Animating hatreds: research encounters, organisational secrets, emotional truths

Book Chapter

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Successful empirical sociology depends on understanding the ways social actors, including researchers of all sorts, manage secrecy and disclosure of their motives, identities, and practices. Mitchell, 1993:10

He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal may keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips….. Freud, 1905:77

…the potential space of the secret for a child, where he can build up and sustain a private tradition of the maturing and growing self … can become distorted into secretiveness. Khan, 1977:121

Introduction

For at least two decades, prompted and encouraged by an ever developing feminist research praxis, the injunction to be self-reflexive in the research process has become somewhat of a commonplace for social science researchers (see editors introduction for discussion). In this chapter, I want to take the injunction for self-reflexivity as a starting point for looking back at some research I carried out about 15 years ago and use it as an opportunity to explore – and expose – some of the secrets and silences embedded in it.

So let me begin by using the pronoun that feminists (me included) have rendered problematic – we – and ask: How do 'we' as feminist researchers reveal and come to terms with what it is that motivates the selection of particular sections of data for scrutiny – beyond that is, the dictates of the research question(s) being addressed, the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted, the argument made? Of course I have no idea of the answer to this question but I want to pose it, to myself at least, as a way of getting to a second question: that is what is the emotional truth behind or invested in the selection of particular segments of data for analysis and the development of one's argument as against other, equally illuminating, segments? I ask the question because I think that an attempted answer might help us (to use another of those problematic pronouns) tease out some of those aspects of research, understood as a professional and personal practice, that have been rendered secret. In this chapter I think there are three such secrets: the 'secret' about and the possible

effect of negative emotional experience; the occlusion of the agenda partly driving the selection of data for use in publication; and the organisational context influencing what can be said, what can be heard and what made intelligible.

Let me explain a little. In what follows I return to a small section of data generated in the course of a research project aimed at exploring how 'race' and gender were constituted in specific organisational and professional contexts and the experiences of black women social workers working in local authority social services departments in the 1980s and 1990s. In that project I interviewed 22 professionally qualified black women social workers and eight of their managers, of whatever ethnicity and gender. The data I return to here is taken from a two hour interview with a white woman area manager and I have used this material in previously published work (Lewis, 2000; Lewis, 2002). As I hope will become apparent the encounter with this manager was marked by moments of acute emotional intensity and strain and led to a state of mind in me that was full of rage and bent on vengeance. Yet this desire for vengeance was masked from view, sanitised by the process of writing academically for publication. The effect was to make the affective register secret and my state of mind a secretively held undercurrent pulling some of the subsequent work with the data in a particular direction. Following a lead offered by the psychoanalyst Masud Khan (1977) my use of the term 'secret' here means kept private or undisclosed whereas 'secretively' has a different inflection aimed at summoning up a degree of slyness harnessed to a desire in me for domination in a context in which the formation of some kind of real relationship became psychically impossible. This desire for domination emerged out of the *pain* of the research encounter and was, I now think, a form of psychic defence against this pain but turned into a form of concealed hitting back.

The secretiveness and its disguise were partly facilitated by the theoretical and methodological approach I had adopted for the research, i.e. Foucaultian discourse analysis. A qualifying comment is required. I do not intend this to be read as repudiating the capacity for discourse analytic methodology to produce rich and textured analyses of the complexities of social life as people attempt to make sense of their worlds, their places in it and struggle rhetorically to establish coherent and plausible narratives as they (we!) negotiate the ideological dilemmas in which they (we) find themselves (ourselves). Yet as my theoretical and methodological orientations have expanded I have come to think that discursive work can only take us

so far and that its limitations preclude the capture of some of the more inchoate, subtle and enigmatic aspects of human interaction and experience that are integral to the making of psychic and social meaning. To capture something of the emotional experience of 'race' and gender as processes of inter-subjective entanglement in organisational contexts a different (or additional) theoretical frame and methodology would have been necessary. Thus, had I been concerned to capture something of the emotional truth of the encounter between myself and the social services area manager, something of the affective registers and flows between us that punctuated the interview and was interred within but not transparent in the words that were produced as we talked then the secretiveness might not have been so easily disguised and might not have been so powerfully mobilised.

In many senses then, this is a confessional and indeed reparative piece that has running through it a claim about the impact of what different theoretical and/or methodological approaches can deliver – indeed are designed to deliver – in terms of insights into the constitution of the social and the vagaries of human experience that is constitutive of and constituted by (to speak in highly social constructionist language) that social yet which also exceeds it. I recognise that this difference is related to a major difference in the theorisation of subjectivity and subject formation but I do not intend to address this issue here. Rather I attempt to illustrate and develop the former claim by looking at the way hatred was educed and deployed in one part of the encounter with the area manager and re-examine some of the data that I have previously used in publication. I do so with the aim of thinking anew the determinants of this interaction, its content and effects, paying attention to the way that the emotional states of hatred and vengeance became central in both the inter-subjective encounter and the subsequent selection of material for publishing purposes. In doing so I want to point to what was neither seen nor directly spoken and yet was powerfully present and fundamentally contextual in a complex temporal and organisational matrix.

My re-thinking has been facilitated by a systems psychodynamic approach to organisational and group process[1]. The nature of the relationship between individual, group and organisation (Freud, 1921; Bion, 1961; Jacques, 1955; Menzies-Lyth,

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[1] The journal *Organisational and Social Dynamics* is a particularly good source for an illustration of the range, objects of enquiry and methodological and theoretical emphases encompassed within this approach.

1959) has long been the subject of theoretical and empirical inquiry and many different ways of conceiving the relationship have developed. There are variations among those who combine psychodynamic and systems approaches but generally they share a commitment to thinking through the dynamic relation between intra-psychic and inter-subjective processes, on the one hand and organisational systems and their effects on individuals and groups, on the other. With a debt to group relations model associated with the Tavistock the focus is the 'here and now' of group interaction mediated through conscious and unconscious processes. Lawrence has described this model as a "'living methodology' for inspecting the conscious and unconscious realities of groups and institutions and the political relatedness (authority, management, and organization) of individuals in roles" (Lawrence, 1979, p.4). It "uses subjectivity" (Lawrence, 1979, p5) to gauge the quality of organisational life.

In the context of this chapter two factors are particularly significant. First is the conception of organisation as an active, on-going process and field of social action, including that of meaning-making (Stein, 2008). The second is that the dynamics propelling the forms and meanings of (formal and informal) relatedness among organisational members are understood as being conscious and unconscious, cognitive and emotional. Thus 'organisation' is less a reference to a pre-existing structure and more about referencing a process of human relatedness in a context of specific roles, tasks, social and professional identities and institutionalised norms of linkage and division among different units or departments. This means that the *emotional experience and meaning* of the organisation (including the meaning given by organisational members to the hierarchies of division, status and role) is a key object of enquiry since it is this that is deemed central to capturing something of the livedness of organisational life. David Armstrong (2005:52 [1995]) captures this in his evocative reformulation of the phrase "organisation-in-the-mind".

The rest of the chapter is organised into five sections. I begin with a brief outline of the approach to organisation I adopted at the time of the original research and the earlier publications. I then re-present the previously published research material, hoping to capture the affective tenor of the interaction, my responses to it and point to some questions that now arise for me. I then think about this material afresh through the lens of systems psychodynamic theory harnessed to a brief discussion of theories of multiculture. My aim is to offer a psychosocial reading of the material, inviting readers to compare this with the earlier discourse analytic

reading (e.g. Lewis, 2002). In doing this I hope to show some of the ways that secrecy and silence operated in the work I did after the research encounter but also how organisational (public) secrets were already animating some aspects of the encounter. I end with a brief concluding section in which I suggest some of the implications of this way of approaching research – the process and the after-image. I suggest that where the aim of feminist anti-racist research is to capture aspects of the discursive constitution of the social *and* human experience, self-reflexivity requires that we take the risk of revealing the secrets and secretiveness that may be powerfully present yet have remained silent.

Organisations as sites of difference and inequality: an earlier held view

As situated structures and processes organisations inevitably reflect wider societal inequalities yet organisations themselves are sites of power and thus are productive in the Foucaultian sense (Foucault, 1978). That is, in the complex dynamic of interaction between the societal context and the organisation, the organisation becomes a space in which inequalities are constituted or brought into being. This is so not just in terms of the formal hierarchies of status, authority and chains of command but also as arena in which the 'big' axes of differentiation and inequality are themselves constituted. Of course, the movement of what we might call social subjects, i.e. people already positioned within axes of inequality and differentiation outside the organisation, across the boundaries demarcating the organisation as a specific and identifiable entity, ensures that already formed social positions and identities enter the organisation from outside. However, it is my argument (both at the time of the original research and now) that organisations do not simply reflect that which is generated outside but are also places where inequalities and the categories and identities associated with them are constituted, performed and experienced. In part this means that if one is thinking about how 'race' and gender are brought into being in particular organisations, such as social services departments as I then was, the researcher is exploring how those working within them are constituted as racialised and gendered *organisational* subjects and how this subject-hood is experienced in its organisational specifics.

Taking this approach seriously would mean tracing not just how gender and 'race' operate within the organisation – as discursive production and experiential performance, but also how the organisation, as a set of inter-subjective, group and emotional processes, 'acts back' to craft dimensions of difference in its own image

and which make for the quality of human experience as felt and lived (intra-psychically and inter-subjectively) in the specifics of the here-and-now of organisational life. It is this latter part that I would now argue I failed to address in the earlier work and which meant that I was unable to make sense of and work with the powerful emotional experience of that research encounter with the area manager I call Annie[2]. Let's hear something from her now.

The research encounter - I

The following is taken from the two hour interview with Annie and is the section of transcript material that I have previously used[3]. I had arrived as the researcher who, equipped with her armoury of social theory, was there to excavate how this other woman constructed social differences of 'race' and gender through the discursive resources she drew upon. Approximately two thirds through the interview I ask:

> *GL: How do you think differences of 'race' and gender reflect themselves in this area office?*

> *Annie: Well, I have not been here very long, but I think there are issues around gender, certainly, in that there are two female [team] managers, Bianca and Shirley, who are both black, and a white male, team manager, and he is acting up into the deputy post, and I certainly would say I like Bianca and Shirley a lot. It is not that I don't like Richard, but I feel more comfortable with women any way and I am conscious that as a group of three women, we combine together to somewhat undermine and get at Richard. [laughs loudly and heartily] I don't know why I am laughing, and it is not funny and not good. Shocking really. It's no better…em, so if you can do that to one person you can do that to another. Um, yes it's not good, but we **do** do it, and within that er both those two women are very competent, very good workers, and there is something about this that is very good for me and although this isn't my permanent job, I am able to swan around and be area manager with team managers, um, and although I haven't thought about it till just now, but there is this sense of it is like having a better possession, a better car [pause approx 3 seconds] and part of that is of course not about the fact that they are good workers, but it is an added dimension of good workers who are women and who are also black, it is like you have got the icing on the cake.*

[2] All names of research participants are pseudonyms
[3] In the 2002 publication I cross-read this section of account from Annie with an account from Shirley, one of the team managers mentioned here

One could analyse this sequence of talk with reference to a whole range of social theory, especially feminist post-structuralist and critical race theory to 'unwrap', analyse and reveal its workings discursively. We could show how, in answer to my question, Annie constructs a narrative that is convened around organisational positions and constructs a gendered 'we' that crosses organisational boundaries of status. We could show how this reference to their relative positions within the organisation also lays the ground for her claim of 'ownership' of the two women team managers, and how in doing so she performs racial difference by constituting herself as white without ever mentioning it. We could show how the switch from a gendered 'we' (i.e. a 'we' constituted as the gendered same) to an organisationally and racially constituted 'me/them' suggests something of the ideological dilemmas with which Annie struggles and also reinstates hierarchies and we could analyse her account in terms of its constitutive effects and her performances of gender and 'race'.

Then, in an attempt to locate this sequence of talk and the specificity of the research encounter in a more 'global' social topography of gendering and racialisation we could draw, for example, on Joan Scott (1988) and Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham (1992) to develop a theorisation of how the social as a field of interaction and a network of power is simultaneously at work and constituted in the extract. And we could show how the categories 'race' and 'gender' were deemed (by both Annie and me as researcher) to be among those at the heart of questions of 'difference', and thus how the social (understood as uneven but intersecting 'differences') enters into the corridors and meeting rooms of public sector organisations and come out of the mouths of those of us who work in them.

And, thinking that all this would be both politically relevant and demonstrable of a competent researcher, this is what I did. I still think there is much of value in showing how social differences are constituted in these micro-social, organisational situated processes. But, and it is a big but, let's listen to a bit more of the story – bits of the story that evoke something of the emotional experiences conjured up in the course of the encounter and which gesture toward a much more layered evocation of organisational process and the inter-subjective play of power across difference, but which were held secretively in the subsequent unfolding of the research process.

The aftermath: Research diary entry.

I left that interview in a complete rage, I can't believe it!!! " the icing on the cake!? A better possession!??" Who the 'f***' does she think she is and imagine

working with her, as her team manager when she is your Area manager. Slavery done long time! Well I'll get her, I'll definitely use this. Typical bloody white people, they just cannot see can they – even when they think they're being so cool and so progressive. Well you wait. I then went off to a pre-arranged meeting with a white woman friend of mine for a cup of coffee and chat. I am impossible, passively aggressive; querying her every statement or comment. Just totally closed and rejecting. I eventually make an excuse and apologise, saying I have a terrible headache and must go home. I keep saying "Sorry, another time soon, is that ok? Great, sorry, take care though and see you soon. What? Yeah ok I'll give you a ring tomorrow to let you know how I feel". Even when I left and went home that interview, that shit-bag woman was still with me, she is now! I think it was when she was also talking about how she thinks black women are being progressed up the hierarchy too fast – and making it seem like she cared about them being set up to fail – I think I was on the alert then. Oh god, I hate this interviewing….

There are a number of things I want to say in light of this widening picture. Firstly, the switch in register from direct speech to reportage within the brief space of this diary entry is notable. In part this is because it was written three or four days after the actual interview. But I think there is more at play than this. Despite the fact that both registers conjure up the entanglement of powerful emotional experiences across two sequential inter-subjective encounters, the register of direct speech in relation to the interview with Annie hints at my inability to move with linear time as I recall it – I register it as if it is 'now'. In contrast, the account of my behaviour with my friend, though emotionally fraught, is presented as past. Yet what binds the two experiences is that they appear as equally unprocessed, more characteristic of what Bion (1962) called "beta elements" (i.e. the sensory and/or somatic aspects of experience (Britton, 1992). It was this that I was locked into and even though they were given a form of words I was unable to process them into a form of thinking from which I could learn and mould into an analytical tool for the research I was undertaking. Instead they became harnessed to a strategy of psychic defence and vengeance disguised behind the performance of professional competence.

I am also struck by the analytical opportunity that was lost as a result of my theoretical inability to *use creatively* the emotional experience, an analytical use that *might* have contributed to a more rounded and sensitive presentation of this part of the interview and thus a more rounded understanding of the making and experience of

'race' and gender in a particular organisational context. Yet it is precisely at that junction of the micro and macro-social in the here-and-now of the inter-subjective encounter of a research interview in a given organisational context that a particular quality of emotional experience arose. And it is this situated experience occurring within the strictures of the rules of the research game as I understood them at the time and subject to the logics of the theoretical and methodological tools I adopted that rendered ground fertile for the animation of hatred and vengeance so apparent in the research diary entry. Having heard from Annie and I separately let's hear a bit more of our question and answer interaction.

The Research Encounter – II

The following is a much longer sequence of text from Annie's interview that occurred about fifteen minutes into the interview, i.e. earlier than that already presented. I had been asking about the public sector reforms introduced by the Thatcher governments, especially the introduction of the purchaser/provider system of organising service provision and structuring the relationships among departments and sections. I had wanted to know whether she thought these changes had impacted on issues of 'race' and gender and if so how.

GL: Right, so tell me if you were, if you had to sort of think how this delegation of responsibility and authority, how do you think it might have impacted on black women, because as you say the point is to take it right down to basic social workers grade?

Annie: Well I suppose I would look at it from the other way actually, I would look at it from, em, the bottom up I would say, the majority of the time, I mean, mean many of the service users that we work with in this borough are black and are women and black women carers of their children.

GL: yes, um

Annie: Having had more authority and responsibility, more control over budgets has meant that, em, all workers, field workers whatever their ethnicity, their gender, are able to offer a better service to that bulk of service users, and I would say that has massive impact, if you can work much more effectively in partnership with all clients, but particularly if we are talking about black women, with black women who are carers of children, then you are going to feel differently if you are a black women worker about how valuable the service is that you are providing, I would say

…

GL: ri:ght

*So that's on one level, I think there is an area that concerns me that I think needs to be more openly on the agenda, and people need to **feel free** to **speak** about it, and I don't sense they are, and there is this tremendous push in 'Centreville' to get women and black women into management positions, and I think sometimes that black women are not being allowed to move up this management ladder at a pace that suits them, and are being pushed up before they are ready and could get into a position of being set up to fail, and I just think that this needs to be opened up and I think this needs to go openly onto the agenda. I am not saying that there is not other ways that other people move up the ladder before they are ready, I mean white men move that ladder before they are ready because people, you know, whatever the push to get black women into management actually take white men into management for all sorts of reasons. So they move up before they are ready too and white women move up before they are ready, but in terms of black women I think that's having an impact I would say and I don't think that's sufficiently on the agenda.*

GL: Oh. On who's agenda?

Annie: Well, no it is not right to say it is not on the agenda (2 second pause) but I certainly would say it's on the senior managements' team agenda, this is what we have got to do, we have to get black women into management.

GL: Senior management posts?

Annie: Yes. Em, and that is said but what isn't open for discussion, it seems, is that it may be putting unreasonable pressures on some black women to move up the system when either they don't want to, because either they want to carry on what they want to be doing, or move up before they feel ready to do so and asking them to move up into a climate where they feel, and I know from some of my black colleagues, where they will be expected to demonstrate they are better than, and can't afford to make mistakes and are not adequately supported.

GL: So what sorts of things, er how would you think this should be managed … what kind of procedures, training, policy packages, I don't know what they might be, to both ensure that women can travel up but at the same time avoid some of those pitfalls?

Annie: em, well, er I mean that is something that the senior management team, and I am not part of the senior management team that I am talking about

GL: right

Annie: em, Janet, um mostly Tim Smith, Judith, Andrew, Bryan Brown, I think that is something that either they have to take responsibility for and say so very clearly, and I'm not saying the rest of us don't but I think they have to lead on that, and I think they have to open the debate on it and I think they have to make the debate safe mm [2 second pause] and there was an incident about two months ago now which I feel illustrates all this and I felt very upset about, where we had a joint meeting between the two divisions. Every now and then we have these joint meetings … and somewhere or other the assistant director in community care, Judith Arsenal, who is a white woman, said that she and Andrew who is a white man had been having a discussion about how to support black staff and that they, em really felt that they didn't know where to go next and didn't know what else they could do, and, oh, that provoked am absolute storm of anger from Tim Smith who got really angry and who I felt was particularly abusive and I said so afterwards, and he said this is a load of crap and he said you cannot sit there and say you don't know what to do, it's a cop out if our black staff hear you say that, they would be disgusted. (voice lowered) He was really prissy about it, and I thought well you know, I was really angry and very upset about it.

GL: Did you agree with the sentiment or was it that you were angry about the way they did this?

Annie: well you know, I thought he was abusing his power, as a white male, very high up the system in speaking in this way and felt that the way that he had put it wasn't at all enabling and my belief is that unless people are able to keep a dialogue going

GL: sure

Annie: Unless people are able to say and white people <u>have</u> to be able to say I <u>don't know</u> what to do next, and I don't know, my belief is that I have a right to go to my black colleagues, black counterparts and say 'I don't know what to do next here', and they may say 'No I won't' and I may have to go elsewhere, and I may have to go outside the organisation to seek support, but it seems to me to be absolute nonsense that I shouldn't be able to go to somebody like Gemma, for example, who is my counterpart, a black women, and say 'Gemma I don't know what else to do now, will you help me?' and it seems to me that what was being said [at that meeting] was that black people can't be asked to be able to take this responsibility and the responsibility must rest with white people and I don't agree with that. Em, I'm not saying that black people have to take responsibility and tell us what to do but I think it is a shared

experience, and most important for me is that you must keep the dialogue open and moving and I felt that his intervention really was unhelpful and what it meant for me was that if I had something to say, er that I wanted to say um in that kind of meeting, where the people who had the most power were the most concentrated then I was going to be very frightened to open my mouth, and this is not very constructive, and I was very upset by that really, and did say something in the meeting that I felt it was important for people to say what they felt without being castigated. He came to me afterwards and said well your body language said it all. [And I said] Well you know what you were saying wasn't helpful, it was not helpful for you as a white man, in a position of enormous power to speak in that way, and he accepted that.

With reparation in mind: rethinking the research encounter

Even in the absence of a transcription convention that captures the patterns, flows, tones and hesitations of Annie's speech I think it is possible to hear/feel the passion and emotional intensity with which she delivers it, especially where she discusses the incident with Tim Smith. She clearly states that in her view certain things are unsayable in the organisational environment operating at the time. That which is unsayable is racialised as are those who are silenced whilst the arbiters of the sayable are gendered. She makes it clear that for her patrolling the boundaries of the sayable results in an atmosphere of fear and, perhaps more importantly, this in its turn erodes any possibility of *creative* thinking among the senior management team and groups of colleagues more generally. Perhaps more tellingly in the context of my concerns, Tim Smith's anger, rage and intolerance is powerfully evoked as is her own anger and fury.

All this followed from her statement and apparent concern about black women being set up to fail, i.e. one of the things that I had referred to with such rage in my diary entry. So anger, rage, offence and a sense of being silenced and abused were emotions that *both* Annie and I refer to, suggesting that these were distinguishing features of the affective register of our inter-subjectivity (at least in parts of the research encounter) and *perhaps* characterised more generally the affective register of the organisation as it sought to respond to issues of 'race' and gender. At this point I am not in a position to pursue the extent to which this was a more general feature of the organisational atmosphere. What I can say is that encountering powerful emotional experiences is an occupational hazard of the social and human researchers' trade.

In his book *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research* Peter Clough (2002) presents a series of stories taken from educational settings with the aim of contributing to a project which "redefine[s] the relations between subject with object, or researcher and researched identities, and of knowing with the known" (p.4). Particularly striking is the way that Clough integrates emotional experience into the narrative content and structure of the stories and argumentation. In one story organised around a boy named 'Klaus', Clough writes:

> "I've met my father and his sons in so many special schools. ….By the time I got to the main road I was crying. The fear that day was a simple animal fear and it was a galvanic nothing … by the other fear that I later felt in front of Klaus's father. I was immobilised by that other fear. That was something that reached down the canal of my composure and found the ever-leaking corrosion of my father's presence" (pp.20-22).

This brief quotation is a miss-service to Clough's book, robbing it of its full texture and complexity. Nevertheless it provides a powerful and moving evocation of the way that researchers can unexpectedly encounter our emotional and long-felt demons in the course of a day's (research) work. In this it is evocative of my experience with Annie and perhaps Annie's experience with me.

Taking a lead from Clough, I can begin by asking: So who was it that stood before each other in that interview? Who did each of us meet and what did we expect of each other as we embarked on our two hour interaction? To begin to answer these questions a brief bit of ground-clearing is warranted. I am not about to launch into a series of conjectures about things that I cannot know, i.e. conjectures about Annie's transference based on her early life experience and inner-object world. Any such attempt would be futile and within the theoretical and methodological terms of systems psychodynamic theory it is not necessary though any research project adopting this theoretical and methodological approach would be concerned to track (via observation and/or individual and group interviews and the researcher's own experience) the movement between different states of mind among the various staff groups as manifest in the dynamics among them as they pursue their various tasks.

That said the analysis stays within the here-and-now of the research encounter but that here-and-now *is* marked by the conjunction of a number of different and asymmetrical experiential temporalities, as the quotation from Clough indicates. As the researcher I bring a temporal here-and-now but as Annie's account unfolds *my*

accumulated *past* experiences of racialising gendered talk are re-animated as part of the 'now' and becomes the aural and emotional register through which I hear and respond to everything that comes after *"I think it was when she was talking about how she thinks black women are being progressed up the hierarchy too fast"*. For Annie what we can say is that she feels an urgent need to break through the organisational conspiracy of silence about issues of 'race' and gender, including whether black women are being set up to fail. A silence that, in her organisation-in-the-mind, she says (feels) is rampant at least at the level of those with more organisational status and power – white men.

Yet even here nothing is simple, for if we take the two sections of her account together we see that 'white men' are a differentiated category: there are those in the senior management team like Tim Smith and there are those organisationally subordinate to her like Richard. In relation to Tim Smith black women cannot be called upon as colleagues in a gesture of creative thinking (about anything) but in relation to Richard they can be incorporated into a kind of gang and, as Canham (2002) suggests, a key characteristic of the gang as opposed to the group is the inability to bear difference. Moreover, with an implicit nod to those beyond the Area Office, black women 'gang' members can be 'owned' as a token symbolising what Annie had told us was seen as the organisational good: black women in some kind of management position. And there I am before her as a receptacle into which she can pour her views (anger, frustration, vengeance?). And I am ripe.

For if it was not my father and his daughters whom I met in that social services department office, who was it – for as my research diary entry suggests, I knew this 'kind' of white woman very well and here she was before me again! And she was surely, sorely well known. It was this debilitating and frightening familiarity that animated the vengeance and rage and hatred that was itself of a product of earlier hurts – at individual and collective level. The question is how to make sense of the links between these familiar hurts and the unfolding research process. I want to try to address this in a number of ways.

First, as I look back over this material I am struck by two things, one is the point already made about the prevalence of rage, hatred and vengeance in the organisation, at least as narrated by Annie. Thus we can wonder whether *all* the rage, hatred and desire for vengeance that I felt was *my own* or whether I was also expressing that felt by other people who had unconsciously communicated it to me by

a process of projective identification. In this context projective identification can be thought of as a (defensive) communication animated by the organisational inability to facilitate and contain the difficulties of and foster creative thinking about matters of 'race' and gender among a staff group fractured by these forms of difference and hierarchies of grade and status. I am also struck by the sense of *loss* that seems to permeate the encounter and interview material: loss of voice, loss of professional competence, loss of relationship among colleagues – a series of losses experienced by both Annie and I. The problem is that neither of us had a containing[4] environment to which we could take and process that experience of loss and in such situations facing loss (actual or phantasised) becomes unbearable and rich material for processes of splitting between 'good' and 'bad'. If I am right that loss is a central thread running through the encounter and the organisational experience I think it possible to make a cogent case that 'triumph' or perhaps more accurately 'triumphalism' was at least one factor behind my selection of data from the interview with Annie. For loss, at least from the perspective of object relations theory and the form of group and organisational theory influenced by it, can produce states of mind in which fear, anger and annihilation predominate which in turn lead to forms of psychic defence.

In this regard I am reminded of a point made by Melanie Klein (1940/1986) in a paper on the psychic process of mourning. She writes:

> I wish to stress the importance of *triumph*, closely bound up with contempt and omnipotence, …One of the ways in which hatred expresses itself in the situation of mourning is in feelings of triumph over the dead person [lost object]….In my experience, feelings of triumph are inevitably bound up even with normal mourning, and have the effect of retarding the work of mourning…In my view, this 'narcissistic satisfaction' [when ego severs attachment to lost object] contains …the triumph (pp.157, 161).

So there Annie and I were, face-to-face in the context of a project exploring the experiences of black women social workers and in which the affective atmosphere is thick with a sense of obstruction, abuse and annihilation as a woman with thoughts and concerns. No wonder she was easy pickings for a highly defended researcher who phantasied about getting back at her and thus 'commanding' her. And one who was equipped with a theoretical and methodological approach that facilitated the

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[4] Here I am using the notion of containing in the sense proposed by Bion (1962).

production of a adequate analysis, whilst disguising the element of vengeance and psychic defence that were secretively inscribed in that analysis.

For I was battered in that double sense of encased in and bashed by experience as I felt stripped of my humanity (another bit of "the icing on the cake"). I was incapable of hearing, feeling or connecting with anything other than this woman's recourse to racist discourse. Totally unable to recognise or even countenance Annie's sense of being de-professionalised and demonised if she asked for help. I was thus unable to engage with the full range of emotional experience generated between us. I was not able to use that multifaceted experience as an analytical tool and as something from which I might learn and which might have enabled a more textured analysis of the processes and experience of racialisation and gendering. To get to that place I would have had to consider questions that were too difficult to even put into words let alone face and process. Such as whether the circulation of an affective economy that includes this kind of triumph also helps us understand our investments in particular intellectual projects. To ask whether we think expending intellectual energy in the direction of disrespect, trauma, pain will help us to 'master' – triumph over – our own traumas, our own pains as we go about our work as qualitative feminist researchers? These are among the questions that are now among my intellectual and political pre-occupations. At the time I did not have the emotional, theoretical or methodological resources that would have been necessary to consider the link between intellectual and creative work, on the one hand, and subjectivity, on the other.

Organisation as Multicultural and Affective Zone

Earlier I outlined the way in which I had been thinking organisations as sites for the production of racialised and gendered difference at the time of the original publication. I also stated that there were three secrets interred within the earlier research: the secret of emotional experience; the secret of the relation between that emotional experience and data selection; and the secret of the censoring and persecutory organisation. Now, having established the ground upon which these 'secrets' took root, I want to offer a different way to think organisational process as I near the end of this new pathway through the original research encounter.

Within the UK (and indeed other parts of northern Europe) public sector organisations have been placed on the frontline of attempts by Government to foster

their preferred approaches to the management of ethnic and other forms of social diversity. As such public sector organisations are zones of *multiculturalism*: that is they are the administrative units charged with implementing the policies that are aimed at governing populations marked by the postcolonial logics of difference.

But they are also zones of *multiculture* (Hesse, 2000): that is spaces of encounter and negotiation across numerous forms of difference – sexual, cultural, religious, gendered and classed. In this conception of multiculture it is the indeterminancy of the meaning and reach of cultural difference that is foregrounded and which marks out a space of what Hesse calls undecidability. In my reading, designating zones of multiculture as sites of *negotiation* and including public sector organisations among these suggests that they are also sites of inter-subjective encounter and experience in which all the vagaries of intra-psychic and inter-subjective anxiety and possibility are also present.

Yet as a field of practice and interaction, it is precisely the ambiguity, or undecidability of the multicultural that is in play in the everyday of organisational sociality. As I indicated earlier, from a psychodynamics of organisation perspective this ambiguity with its lack of clear boundaries makes such organisations fertile ground for the mobilisation of psychic defence mechanisms at individual and group level. Thus the conjunction of multicultural ambiguity with unstable and changing work contexts impacts upon the extent to which individual and/or organisational defences are mobilised. Such conditions characterised the social services department in which Annie worked and which I entered as researcher.

In such circumstances what Hirschhorn (2000:26), calls "normal psychological injuries" are part of the quotidian fabric of working life. Such injuries "are the normal, expectable hurts that people experience as they try to collaborate with others in implementing an organisation's primary tasks within an *uncertain environment*" (my emphasis). In framing the issues in this way he points to the organisational situatedness of interpersonal relations and the psychodynamic processes evoked as people work in pursuit of the primary task. What then have to be negotiated are the demands, ambitions and anxieties provoked by the assumption of organisational roles. Including those of competency and what is deemed sayable, how and to whom.

Through the analytical lens offered by systems psychodynamic approach the demands of group and organisational life are fertile sites for the generation of paranoid phantasies in which ontological security is threatened. Jacques (1955) suggested a profoundly interactive relation between the psychic and affective world of individual members and those organisations of which they are a part. Other writers, as noted earlier, have suggested that individuals symbolically internalise the institutions with which they are connected (Armstrong, 2005) and thus there is a dynamic interplay of projection and introjection of affective states, including the anxieties generated by the very character of group and organisational interaction. Thus boundaries, psychic and structural, are central to the anxieties and ambivalences of individuation/group membership. I also want to insist that the *academic researcher* also be placed within this formation and thus subject to the same conditions, vagaries and anxieties.

If I now 'know' this, the discourse analytic perspective that was my intellectual armament at the time offered me much *but* had no way of alerting me to this way of thinking human relatedness. Had I been able at that time to recognise the inter-subjective emotional dynamics of my encounter with Annie, including my own intra-psychic conflicts that it seems evident had been animated I might have been able to use this understanding together with my own pain as an analytic resource rather than a cause for triumph and quest for (defensive) domination. I might have attempted to read the 'possession' extract against or alongside the grain of the second (sequentially earlier) extract. This might have enabled me to recognise that Annie's attempt to seek refuge in whiteness (*for I still have no doubt that she does resort to this*) and her organisational position were defensive responses through which she was seeking to bring some stability and meaning to a here-and-now that was profoundly unstable and ambiguous as the organisation struggled to meet both the challenges to racialised and gendered power and the new systems of service delivery. In that context I might have read the extract about being able to ask black people for help when at a loss as reaching for a connection: as an ambivalent and ambiguous claim of (frightening?) responsibility. At the same time a closer cross-reading of those extracts might have suggested that the claim about "moving up too fast" be heard as a kind of displacement of Annie's own here-and-now anxieties about her ability to do her job in a context of organisational chaos and censorship in which the ambiguities of multiculture were pronounced.

This would have offered a very different analysis not one that totally replaced the earlier theoretical and methodological approach and arguments made but which expanded and deepened them. And, in the context of this volume one that offered a more complex form of researcher reflexivity, one in which the vengeful and pained secretiveness was replaced by a more creative, even if private, secret space in which a different kind of thinking was possible and in which discursive constitution of sameness and difference sat alongside a commitment to capture something of human experience – and learn from it.

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