘for our conceptualisation of freedom and agency’ (Cheng, 2018: 442) – in our collective path of becoming real.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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