Troubling categories and conflicting affective relations: A narrative case analytic study of mixedness

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Abstract

We take readers directly to a research interview extract in which Liyanna introduces the topic of her "mixed" new baby, where we trace the affect in the interchange. Our purpose is to conceptualise an *event* of production of subjectivity (Stengers, 2008), specifically Liyanna's talking about her daughter's appearance, through the triune relations among discourses (about and constituting or marking differences), the bodily schema to which "mixed" refers and psychic change as a key feature of subjective becoming. After situating our research data, methodology and theoretical resources, we focus on two interview extracts in order to show how Liyanna's use of a mixedness discourse draws on her imaginative resources, and on her own and the interviewer's containment, in the thinking space afforded by the interview encounter, space for making sense and finding comfort. In this way, Liyanna's subjectivity-in-process vitalises a process of parental ethnic mixing and contributes to cultural hybridity.

Keywords

Hybridity, emotional experience, imagination, comfort, intergeneration, becoming, narrative.

Scenic introduction: Me plus him equals baby

The extract below shows Liyanna[i] initiating a discussion of racialised mixedness, towards the end of a second research interview, when her baby is

five months old. We have chosen to start here, prior to any contextualisation or introductory material, to create a "scenic" representation (Hollway and Froggett, 2012). Just as the first scene in a play is revealed as the curtain opens, we present a live scene, inviting readers to use what Alfred Lorenzer calls "scenic understanding", "a process by which researchers reflect on their affective and embodied experience of their data" (Redman, Bereswill & Morgenroth, 2010 p. 217). Lorenzer advocates using the text's provocations as an entry point, because these are a channel to socio-cultural meaning, indicated by the affects provoked: 'texts are not …empty formulae to be filled, their provocation lies in a quality present in the text itself (Lorenzer, 1986 p.28). We invite you to do likewise.

As the interview is drawing to a close, the interviewer checks if there is anything further Liyanna wants to talk about. Liyanna fetches photographs of her family of origin she wanted to share with the interviewer and in the process, shows the interviewer a visual montage that she has recently created using a scanner. In her fieldnotes, Heather Elliott, the interviewer describes what she saw as follows: "There are two photos, of her husband and of herself, as babies. They are printed on digital paper with a + sign between them and then an = and a picture of their baby."

> Liyanna: This is funny, I just scanned these in the other day. (Int: Ooh)
> That's my husband, that's me and that's her. (Laughs)
> Int: Oh my *good*ness.
> Liyanna: So it's quite funny looking at these.

Int: Well she looks like a - she's very -

Liyanna: - mixed. (Laughs)

Int: Well no, but she looks like she's the sum of two, of both of you, she looks really like you've mixed the two of you together.

Liyanna: It was quite funny when I saw those pictures. So (.) that was interesting.

Int: Because you can see, you can see both of you as children in her very, very clearly, can't you? Do you think she's more like one of you than the other?

Liyanna: I *think* she looks more like how her Dad is *now*, than she does like how I am now, 'cos I changed a lot as a child, I don't look at all like my baby pictures or anything like that.

Int: Yeah, although your eyes though, there's something about it, there is something that looks like you.

Liyanna: Yeah, yeah, but everything else is *very* different so, you know, people, when they see her, they do instantly say, "oh she looks like her Dad". But then a lot of people do say she looks mixed. (Int: Yeah.) Not necessarily mixed, as in me and him, but mixed as in she does look kind of a mix of Vietnamese and Asian, you know, she doesn't look purely Vietnamese. 'Cos she's sort of more brown than they are and there's certain other things about her that are slightly different – her eyes are a lot wider. And, you know, his family are fascinated by her lashes, 'cos they don't have long lashes in their family. (Int: Right yeah.) They've got very short kind of downward

pointing lashes, so they're fascinated that she's got these longer lashes and (laughs) things.

[*Pause to notice and reflect on the affective impact of this extract and what it provokes.*]

Before trying to work out what is going on in this interaction, we first situate it within the research project and research relations that produced it and do some theoretical ground clearing to help in clarifying our purposes.

The research project and its methodological use of affect

The research project, entitled 'Identities in Process: Becoming Mothers in Tower Hamlets', was located within an Economic and Social Research Council programme focusing on identities ("Identities and Social Action"). In talking of identities in process, we wanted to use the strengths of a psycho-social approach to help us go beyond a widespread tendency to reduce identities to social identities, to "a hollowing out of the psychological" (Blackman *et al,* 2008, p.13). The overarching research question 'How do women experience the process of becoming mothers for the first time?' reflected our focus on experience and becoming. Consistent with our focus on mother-baby intersubjectivity, as well as recent theoretical emphases (Blackman *et al,* 2008), we wanted to pay attention to bodies, affect and relations in the flow and change of subjectivity over a transformative year in the lives of women becoming mothers for the first time.

Throughout this article, there is a dual use of the terms affective and emotional (the latter linked to "experience"). In many contexts, distinctions are made between these terms (see for example a special issue on affect of *Body and Society*, Blackman and Venn, 2010), for example in relation to whether they are mediated through language (emotions) or simply embodied (affects). We use the term affect when it ties in with recent debates, where this term has come to be preferred, but retain Wilfred Bion's use (1962), similar to object relations psychoanalysis, of the term emotional experience where this theory is in use. The shared meaning of the two terms in the current context will become apparent.

Methodologically, our claim was that because 'identity is not transparent to the person undergoing the transition, we use methods capable of dealing with what lies hidden'[ii]. This is particularly important in light of mother-infant relationality with its non-semantic character and the centrality of embodied, affective intersubjectivity. We wanted to address aspects of becoming that are inaccessible, or less accessible, to language, to address the limitations inherent in the prevalent social science in which "language is the medium whereby data are gathered" (Blackman *et al,* 2008, p.13). Psychoanalysis was an important resource for two reasons. First, following Devereux, who argued that "psychoanalysis is first and foremost an epistemology and a methodology" (1967, p.294), it gave us access to a non-positivist methodology. Second, "psychoanalytic thinking is particularly relevant to understanding emotional investment in a present social reality and the difficulties in dealing with change" (Urwin, 2007, p.242).

We used two psychoanalytically informed methods, Free Association
Narrative Interviews (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), where narratives are
elicited that encourage affective linkages between ideas, and Infant
Observation (Urwin, 2007; 2012), modified from the British object relations
school of psychoanalysis, where babies' development is observed weekly, at
home, for one or two years. Psychoanalytically informed versions of reflexivity
accompanied both methods (Elliott, 2011; Elliott, Ryan and Hollway, 2012).
Reflective fieldnotes provided the initial form in which researcher subjectivity
and the research relationship became part of the data record. In practice this
meant paying attention to, differentiating, and noting down, emotional
responses in the field setting, and extended to structuring in opportunities for
further reflection, including in data analytic settings using the resource of
others' reflections.

Liyanna's case did not include observations in addition to three interviews
over the course of nearly fifteen months. However, our use of reflective
fieldnotes was increasingly influenced by the researchers' parallel experience
of the infant observation method[iii], which provided a kind of training ground in
focus on nuanced emotional responses and a developing ability to live with
the uncertainty of holding open possibilities about the significance of what we
encountered (Hollway, 2012). While socially-defined dimensions of difference,
such as ethnicity, are present in interview relations, as in the current extract,
we strove to keep our emotional attention category-clear, based on the
principle that categories, along with knowledge and theory, are best

set aside during the acts of observing and recording in favour of
allowing the experience to make its own impact ... A new concept of
the observer [researcher] is being employed ... here the truths which
interest us are emotional truths. The observer cannot register them
without being stirred ... Correctly grasped, the emotional factor is an
indispensable tool to be used in the service of greater understanding
(Miller, 1989, pp. 2-3, our addition).

Liyanna's data set consists of three audio-recorded interviews (the audio
record as well as the transcript has been consulted for this article) and the
accompanying sets of fieldnotes, written as soon as possible after the
interviews. The first meeting took place about 6 weeks before the birth, the
second when the baby was 5 months old – as extracted above – and the final
one when the baby was nearly 14 months old. Forms of qualitative data
analysis have in practice ranged from close attention to the wording and form
of short extracts, characteristic of most empirical forms of discursive analysis,
to whole case analysis based on enabling grounded, participant-led themes to
emerge in dialogue with theoretically-derived themes that illuminate research
questions (for example Hollway, 2010). The use of Liyanna's transcript
material foregrounds the former but includes attention to the latter, especially
in an affective register.

By physically locating the research in the ethnically and socio-economically
diverse borough of Tower Hamlets in London, we could reflect the variety in
the local population in our sample and situate participants' lifeworlds

(Gunaratnam, 2013). For example, Liyanna loved living in Tower Hamlets, where she grew up and where she has a circle of close women friends, in the company of whom she anticipates getting old. "It's just home isn't it? It's just where you – where you've known". She described the area as a 'very comfortable environment. I feel quite safe here … Um especially in light of, you know, all the terrorism, and everything that's happened.' This refers to the suicide bombings in London on July 7th 2005 and the subsequent concerns about Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Liyanna describes 'all this kind of hype and (.) intense kind of scrutiny and (.) everything about Muslims, and particularly about women and covering'. For her, Tower Hamlets felt 'safe' because of the large practising Muslim population, compared to other areas in London, 'whereas in this area you wouldn't feel it, because the majority of the women are actually covered'. She enjoyed the "mix" of the area and the widespread appreciation of Muslim culture. She lived very close to siblings and her parents, and further away from her husband's family of origin, where when she visiting her in-laws, she found it less comfortable because she felt stared at.

This shift in climate that Liyanna highlights was an important context for our research (Gunaratnam, 2013) and for other work undertaken with Muslim research participants (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008). The topic of ethno-religious difference, which, as we suggest below, is often sensitive, was particularly fraught at this time. In her third and final interview, at the end of a fifteen month research relationship, Liyanna is able to talk about the racism she and her friends have encountered, and about what her faith means to her,

by which time she and the interviewer had found ways to talk about mixing and mixedness. Liyanna was one of nine Bangladeshi heritage new mothers in our sample, she was the oldest and one of four graduates in this sub-sample. Of 19 women, Liyanna was one of five whose babies were mixed in the sense commonly used; that is as an ethnic mixing of parentage. She was the only one to use the term and the only one to use the interview situation to explore this aspect of her experience in becoming a mother, which was the primary reason for selecting her case in this context.

Our proximate focus is the discomfort provoked as Liyanna and the interviewer delicately try to find words to describe the baby's physiognomy and parental resemblances, leading to the awkwardness of how ethnic differences figure in the interchange and how mixedness is negotiated between interviewee and researcher. Our wider purpose is to ask how Liyanna's subjectivity is engaged in this experience (no doubt one of many) of familiarising herself with having an ethnically mixed baby, drawing especially on three key features of subjectivity that exceed language: material bodies, affects/emotional experience and intersubjectivity (Blackman *et al* 2008).

Subjectivity in theorising mixedness and hybridity
On the face of it, there are two literatures that might assist in our analysis of the phenomenon of mixedness that Liyanna is illustrating: "mixedness" and hybridity theory. We use the term mixed because Liyanna does, and not because that literature addresses our purposes. In the case of the policy-focussed "mixedness" literature, the word was taken up from popular

parlance, treated as a growing social phenomenon in Britain, and as representing a particular challenge in the context of racism and racialised integration (Edwards, Ali and Caballero, 2012). The phenomenon it represents is investigated largely through qualitative interviews with "people from 'mixed' racial and ethnic backgrounds (which may encompass faith differences) and their families" (ESRC seminar series, 2008-10). The literature does not address issues to do with subjectivity; it characteristically seeks information about how mixed families handle the experience of negotiating their social identities, especially in the case of the children's identity formation (Caballero, Edwards and Puthussery, 2008).

Regarding cultural theory and the concept of hybridity, East London, the site of our research project, is home to the kind of mobile, mixed cultures celebrated in cultural hybridity (Hall, Held and McGrew, 1992). Homi Bhabha's use of the concept of hybridity (1994) within cultural and literary studies focused on culture and power inscribed in discourse and was taken up widely in post-colonial theory. Edward Said's (1993, p.xxix) emphasis on the inevitably polyglot character of all cultures challenged the assumption embedded in the term 'hybridity' of something pure, originary or unitary that logically precedes mixture. Nonetheless, Bhabha's treatment of the flux and nuance of cultural hybridity is reflected in contemporary emphases on multiplicity, becoming and invention. For our purposes (in this journal), while postcolonial theory opened up the issue of the relation between culture and identity (Venn, 2006), theorists nonetheless tended to assume that identities *reflect* the flows and mixing that are characteristic of cultural hybridity. Here,

as in much of identity theory, there is a danger of "a hollowing out of the psychological and its reduction to other analytics (the social, language, power)" (Blackman *et al,* 2008, p. 13). The emphasis on plurality and blending in abstracted terms says little about subjectivity at the point of mixing, about avowal and disavowal, desire and anxiety or the investment of identity, nor about generational continuities, psychic change and resistances to change. Questions of the relation between inside and outside, including the effects of discourses about identity, race and culture, remain a challenge for theory. They are the terrain of the psycho-social. Second order dynamics are also posed by Liyanna's discourse here: the effects of critical discourses on everyday thinking and talk about mixedness, racism and power relations, leading to a politicisation of questions of identity. We want therefore to ask through what subjectivising processes might hybrid cultures come to be lived in residents of East London such as Liyanna and her family.

In mixedness, as in the more theoretical concept of hybridity[iv], there is a historically-based awkwardness about terminology concerning race and ethnicity, motivated by the wish to undermine beliefs in racial purity and to avoid the accompanying biologising of race (see Gunaratnam and Hollway, this volume). We too are concerned about the vernacular semiotics of mixedness and its rationalised metrics of identity where there is talk of fractions, bits and parts and it is primarily for this reason that we chose the extract with which this article begins, prompted also by the interviewer's fieldnote comment on the equation of parental and baby photos: "It seemed like a very concrete way of thinking about mixed heritage (…)". The

interviewer substitutes 'mixed heritage', the project team's preferred category, for 'mixed', the term Liyanna chooses.

How might we extricate ourselves from the "treacherous bind" (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 81) and conflictual logic of categorisation, namely how racial categories, even when they are used to name racialised experiences, are liable to be contaminated by racism? We are guided by Annemarie Mol's alternative thinking on the category: "The crucial question to ask about a category" Mol suggests "is whether or not it takes good care of you" (2008, p.77). Consistent with the principle of noticing salient affective currents – provocations - generated in the field encounter, we start by noticing a puzzle: despite the sensitivity of the topic of Liyanna's mixed baby, despite some mutual discomfort as the subject is introduced and explored, Liyanna is motivated to talk about this in the interview relationship. How does Liyanna take care of herself and elicit care by engaging on this subject?

Comfort and discomfort in the interview relation
At the beginning of the introductory extract, Liyanna uses the word 'funny' three times and laughs twice while introducing the montage. The second laugh follows her introduction of the word 'mixed', interrupting, pre-empting the interviewer's point, and perhaps wanting to retain control of the meaning of the topic she has in mind. The interviewer's uncertainty is expressed in the heightened tone of her immediate response when Liyanna presents the montage (largely lost in transcription but found on listening to the audio

record). As they evaluate the montage, both Liyanna and the interviewer are unable to avoid complicity with racial thinking.

The interviewer initially disagrees with Liyanna's suggestion that the baby looks 'mixed'. She says 'well no', but perhaps she is disagreeing with the racialised connotations of the word, or the possibility that Liyanna has anticipated what she might have been about to say but holding back. When she goes on to use 'mixed', it is in the context of Liyanna and her husband as unique individuals and not, by implication, their ethnicities. The interviewer is tentative around Liyanna's racialised language of mixedness. She stays on the territory of parental likenesses until Liyanna makes the firm move to 'mixed as in … Vietnamese and Asian'. This framing of a racialised mixity may be difficult at several levels. We have already mentioned the political sensitivity attached to the mixedness vocabulary. The interview exchange is, not surprisingly therefore, laced with discomfort with regard to terminology and its meanings, a discomfort dubbed "topic threat" in the methodological literature on researching "sensitive" topics (Lee, 1993). The challenge for both interviewer and research participant in interviews on sensitive topics has been seen as one of Goffmanesque impression management: how the interviewer might become a ratified stranger to whom the research participant can disclose and talk about potentially discrediting experiences, views and opinions without losing face. In this case, Liyanna appears in control, motivated to explore the topic: she had created the montage, she chooses to show it and she is the one to move from the topic of parental likeness to the racialised terrain that follows.

Nonetheless, Liyanna seems ambivalent. As the conversation continues, she makes as if to move on to another topic with the past tense 'so (.) that was interesting'. The interviewer now stays with the theme, but moves it to possibly more neutral ground, by asking a question about which parent Liyanna thought the baby most resembles. It is a commonplace activity with newborn babies, irrespective of ethnic mixing. This reminds us that babies are routinely seen as a combination of their genetic parents, in a way that risks little topic threat. In asking this question, Liyanna's choice to represent herself and her husband as babies in the montage is recognised, enabling Liyanna to take this up by answering that she *thinks* (her emphasis here suggesting hesitancy) that the baby is more like her father than like her, as adults. Quickly this thought is followed by a link, 'because', which is not logical, so must represent an affective link: ''cause I changed a lot as a child ... I don't look at all like my baby pictures or anything like that'. Her emphases ('a lot', 'at all', 'anything like that') suggest the heightened affect in this remark and made us pay attention to that link. Liyanna's free association seems to suggest that, although her baby does not resemble her at this moment in time, she could resemble her in the future. The mobility of these markers at this stage of the baby's life points to further and future unknown possibilities so that what is seen and questioned as existing in the present is also temporally ambiguous and unfinished: it is "an existence that needs 'filling'" (Fortier, 2008, p. 41). At stake is whether the baby looks more like her husband than herself, if not now, then in the future.

The interviewer, picking up on what Liyanna appears to desire and having as reference not only the photographs but also Liyanna and the baby in the flesh in front of her, qualifies Liyanna's claim, finding a similarity in the eyes. Liyanna hardly pauses to agree ('yes but'), emphasising instead how different from her everything else is about the baby, a claim that leads by association to her remark that 'people instantly say "Oh she looks like her Dad"', which she straightaway calls into question by asserting "But then a lot of people do say she looks mixed". Here the baby's mixed features are a comfort: they include her. In our focus on racialised discourse, we should keep in mind how every baby is a mixture of families and that there is consequently always a question of whose family is transmitted into the next generation. The common occurrence of talk about who the baby resembles (Mason, 2008) reflects the considerable emotional investment in this issue and suggests that narcissism is always involved, probably especially through same-sex identifications.

Liyanna's next association leads away from the line that the interviewer introduced (parental likenesses) and on to a different meaning of mixing: 'a lot of people do say she looks mixed', not as in 'me and him' but 'mixed as in she does look kind of a mix of Vietnamese and Asian, you know, she doesn't look purely Vietnamese'. Liyanna goes on to specify the physical characteristics of this mix in terms of skin colour, the width of the baby's eyes and the length of her eyelashes, which is 'fascinating' to her husband's family. The word fascinating crops up subsequently, always in the context of their families' interest in the combination of physical characteristics that are seen as deriving from the different ethnicities. 'Family' here seems to act as a bridging signifier

between 'me and him' and 'Asian and Vietnamese' (families are, after all, the terrain of inheritance): short eyelashes are a feature of his 'family', which as used here may or may not be a feature of Vietnamese physiognomy. Liyanna's own position, her desire, is suggested in her choice of comparator: her dismissal is of the baby looking 'purely Vietnamese', rather than purely 'Asian', again suggesting that she wants the baby to look more like her. This makes sense of the earlier concern with 'just like her Dad', which now appears to include a wishful rejection of the idea that their daughter looks wholly like her husband's ethnicity – Vietnamese. Three aspects of the baby's mixedness are all specified from the point of view of Liyanna's own ethnicity being more in evidence: 'more brown than they are', 'her eyes are a lot wider', 'she's got these longer lashes'. Going back to Liyanna's earlier, puzzling, affect-laden claim about how she looks so different from the way she looked as a baby, we can see that this leaves plenty of scope for the baby to look more like Liyanna as she grows up.

What is conveyed about the meaning of the conversation if we consider in more detail the emotional tone when the interviewer continues the conversation about who the baby resembles, (after Liyanna's 'that was interesting', which could well have closed down the topic of mixing)? We have documented the discomfort in the use of 'funny', in the laughs, especially the one following the moment when Liyanna pre-empts with the word 'mixed' whatever the interviewer might have said. As words, these have no single meaning and it was necessary to go back to the audio record to assess this. Liyanna's overall tone in this their second meeting is warm, confident and

friendly, seeming to enjoy the intimacy. The discomfort is apparent but not strong. The introduction of the montage with the words "this is funny" had a quality of both uncertainty and anticipation, a sense of wanting to have another look, a think about what she had produced (in both senses). Yet, as we shall see, Liyanna did want to move towards showing the interviewer photos of her family of origin, especially regarding her mother: after the whole episode, she says 'I just wanted to show that about my Mum'.

Being the second interview, there is a history to what we see passing between Liyanna and the interviewer, which suggests Liyanna's desire to show the photos as a follow-up to an earlier shared anticipation. Liyanna spoke about her husband's ethnicity in the first (prenatal) interview and there too it was in the context of her interest in what the child might look like:

> there is a fascination um (…) you're kind of curious about obviously what's this child going to look like and who it's going to look like and um especially I think for me because my husband is actually Vietnamese (Int: right) um so it's like you know what's this child going to look like (laughs), (Int: yes) is it going to look Oriental, is it going to look Asian, you know um so it will be interesting to see.

In summary, the fact that she made the montage and showed it suggests that Liyanna is attracted to thinking about mixedness and its visual signifiers, in the presence of the interviewer, that her own identity is in some degree invested there, and also that the activity was linked in her mind with her own mother.

Being mother of a daughter, daughter of a mother

We know from the case as a whole that, in the words of the second set of fieldnotes, "Being the mother of a daughter is extremely important for Liyanna". For example, after saying that she was happy to be having a girl, Liyanna says 'it's just the bonding that you have with a daughter, um because throughout my pregnancy I'd been thinking about my own mother a lot really (…) 'cause we didn't have a very good relationship'. So, on the basis of this chain of associations, the fieldnote wondered 'Does it give her the opportunity to re-vision her own difficult relationship with her mother?'. Showing the old photos, Liyanna provides a further example of intergenerational identifications. She came across as highly motivated to show these to the interviewer: the formal content of the interview had been completed and the baby, quiet up to now, had begun to make a fuss. Nonetheless Liyanna lingers over the photos, conveying engagement and pleasure in showing them, without the hint of ambivalence that characterised her choice to show the montage. One is of her mother with her older sister, Amina, as a baby. She and Amina, whom she describes as having 'always been pretty close', have had a difficult relationship with their emotionally withdrawn depressed mother for as long as they can remember. She says:

> It's this picture, it's so strange. (Baby cries.) I was showing it to
> my sister the other day, and I said to her that when I used to look
> at this before, it was like "oh there's Mum and Amina" … and you
> just sort of flick through it, you know, and I never really stopped

to analyse it. But I said to her, since I've had Mala, I look at that picture and I know exactly what my Mum was feeling when she was looking down at my sister. (Int: Really?) 'Cos I know how I feel when I look down at her, and when I play with her, and it's just taken on a whole new meaning, you know, it's like there's my Mum and that's her first-born child, it's a little girl, same as me, you know, and I can just see the love and the emotion that she's feeling when she – when she – when that picture was taken.

It seems likely that, because she has experienced how she loves her own daughter, Liyanna is now able to believe that her mother loved her. She regards this access to a new emotional understanding as 'strange' because the same photograph before she became a mother would have held no such significance. Other cases in the data set have suggested that becoming a mother for the first time sets in motion a generational hinge effect, because the new mother is now both daughter and mother, so that she identifies more closely with her mother (Hollway, 2010). In this context, Liyanna's emotional experience of this photograph demonstrates the depth and complexity of her relationship with her baby daughter and suggests an intergenerational[v] and intercorporeal theme, which will be contributing to the meaning of her daughter's appearance. Probably the baby looking like her would reinforce the idea of intergenerational continuity to which she has just contributed by reproducing, in her first baby, the mother-daughter relationship one generation on.

If Liyanna would like to have a daughter who looks like her, the difference that

her husband introduces is a challenge to this desire[vi]. We have purposely not

qualified the term difference here so that it can hold the many meanings

Liyanna implies, ranging from the physiognomic differences (eye width,

eyelash length, skin colour) to what is signified in broad semantic categories

(Asian, Oriental).

Containment and thinking

Liyanna frequently uses (as above) three words about her daughter's features

– 'interesting', 'curious' and 'fascination'. They suggest to us a key motivation

in her wish to move into or towards the potentially uncomfortable territory of

mixedness with the interviewer. The link of curiosity to emotional life is

elucidated in the work of Wilfred Bion, who elaborates Melanie Klein's concept

of "epistemophilia", the wish to know, seeing it as equivalent in importance

with love and hate. Bion modified the idea of an epistemophilic desire for

knowledge, moving further away from Freudian drive theory towards a

properly psychological (psychoanalytic and phenomenological) theory of the

mind's affective links to objects through loving, hating and desiring to know (L,

H and K links) which have positive and negative expressions. Affects oscillate

between discomfort and comfort during the process of thinking; the pressure

occasioned by emotional experience of real events can be unwelcome at the

same time as it is sought, because it is in the nature of thinking to perturb, to

go into unpredictable, unfamiliar territory. Hence, the wish to know (+K) is

likely to be accompanied by the wish to avoid knowing (-K); and conflict is an

ordinary feature of experience. For example, in showing the montage, Liyanna

has to risk the interviewer being one who says how like her father the baby looks. How such micro events are faced and what conditions might make them bearable are core themes in Bion's account of psychic change. When multiplied across situations in lived lives, they are consequential in whether changes – for example towards hybrid culture – are embraced or resisted.

Bion's theory of thinking (1962b) is not only useful because it dissolves the binary between thinking and feeling, but also because thought is not seen as an individual accomplishment. Bion's concept of containment (1962a) refers to the unconscious use of another person who can help process emotional experience and make it thinkable. Thomas Ogden sums up this principle as "it takes two minds to think one's disturbing thoughts" (2009, p. 97). In the course of a child's emotional development, maternal containing capacities are introjected and become available within the thinker, but an external containing mind is still helpful. This applies outside clinical psychoanalysis too and would be relevant, in Liyanna's case, to thoughts about whether the baby might not be enough like her or worry about how it will be perceived in the world. At the interview when the baby is five months old, Liyanna can see what she and her husband have produced, and can explore further with the researcher who might be usefully containing because she is there to listen, because she is temporary, outside both families and perhaps also because she is outside both ethnic identities at issue. In the infant observation literature, the containing benefits of the observer's unobtrusive and calm weekly presence is frequently noted and became apparent in our research (see for example Urwin *et al,* 2013).

And so, through theorising the potential discomfort of disturbing thoughts and the potentially comforting containment of two minds, we can revisit the dialogue between Liyanna and the interviewer as they look at the montage and at the baby and search for words to describe her likenesses. We see Liyanna's capacity to create an opportunity, probably not the first, for co-thinking about something unusual, which is still quite new to her and to the two families. In the intersubjective process, potentially uncomfortable available categories are stretched, elaborated and refined in the containment afforded as part of sharing.

Bion's account of thinking potentially disturbing emotional experience conceptualises such experience as an affective, corporeal reality that pre-exists thought and language. It works against the danger of the kind of discursive determinism that would underlie the idea that Liyanna's montage - with its dependence on a metrics of mixing - fixed and restricted her thinking and positioned her daughter, for her, as two halves rather than a whole unique baby. It frees us to think that it is perfectly possible that Liyanna experiences her baby as whole and unique; that her temporary language, her play with baby photos and scanner, is part of an imaginative opportunity created, not necessarily consciously, to explore her desires and anxieties about who her baby is in relation to her.

Enid Balint, from an object relations psychoanalytic perspective, claimed that "external reality can in any case only exist for the individual if it is introjected,

identified with, and *then imaginatively perceived*" (1993, p. 95, our emphasis).

This process is made possible by affects, without which meaning would be

stripped of meaningfulness. This is one version of how psychoanalysis

construes object relations. Attempts at theorising bodies in their materiality

have, importantly, provided "critiques of 'cultural inscription' and social

constructionist approaches to the production of subjectivity" (Blackman *et al,*

2008, p.17). Our extracts likewise present a challenge to theorise the

subjectivity associated with the external world, for example, the material

outcome of ethnic mixing signified by Liyanna's baby. We have seen

Liyanna's imagination at work, for example in creating the montage and

reaching for semantic expressions of her baby's features. Finally, then, we

approach the relation between material reality and subjectivity through the

concept of imagination.

According to Winnicott, imagination involves not unbridled fantasy, nor

something determined by reality (whether intransitive such as physiognomy,

or transitive, such as available vocabulary[vii]), but a creative intermediate

space (Winnicott, 1971/1985) where the obdurate and frustrating aspects of

reality can be thought about, experimented with, and one's relation to them

transformed (Gentile, 2007; Hollway, 2011). This is a relevant way to

conceptualise Liyanna's emotional work as she thinks about her baby's partly

Vietnamese appearance. However the process involves psychic conflict, as

we saw in Bion's theorisation. Jill Gentile, from a Winnicottian perspective,

conceptualises the psychic conflict as subjectivity emerging "between desire

and limit" (2007, p.548), where this encounter is "a triumph of personal

agency over a brute inanimate reality". Gentile argues that "the material world is critical to our constitution of subjectivity and that we simultaneously impose our weight upon it and surrender to its unyielding aspects" (2007, p.547). This is surely a key (micro) process in psychic change or becoming. If, for Liyanna, desire is vested in a baby daughter like her ('will my daughter look like me?', holding also perhaps the irresolvable intergenerational legacy of 'did my mother love me as much as I love my baby?'), limit lies in the obdurate reality of a baby who is mixed, a mixedness construed by Liyanna in terms of the parents, the families and their different ethnicities. As Gentile (2007) argues, such processes are continuous and endless in the encounter of emotional experience with the external world in which our subjectivities take shape as fluid becoming. In this way we have analysed one (micro) event in this process of production of subjectivity.

A triunity is defined as a being that is three in one, or a group of three things united (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). We want to suggest that the "event" of talking about Liyanna's baby's mixedness with which we started this paper, an event that is part of the process of the becoming of Liyanna's subjectivity as a mother, shows a triune relation among three things: mixedness as racialised discourse, the baby's appearance, and finally the ongoing dynamics of Liyanna's psychic life as she explores, in the company of the interviewer, the meaning of having a baby daughter who looks partly like the father, who is ethnically different from her and her family.

Concluding comments

It might be objected that this psycho-social analysis, with its focus on the process of thinking perturbing thoughts, removes us from an analysis of the power relations within which 'mixedness' and 'hybridity' are produced. On the contrary, this analysis, because it is psycho-social, highlights how actors in the world, like Liyanna, encounter those very power relations in the unique forms they take for individuals' lives. Liyanna is not simply a passive conduit in the evolution of dynamic, mobile mixed cultures that have been described as 'hybridity'. She finds her voice for what might have been doubly silenced or derided. Earlier, she faced the moral consensus that cast her marriage as a transgression, expressed forcefully by her parents. She told the interviewer that as she left her parents' home on her wedding day, a wedding from which her parents absented themselves on account of her marrying outside the Bangladeshi community, it was 'probably the most traumatic thing I've ever had to deal with'. She felt 'a huge sense of guilt' despite knowing she was doing nothing wrong. This felt transgression might have undermined her resistance to the settled moral consensus.

In the event, there were bound to be psychic consequences involved in whatever unique combination of circumstances led to Liyanna, like so many others, contributing cultural hybridity. Betty Joseph, developing Bion's analysis of psychic change, wrote as follows: "the emergence of concern or guilt, and the wish to put things right, or going into flight from [responsibility] (…) feeling able to look at and struggle with what is going on and face anxiety or starting to deny it – these movements are the very stuff that is inherent in our understanding of psychic change" (Joseph, 1989, p. 195). The clash of old

and new, as manifested in the generations of Liyanna's family, generated just such feelings; psychic conflicts requiring imagination and thinking if Liyanna was to produce her own standpoint. The process of finding comfort in bringing emotional experience to thought had to traverse Liyanna's discomforts, for example in the interview as she brought back to mind the trauma of her parents' boycott of her wedding. Now, in the interview, Liyanna and the interviewer think together about the appearance of the baby who is a product of this marriage.

The "treacherous bind" of racial categories mentioned earlier might also have felt like a taken for granted bar on finding words with which to express the material reality of Liyanna's baby's facial features, but these discomforts were negotiated too. It can therefore emerge that the meaning of her baby's features was much wider, inextricably connected to the desire for her daughter to look like her, accompanied inevitably by the fear that she might not. Her dialogue with the interviewer can be seen as a passage from unavowed emotional experience to avowed (thought) rather than disavowed (and therefore silenced but embodied traumatically), with all the consequences for transformation that this affords.

Venn and Valerie Walkerdine continue to do so since the death, in 2012, of

Cathy Urwin, who remains an affective and intellectual presence amongst the

four. We also thank Yasmin Gunaratnam, who made an invaluable

contribution to the development of this paper.

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[i] The name Liyanna is a pseudonym. We have changed some biographical details to protect Liyanna's anonymity.

[ii] We used the term identity partly because of the programme in which our project was located; also in order to challenge the common absence of 'subjectivity' within identity theory, to stretch the canvas of identity, to take a psycho-social approach.

[iii] Cathy Urwin, experienced in infant observation, led the six, year-long observations conducted by trained observers. The three interviewers, Heather Elliott, Wendy Hollway and Ann Phoenix, attended weekly infant observation seminars where the observers' notes were thought about in the group, drawing on an epistemology that privileged the use of researcher subjectivity as an instrument of knowing (see Urwin 2007 for details).

[iv] Hybridity has been recognized as an unfortunate term because of its uses in plant breeding, where it has a "marked tendency towards sterility and uniformity", a meaning "precisely the opposite" to those intended by its usage in this context (Cohen and Toninato). Cohen and Toninato go on to say "Provided one discards the biological referents and uses the term sociologically, the term 'hybridization' is more or less synonymous with creolization and many authors use these two terms interchangeably".
(http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/current/cscs/creolizationconcepts/hybridity/. Accessed 14/06/2013.

[v] A conflation of generations was fascinatingly suggested in two other Bangladeshi heritage mothers' use of the names Mum and Dad for the new babies. When Juhana's daughter was six months old, the observer recorded in her notes a session where the baby is taking solid foods: "There you go, Mom, smack your lips it's so good", Juhana then commenting that she didn't know why she called her that. Silma recounted how furious her younger sister had been when Silma called her baby Dad (their father had died many years previously): she cried for over an hour. Silma had told her "But I have to call someone Dad".

[vi] The interviewer's fieldnotes remarked several times on the absence of references to the husband in Liyanna's interviews (in contrast to her sister and her own family). This emphasis on the family of origin rather than the baby's father was common across the sample at this stage of the research (Elliott, 2007). The context of living in Tower Hamlets, within a Bangladeshi origin community, includes Liyanna's parents, brother and sister all living within short distances, in contrast to her husband's family who live on the other side of London.
[viii] According to Margaret Archer 'The realist insists that what is the case places limits upon how we can construe it' (1998: 195). 'To sustain a clear concept of the continued independent reality of being – of the intransitive or ontological dimension – in the face of the relativity of our knowledge' (Archer, 1998 p. x) is part of critical realism's challenge to constructionism. In this endeavour it makes a distinction between intransitive objects: 'those things which exist and act independently of our description of them' (Bhaskar, 1998: 198) and transitive objects which are concept dependent (ibid).

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