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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Culture as the bad object

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Abstract This paper creatively extends Fairbairn's theory to investigate the impact of the UK's hostile environment policy on marginalised communities at the intersection of culture, politics and society. The hostile environment is conceptualised as a disruptive 'bad object' in the cultural dimension in alignment with Fairbairn's theory. Its influence is explored in terms of its unconscious reproduction within the psyche. By juxtaposing context, theory and personal introspection, this paper offers a Fairbairnian exploration of how sociality and sociopolitical contexts interplay with the intricate processes of the human psyche. It provides reflective commentary on how external racial dynamics are internalised within the endopsychic structure, shaping one's interactions with others, and, more significantly, how one relates to aspects of the self.

Keywords Fairbairn · hostile environment · psychosocial · racism · autoethnography

Feeling 'Racist'

My partner and I were on a bus from Edinburgh on the way to the Borders. A few stops further down the journey, a group of East Asian people got on.

This should not have bothered me, but it did.

My account will reveal how the internal and the external world each permeate and produce the other which makes us feel and act in ways that defy our character and best intentions. The theoretical discussion that follows attempts to use my experience of internalised racism as a focus of reflexive inquiry, adapting Fairbairn's original object relations theory psychosocially.

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I hope the reader will bear with me as doing so requires me to look into how the historically constituted social contract has taken root in me, and, as my vignette will reveal, can produce racist feelings when these implicit terms and conditions of how one should be appear challenged. The implicit social contract that governs how one should be and how one should conduct oneself in social relations, according to Charles Mills, is 'underwritten' by the racial contract in such a way that rights, duties and freedoms are frequently allocated 'on a racially differentiated basis' (1997, p. 93). The racial contract, as I reveal in the account below, powerfully shapes my everyday interactions with white and non-white others. In this examination, I cast light on an internal crisis when feelings betray identity – a crisis which is hard to confront without a backlash of feelings of hypocrisy and fraudulence against oneself. As I have argued alongside many other scholars (Lewis, 2009; O'Loughlin, 2020, 2022; Fang 2020a, 2020b, 2023), such autoethnographic explorations are essential for expanding psychoanalysis beyond its conventional scope of intrapsychic examinations towards a more critical, psychosocial praxis that meaningfully explores the implications of sociality and historicity on the psychic processes.

Back to the bus.

In the rear of the upper deck of the bus, we sat back, taking in the countryside breeze that slipped in from the window. The cool air calmed the queasiness in me, amplified by the anticipation of another hour of travel ahead. The group of people who had just boarded, walked down towards us, passed us. Judging by the logo on his hoodie, this appeared to be a student accompanied by his family, perhaps seizing the opportunity to do some sightseeing before university started. They sat themselves down in the last row, right behind us. Soon loud chatters were unleashed amongst themselves, their sandwich wrappers crackling. Uttered with a racing cadence and excitement, their voices were distinct like a live football channel on a radio.

The sense of unease intensified in me. I straightened up: I recognised who these voices belong to, by which I mean, *where they came from.* Other passengers in the front rows began to turn their heads around to look at us with expressions that indicated annoyance. A thought crept up in me: from their vantage point, it must have looked like we were all part of this same group. A sense of shame washed over me at the suspicion that I had been 'identified' as *one of them* – the guilty party who wouldn't stop shooting up swirls of clink-clank that wrecked the otherwise peaceful and quiet ambience all of us had managed to enjoy till now! A coiled charge of anger surged in me, at their obliviousness to the 'looks' other passengers were casting towards them, which I felt I was also on the receiving end of. Worst even, in my head, I felt somehow 'responsible' to get the group to quiet down so *we* would not be seen as such a nuisance!

A gentle tap on my wrist from my partner, who is white British, reminded me that the internal crisis was still attached to a living body. I realised the powerful mixture of anger and shame had melted into a strange ache in my chest where my hand was laying on. He whispered to me: 'relax', 'not long to go now', and 'try to focus on the scenery outside'.

This was hard.

What I was trying to get out of, namely this internal crisis, could not find a merciful moment of relief from the views of the idyllic landscape, the heather moors and rolling green hills of the Scottish countryside outside the window. For this crisis was a crisis of identity, of a clash of seeing myself as anti-racist, anti-oppressive, someone who has dedicated effort to the decolonial project, yet right at that moment being so caught up in a kind of horror, a kind of hate, that is racially driven. Yet these racist feelings of contempt and aggression as directed outwards towards the loud group of passengers, had nowhere to go but ended up ricocheted against a portion of the self that extended into a sweeping view of a wasteland: a ruin with no flow of time, no horizon. A ruin that is the 'everlasting, horrifying present of the past' (Martínez Ruiz, 2020, p. 601). Here, love and compassion towards difference, especially within the self, are as exhausted as the political rhetoric that marks you out as unbelonging and asks you to return to your place of origin.

Caught up in the middle of an inner horror, an impulse brimmed with simple glory of a promise – that the only way out of this overbearing affective cocktail of anger and shame would be to move to the other side. This would declare, once and for all, that I was not one of them. Shame, however, refocused my evaluation on the simplest measure of appearance: I cannot shed my yellow skin, no matter where I relocate. What if being the only yellow person on the white side isolates me on the receiving end of further contemptuous looks? These fears held me immobile. In this moment, the derogatory cliché of *rowdy* and *unruly* Chinese tourist*s* so often evoked in media portrayals loomed large.[1] Feeling isolated, I was alarmed by the prospect that, to get up and move away from *them,* my fellow yellow people*,* now would send a clear message of betrayal that I, one who looked just like them, had kowtowed to the Western production of these harmful stereotypes. What would they think of me and say about me that I could not help but understand in my mother tongue?

Much of these agonies were self-inflicted – a fact that could be thought about without being comprehended at the time. No one was accusing me of anything apart from my own hyper self-consciousness of my proximity to *them* on the grounds of my 'Chinese-like' appearance and my capacity to understand and to speak the language that was now a source of offence. My need to disassociate, in waiting for this agony to pass me over, was punctured by the echoes of loud sighs from the 'white' side of the bus as though they were gasping for a last breath of fresh air. I heard them as exaggerated war cries. In my head, it was as though the white passengers at the front were together holding the line against the rattling bombardment of a foreign kind pushing their way against a tranquil and orderly world of common sense.

Upon arrival, I spluttered to my partner with fervour: 'You see,' bizarrely in a 'Chinese' accent more distinctly uttered than ever, 'this is why people *here* don't like Chinese people!'

Seemingly taken aback, he said 'you are sounding quite racist just now, you know, they weren't that bad', thinking all along that I was just feeling a bit queasy

[1] For examples of this derogatory media portrayal, see 'Chinese Tourists: Mind Your Manners' (K.M., 2013) and 'Switzerland: Special trains for Chinese tourists' (News from Elsewhere, 2015).

on the bus and did not think much of the 'Chinese tourists' that had been my imagined nemesis!

What was going on in me that produced such an overbearing experience with my fellow racialised others? How could Fairbairn help me think through this, and, most importantly, how may doing so open up a new framework for thinking psychosocially? In the ensuing discussion, I will explore the sociopolitical landscape 'outside', focusing specifically on the UK's hostile environment and its underlying mechanisms that function as a racial contract, which subjects non-white individuals to oppressive conditions by forcibly reinstating the de facto form of ethno-nationalism which perpetuates white supremacy.

Anti-immigration culture in/through the hostile environment

From the haunting presence of the 'go home' vans traversing British streets to the Rwanda scheme, which threatened refugees arriving in dire circumstances with deportation to Rwanda upon setting foot in the UK, the hostile environment has thrived, evolving over the past decade and retaining a steadfast allegiance to its original mission: creating a 'truly hostile environment for illegal immigrants' within the UK – a mission inaugurated by the Conservative government in 2012. The convergence of policy and popular anti-immigrant sentiment orchestrates an environment where visibly non-white individuals face suspicion, all with the ultimate goal of targeting and subjecting undocumented individuals to severe psychological intimidation and hostility, driving them to eventually depart from Britain.

In *(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire,* Nadine El-Enany (2020) astutely interweaves Britain's colonial history – a topic frequently absent from mainstream political discourse – with contemporary immigration laws that particularly target non-white settlers. El-Enany compellingly argues that these immigration laws constitute an act of colonial theft. They were ostensibly created to control immigration, while simultaneously serving to maintain Britain as a racially and colonially structured environment. This structure utilised colonial capital to develop infrastructure, enhance healthcare, amass wealth, ensure security, and secure the futures of its white citizens, all while enforcing strict and punitive border controls that systematically impeded access for racialised 'subjects' from its former colonies.

Hostile environment operates as an 'unnamed political system' as Mills would call it: a contractual arrangement that works to uphold a certain power structure and with it 'socioeconomic privilege, norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties' (1997, p. 3). Mill's concept of social contract illustrates how racial ideologies not only shape the dominant political views, but they also produce in material conditions power structures that leave one vulnerable to the arbitrary will of the other. The formal rules, such as through the legal structure of immigration laws, are transformed into informal rules that shape the civic culture. This transformation is evident in the shaping of dominant political positions often viewed as favourable for electoral expediency.

Enacted at a cultural level, the punitive conditionality for those who seek to belong is recited in the public imagination of *those* who are different from *us* and what it means to mix with difference. When policy works in tandem with culture, as seen in the case of hostile environment, legislative rulings effectively and endlessly coerce, marginalise, and enforce the vulnerabilities of non-white groups in a way that addresses them as morally and culturally inferior. In recent years, we have seen how this foments politics of cruelty that persecutes and turns on politically precarious communities of the refugees and the asylum-seekers on the grounds of racial difference. Racial difference is often invoked and culturally justified by igniting highly inflammatory rhetoric that addresses immigrants as a public threat to what lies at the heart of British cultural life. This can be observed in a speech by the Minister for Immigration, Robert Jenrick, who depicted the differing 'values' and 'lifestyles' of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers as a menace to social cohesion (Syal, 2023). Jenrick later ordered the removal of cartoon murals from an asylum centre for unaccompanied children, fearing they were 'too welcoming' (Taylor, 2023).

Racism as a state of mind is imbued with feelings and relies on what Ronald Britton (2004) calls the problematic defence of 'hyper-subjectivity': when in a state of hyper-subjectivity, what matters is what we feel to be true, and our feelings are invested with conviction to justify our beliefs. Feeling is taken as the fundamental truth, and anything beyond that is disregarded. If other people do not see or feel things the same way we do, then it is their folly for failing to notice the obvious! Race, culture and ethnicity, as Dalal (2006) points out, often collapse into each other so that 'culture' is often reduced to divisions of ethnic groupings. In the speech by Jenrick (Syal, 2023), we see how 'culture' is invoked in ways that conflate with an ethnocentric logic that those who are not from here are fundamentally different from *us*, making it impossible for *us* to coexist naturally with *them* (Dalal, 2006, p. 39). This denial of shared common sense and qualities of humanness is invested with nationalist affects to maintain the public imagination of what it means to be British, and more importantly, what it means to appear as such.

While all immigrants, regardless of nationality, share a dimension of ontological precarity based on their dependence on the host country for the right to remain, the extent to which this is experienced is largely determined by how one 'appears' to the white gaze (Fang, 2020b). To appear, as Hannah Arendt (1978) argues, always means to '*seem* [emphasis added] to others, and this seeming varies according to the standpoint and the perspective of the spectators' (p. 21). As the epidermal logic of racial appearance and identification supplants the intricate nature of identity and subjectivity, so is the question of difference and sameness reduced to a superficial, skin-deep assessment of one's appearance based on racial index. The question of appearance is particularly crucial here for its political implications. Under the hostile environment, an arbitrary system of racial categories directly mediates the evaluation of an individual's character, categorising them into distinct groups from the viewpoint of the white gaze.

The government policy paper 'Home Office Measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill: Equalities Impact Assessment' (HM Government, 2023), reveals the tyranny of white supremacy that Mills refers to. It is worth

pointing out that this paper came *after* the Black Lives Matter movement sparked by the police brutality that led to the murder of George Floyd. Linking criminality with racial difference, it states:

> Any indirect difference on treatment on the grounds of race is anticipated to be potentially positive and objectively justified as proportionate means of achieving our legitimate aim of reducing serious violence and preventing crime. (HM Government, 2023, Section 3a 'Serious violence duty')

Through the legal terms of 'justified discrimination', racism is justified as necessary and weaponised as guiding principles for state intervention to achieve common good. In this light, hostility, as a psycho-affective mobilisation, is not one which affects all immigrants equally but particularly targets people who are not white. Analysing the political narrative that is used to justify and sustain the hostile environment, Mathew Whittle (2023) identifies two interlocking narrative devices circulated in political spaces: the 'story of the nation-as-family' which, echoing Dalal's point, defines cultural belonging mainly by race and ethnicity; and, the 'story of security', which frames refugees and immigrants as potential threats to the nation's safety and stability. The mobilisation and circulation of these 'stories' cast immigrants and war- and climate-induced refugees from non-European nations as fundamentally problematic.

These narratives are imbued with the sentiments of the 'war on terror' and the notion of 'a clash of civilisations', which are unmistakably evoked in Jenrick's speech (Syal, 2023). By justifying the hostile environment as necessary to preserve the cultural life and stability of the nation state, it thus works to perpetuate the fundamental difference between white and non-white and along with it, privilege and traditions, masking the 'ugly realities' (Mills, 1997, p. 3) in the form of 'an unjust, exploitative, society ruled by an oppressive government and regulated by an immoral code' (Mills, 1997, p. 5).

For non-white immigrants who are essentialised into racial categories, i.e. their identities are flattened into mere skin colour, their ability to navigate the complex terrain of multiple losses – such as identity and relationships – is obstructed. As I have previously explored (Fang, 2020a, 2020b), achieving a state of psychic settlement for immigrants necessitates the supportive tapestry of social relationships. It entails grappling with the notion that they can never entirely revert to their former selves. Nevertheless, they can cultivate fresh qualities, relationships and ways of existence that unveil previously unexplored potentials within themselves. Consequently, the process of psychic settlement, viewed as a psychosocial task, entails reconciling what has been lost with who one has the potential to become. For white immigrants, this achievement can often occur through the consensual and automatic process of identifying as white. This, in turn, legitimises their integration into the dominant culture, affording them entry into the social contract that assimilates the self into a historical legacy of power and privileges over non-white groups. For non-white immigrants, however, this pathway to psychic settlement through racial identification is forever foreclosed, leading to a psychic impasse of a melancholic state.

Eng and Han's (2000) seminal work on racial melancholia powerfully exposes the dehumanising impact of the tyranny of whiteness. This tyranny, deeply rooted within Western cultures, elevates whiteness as the norm while systematically marginalising all other racial identities. Their analysis illustrates how Asian Americans are psychically coerced into conformity with the restrictive racial stereotypes of the model ethnic minority in order to negotiate social acceptance while constantly being excluded from participating in American 'culture'. Building on Eng and Han's insights, my own work delves into how the interlocking histories of exclusion and silencing continue to impact East Asian communities, particularly East Asian women who are further subject to intersectional processes of oppression through hyper-sexualisation and objectification (Fang, 2021). Forced to exist in a condition of inferiority and polite niceties, little else matters. The sense of loss is compounded by the perpetual status as ghost-like others who are never fully here nor there, never fully present nor past, and never fully belonging or seen as such (Fang, 2021) The experience of racial melancholia thus can be understood as a result of the ongoing psychic toll of racial contract and with it the cultural ideals of whiteness and the subsequent negation of non-white identities in order to *be* at all.

Contrasting her own experience as a white immigrant with my account as a non-white counterpart, Michelle Elliot remarks that:

> I find this reality unsettling, as the hostile immigrant environment written about by Fang (2019) was not represented in my experiences. This reality is a daily reminder that despite being an outsider, an immigrant, I have retained my occupational possibilities and privileges; I am white. (Nicholls & Elliot, 2021)

How, then, can one live with this reality I called mine? In what follows, I will demonstrate how Fairbairn's theory, when extended to examine the internalisation of everyday social interactions and relations, provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics of the racially-driven hostile environment as a bad object. Focusing on the intersection of the social and the psyche, I return to the bus incident to examine how the hostile environment, along with its culture of 'justified discrimination' of racist norms and practices, impacts on my inner world. Specifically, I will demonstrate how what goes on 'outside' becomes taken inside, or 'incorporated' (Fairbairn, 1944/1952c), as a bad object in dealing with the chronicity of racial suffering.

Psychosocial potential of Fairbairn's object relations theory

Fairbairn's theory has been acknowledged by many as a fundamental force driving the paradigm shift known as 'the relational turn' within psychoanalysis (Clarke et al., 2008). However, the extent to which his work has been engaged with in psychosocial studies remains minimal. It is my belief that Fairbairn's theory has significant psychosocial potential that an extended application of it can offer distinctive avenues of thought concerning the interactions between object relations and social relations. I will extensively draw upon Fairbairn's concepts of 'moral

defence' (1943/1952b), 'endopsychic structure' (1944/1952c, 1951/1952e), and 'object-relatedness' (1946/1952d), which I find particularly valuable in exploring the politically driven inquiries on selfhood in a social world.

In his paper on endopsychic structure (1944/1952c), Fairbairn suggests that the formation of the personality structure is shaped by social relationships right from the start, originally within the province of the family with the primary caregivers, specifically the mother. For Fairbairn, the baby forms an understanding of relational environment based on her actual experience of the mother, both as a source of nourishment and as a cause of great anxiety; the latter being a result of the mother's realistic limitations that she may not always accurately read and respond to the baby's needs. The infantile state is underscored by 'absolute dependence' (1944/1952c): that the baby's recognition of the mother's ability to both satisfy and frustrate leads to an unbearable psychic tension in the baby which can be articulated as: 'I am terrified to rely on an object that may or may not take care of me'. This anxiety, universal in the infantile state, prompts the development of primary defences of splitting and repression in the baby to ward off further psychic suffering in relation to social others. An 'unsatisfactory' object relation, in Fairbairn's thinking, is one which has been experienced as unresponsive to the relational needs of the baby. The bad object therefore is one which is 'too disruptive and threatening to the ongoing relationship with the [external] object to remain in awareness' (Celani, 2007, p. 123). Moreover, the bad object is further split into the 'exciting' and 'rejecting' part-objects, which characterise the qualities of relational experience that have been experienced as a failure to respond to the relational needs of the baby. The exciting object represents the element of the object that perpetually entices, promises, and allures but overstimulates in the baby an intensity of desire without being able to satisfy what it arouses. While the rejecting object encompasses the aspect of the object that treats the child in a depriving, abusive, or neglectful manner (Celani, 2007). Both exciting and rejecting objects are excruciatingly 'intolerable', in Fairbairn's terminology (1944/1952c) hence they become repressed – pushed outside of the conscious awareness.

The child cannot survive without relational others, whether they are perceived as good or bad, and this need for 'objects' persists throughout life. Building on this understanding, Fairbairn regards separation anxiety as the most powerful form of anxiety, originating from the state of infantile dependence where the child actively seeks engagement with objects on whom they depend and by whom they are socially bound. The concept of object-seeking (Fairbairn, 1946/1952d) emphasises the significance of engaging in relationships with others. Object-seeking not only ensures internal security for survival but also enriches the experience of a reciprocal 'we' leading to the recognition of mature dependence (1941/1952a) – a state of mind characterised by an understanding and appreciation of our inherent human interdependence. Opposing Melanie Klein's perspectives,[2] Fairbairn proposes that

[2] Notably, Fairbairn openly and consistently challenges Klein's perspective that both the good and the bad objects are internalised. Fairbairn's argument rests on the idea that there is no 'adequate motive for the internalisation of objects which are satisfying and "good"' (1944/1952c, p. 93). Instead, he considers the internalisation of bad objects is invariably linked to repression and the experience of the good object as constitutive of part of the 'central ego', which consists of conscious or preconscious elements.

repression primarily arises as a defence against the unsatisfactory object-relations rather than contradictory instinctual drives within the self (Fairbairn, 1944/1952c, p. 93). This perspective has significant implications for the shift in psychoanalytic thinking from instinct to self (Scharff & Scharff, 2005). It redirects the focus of psychoanalytic examination from 'what the self wants' to 'what the self wants *in relation to* others' (Fang, 2020c).

Like Klein, Fairbairn acknowledges that the infant resorts to the primary defence of splitting as a means of coping with the reality of infantile dependence. He diverts from Klein, theorising that splitting is ensued by an oral attitude of 'incorporation' (Fairbairn, 1944/1952c). This is a point worth expanding on within the context of this paper: As the mother becomes split into good and bad, the baby proceeds to incorporate the bad object of the mother in an attempt to alleviate the escalating anxiety of encountering her as unreliable or uncaring in daily reality. Fairbairn believes that incorporation arises from an unconscious attempt to resolve the relational impasse. This can be articulated as follows: if I express aggression, I am threatened with the loss of my good object; on the other hand, if I express my relational need, I am threatened with the loss of my feelings for my good object (adapted from Fairbairn's original quotes, 1944/1952c, p. 113).

By *taking in* the bad object, the child can thus exert control over it by containing within the self the traumatic elements associated with the bad object. These elements carry traces of a chaotic external world that fails to fulfil the child's relational needs. In other words, through splitting and incorporation, the child negotiates a sense of external security, albeit illusory, at the cost of their internal integrity (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). Fairbairn terms this 'moral defence' (1943/1952b, p. 65), famously stating:

> It is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to live in a world ruled by the Devil. A sinner in a world ruled by God may be bad; but there is always a certain sense of security to be derived from the fact that the world around is good. (1943/1952b, pp. 66–67)

Splitting and incorporation go hand in hand, forming and strengthening the relational scaffolding of the mind (endopsychic structure). Fairbairn (1943/1952b) initially held the belief that only the bad or unsatisfying objects are internalised. However, he later revised his theory arguing that not only the bad objects are repressed and incorporated, but so are the aspects of the self that correspond to these internalised bad objects (1951/1952e, p. 168). Here he further solidifies his thinking on the splitting of the ego. Crucially, he conceptualises that it is not only the exciting and rejecting aspects of the social other that are repressed and internalised, but also the aspects of the self which bond and correspond with these bad objects. Fairbairn refers to these fragmented aspects of the self as the 'subsidiary selves'; they are termed the 'anti-libidinal self' and the 'libidinal self', which are entangled in traumatic and painful object relations with the bad objects, forming parts of the dynamic internal theatre of the mind in which different parts of the self interact. The subsidiary selves are the parts of us which are tantalised yet disappointed, longing for love yet rejected, and being in need yet dismissed. This later revision marks a critical juncture in Fairbairn's theory, one that harbours significant yet untapped

psychosocial potential within his work. The psychosocial potential resides in the emerging recognition that the self is not passively shaped by the objects we internalise or solely influenced by others. Instead, the self is inherently relational and agentially creative, engraining in constant construction and reconstruction through our ongoing object relations in the social and, as I explore below, sociopolitical world.

Culture as the bad object

The prevailing atmosphere of hostility and cruelty saturating the UK's hostile environment culture embodies the concept of the bad object in Fairbairn's theory. On one hand, I recognised my dependence on the Home Office to fulfil my relational needs by granting me the leave to remain in this country. On the other hand, I was confronted with its intensely militarised hostility, which tended to view non-white immigrants as disposable, mere statistics to be reduced. No doubt, my presence here and the desire to remain are intertwined with the cultural allure of the enticing facets of 'British' life. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these aspects have primarily been shaped by white colonial ideals, which have long portrayed racial others and individuals from foreign states as inherently inferior. As articulated by Du Bois (1920/2009, p. 308): 'Everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honourable is white. Everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating, and dishonourable is yellow, brown, and black'. Whiteness, an alluring yet perpetually distant mirage that captivates the psyche, sparks a yearning for identification with it. It beckons as an ever-elusive ego ideal, forever slipping beyond the self's reach. The external racial dynamics insidiously internalise themselves within the endopsychic structure, shaping one's interactions with others, and, more significantly, how one relates to aspects of the self.

Going back to the bus, the Western gaze which I perceived to bestow so clearly a disapproval of the 'rude and the rowdy Chinese' alerted me to the invisible surveillance of social contract that never rests. It simultaneously alerts to me a cultural distinction between what is considered good versus bad, desirable versus improper. My self-consciousness of my proximity to *them* turned itself into a fountain of inferiority, which, as noted by Freud (1914/1957), oozed out of the experience of shame when one fell short of the standard of the ego ideal (of whiteness). My dependence on the Home Office as an immigrant and the shame I felt for not living up to its definition of a 'good immigrant' were both simultaneously triggered, prompting me to defensive actions – to, quite literally, *side with* the 'whites' who hold power over the non-whites: to judge and to reject those who it perceives to be undeserving according to its own propriety meter that says 'this is how a good immigrant should behave, and that is not'. Aligning myself with whiteness as an exciting object stirs within me a promise of a better world where a higher order of civility appears to reside. However, the very essence that captivates me and excites me is a standard I can never fulfil. While I may be culturally influenced by the 'essence' which defines Britishness, I am not and can never truly be white.

Striving for validation within the cultural archetype of whiteness can be paralleled to a precarious pact with the devil: the allure of whiteness, the very ideal one aspires to embody for social acceptance, inevitably confronts individuals with its contemptuous counterpart – the racist spectator who rejects all those who are not white. This is the intricate psychological interplay that Fairbairn terms as the moral defence. Moral defence unfolds as a space where the exciting object and the rejecting object are reunited, ensnaring the individual within a bewildering, anguish-inducing enigma characterised by incessant self-reproach. Translated into the language of Freudian theory, the pursuit of the ego ideal inherently exposes the individual to the unrelenting judgments of the disapproving superego. Moral defence can be contemplated as a site in which the 'diabolical tantaliser', as poignantly phrased by Grotstein (2014, p. xxi), takes on tangible form. It is a space where the origins of our allure morph into instruments of torment, and the very elements that torment us weave an enticing web that catch us within its seductive embrace.

While appealing to the whiteness grants me a fleeting sense of superiority and righteousness, these are illusory in the context of my perpetual racial otherness. This identification with whiteness creates an internal division within me. On one hand, there is the anti-libidinal ego who seeks identification with white surveillance and forges a bond with it to side with what feels powerful and shield against any vulnerability stemming from racial otherness. They form, to quote Ogden (2010), 'a bond of resentment' that perpetuates the object relations between the tormentor and the aggrieved. On the other hand, there is the libidinal ego who helplessly longs for acceptance and approval by the exciting object of the colonial ideal as embodied by the whiteness, despite being acutely aware deep down that such acceptance will never truly materialise. Within this dynamic, the libidinal ego which contains the vulnerable, yearning parts of the self becomes the target of relentless attacks from the anti-libidinal ego, which holds disdain for any human flaws of neediness and dependence. The anti-libidinal ego rejects and humiliates the libidinal ego for longing for love of the exciting object: 'You [the libidinal ego] never learn your lesson. You get kicked in the face [by the exciting object] and drag yourself to your feet as if nothing has happened only to get kicked and knocked down again' (Ogden, 2010, p. 111).

You can perhaps now see how my comment 'this is why people here don't like Chinese people!' reveals much of the underlying psychodynamics of 'the bond of contempt' (Ogden, 2010) in action. It orchestrates a sinister alliance between the rejecting object and the anti-libidinal ego, launching relentless attacks on the libidinal ego, who yearns for acceptance, belonging and approval. These contemptuous assaults give rise to an overwhelming sense of a self that is shrouded in inadequacy and undesirability, not only within oneself but also projected onto those perceived as similar. Quoting Ian Suttie, whose relational thinking influenced Fairbairn, we begin to grasp the truth that 'the indulgences we are forced to renounce in ourselves, we will certainly not permit to other people' (1935/1960, p. 71). What we are unable to love and accept within ourselves, we are incapable of loving and accepting when we come across them in others. Viewed through this lens, the comment paradoxically becomes an expression of the internalised

oppressor within me, self-condemning as the oppressed: ‘Now you see why people here don’t like you!’.

When the object relations mirror social relations, hostility trumps empathy. The anti-libidinal ego persists in its indifference toward the torment of racial suffering, relegating it to the status of mere self-pity. It perceives vulnerability as weakness; contempt and rejection as power. It insists that my shortcomings are to blame, urging me to believe that the only way to rise above my struggles is to align myself with the powerful and denounce the weak: to join those who reject, not those who are deemed rejectable. It thrives on a toxic ideology of blame and condemnation, embodied by the hostile environment as the rejecting object, perpetuating a destructive cycle of oppression and discrimination that sustains it.

For Fairbairn, we are born into relationships and our inner world is populated by social relations. The psyche is formed through our relationships with objects. It is the relationships we have with these objects, rather than the objects themselves, that hold significance. The endopsychic structure, serving as our guiding relational schema, preserves our distinct affective valence of how we engage with others and invest ourselves emotionally in our relationships with them. These affective investments shape the ever-shifting experience of identity as it remains receptive to the activation or dissociation of various object relations within itself during each moment of the intricate interplay of the self, others, culture and society. Knowingly or unknowingly, we are ‘possessed’ by the influences of the bad objects, as if ‘by evil spirits’ (Fairbairn, 1943/1952b, p. 67), which compels us to act in surprising ways. Extending this view psychosocially: our relationality becomes intricately entangled with the unfolding social and political contexts that surround us. As I have illustrated above, they become *part of* us: what goes on outside becomes recreated inside so that what divides a society, divides the self. We can never exist apart from our social relationships, and this recognition requires us to investigate the impacts of the culture which cultivates and sustains particular relational conditions for how to exist, how to present oneself, and how to engage with others, especially across diverse identities and backgrounds. Applying Fairbairn’s theory to explore the culture of hostile environment as the bad object, we come to understand how the oppressed can become the oppressor. That which we cannot bear within ourselves becomes our most formidable nemesis in the external world.

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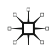

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