Humiliation, Social Justice and Ethno-mimesis

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The focus for this paper/presentation is work I have undertaken with Bosnian and Afghan refugee communities in the UK and new arrivals (asylum seekers and economic migrants from various countries) to the East Midlands. At the centre of the paper is the importance of renewing methodologies for the work we do with in the area of forced migration, humiliation, egalization and human rights (Lindner 2004) and the usefulness of participatory action research (PAR) methodologies. More specifically, I will talk about the contribution that "ethno-mimesis" (O'Neill 2001) can make under the rubric of PAR. I developed the concept of ethno-mimesis in the process of imagining a methodological process that might bring together sociology (ethnographic social research) with artistic methods – creative art processes in challenging and changing sexual and social inequalities –towards social justice. Ethno mimesis (a combination of ethnographic work and artistic re-presentations of the ethnographic developed through participatory action research) is a process and a practice, but it is ultimately rooted in principles of equality, democracy, and freedom, as well as what Jessica Benjamin (1993) describes (drawing on Hegel, Kant, and Adorno) as a dialectic of mutual recognition.

Following Adorno, "mimesis" does not simply mean naive imitation, but rather feeling, sensuousness, and spirit in critical tension to constructive (instrumental) rationality; reason; the "out-there" sense of our being in the world. Mimesis is not to be interpreted as mimicry but rather as relationally deeper – as sensuous knowing. Taussig understands "mimesis as both the faculty of imitation and the deployment of that faculty in sensuous knowing" (1993, 68). Ethno mimesis is both a practice (a methodology) and a process aimed at illuminating inequalities and injustice through sociocultural research and analysis; but it also seeks to envision and imagine a better future based on dialectic of mutual recognition, congruence, care, and respect for human rights, cultural citizenship, and democratic processes.

The paper highlights the importance of participatory action research and artistic/visual methodologies for creating a reflective/safe space for dialogue, thinking through issues, and representing the voices of refugees and asylum seekers that speak of loss, mourning, shame and humiliation as well as mutual recognition and the importance of publicness/public sharing for democratization. Participatory, creative methodologies also help to counter processes of postemotionalism that Stefan Mestrovic (1997) writes about in his work. Mestrovic writes about how in contemporary "me dominated" (*Western*) society rooted in consumption and commodification our emotions lose their genuineness. We reach a state of "compassion" fatigue and cannot/ or choose not to

connect with the pain and suffering of others – we turn over the page or reach for the remote control to switch off the images or words.

Shierry Nicholsen (2002) draws comparisons with postemotionalism (Mestrovic) and normotic illness (Bollas). In her reading of Mestrovic she says emotions "lose their genuineness and become quasi emotions. The emotional spectrum becomes limited and individual "emotions" blurred". In defining "normotic illness" Shierry states that for the normotic individual subjectivity recedes and the person experiences him/herself more as a commodity object - describing flatness of emotions and an absence of affective links between people / in relationships. Nicholsen further develops the analysis by drawing on Adorno to argue that normotic illness and postemotionality cannot be understood separately from war

> "Death-dealing violence and social domination are the agents of the destruction of experience, and thus inextricably linked to the phoniness and propaganda quality of postemotional society- not the war of the Good Americans a vs Bad Germans, but rather the inextricable presence of killing and war-making in the society of domination" p11.

For Nicholsen the importance of passion and creativity are crucial to counter the post emotional – and she draws upon Bion and Meltzer as well as Adorno to develop a theory of passion as a form of turbulent emotional experience "that genuine thought can think about…passion provides the fuel for personality development in the sense of the individual's expanding capacity for truth and relationship" p15.

To counter postemotionalism and the administered society (in our lived experience but also in building, creating our social worlds) the interrelation between thinking, feeling, and doing is crucial. Moreover, the interplay between critical thought, artistic praxis, and social action is one source of resistance to and transformation of the disempowering and reductive social and psychic processes that Mestrovic (1997) speaks about so clearly in his work.

In the process of developing intertextual research with "refugees" and "asylum seekers," I do not aim to or claim to speak for the people I work with, but rather to speak with them, from multiple standpoints, and to open up intellectual and practical spaces for them to speak for themselves. This work as a work in progress, as "micrology," aims to create intertextual social knowledge as ethno mimesis (O'Neill 2001; 2004) and can help us avoid accepting reified versions of "reality", re-presents the complexity of lived experience and lived relations as a counter impulse to "postemotionalism". The research also supports processes of community development (social regeneration, social renewal) and cultural citizenship in collaboration with the individuals and groups. The participants in the research are the co-creators of the research.

In a recent paper O'Neill and Harindranath (2005) argued that PAR/Ethno-mimesis is precisely the methodology that enables such groups to represent themselves, without a cultural or political intermediary talking "on behalf" of them. PAR/Ethno-mimesis transgresses the power relations inherent in traditional ethnography and social research as well as the binaries of subject/object inherent in the research process. For the

participants involved in PAR are both objects and subjects (authors) of their own narratives and cultures. PAR/ethno-mimesis is reflexive and phenomenological but also looks to praxis. As previously argued such renewed methodologies take us "outside of binary thinking and purposefully challenge identitarian thinking...they deal with the contradictions of oppression and the utter complexity of our lived relations…in ways which counter postemotionalism, valorizing discourses and the reduction of the Other to a cipher of the oppressed/marginalised/exploited" (O'Neill et al 2001:75-6).

The visual examples I will show to the workshop are from a project undertaken with Bosnian Muslim Refugees in the East Midlands.
PAR methodologies were used, and life history narratives were re-presented in photographic form. The life story narratives and photographs re-present three key themes that emerged from the life stories of those involved in the research:
>1. Experiences before the war—dislocation marked by postcommunist citizenship in "Yugoslavia" that reconstituted "citizenship" on a kinship or community basis, that is, for the Serb leader only Serbs were allowed "citizenship" and the protection of law.
>2. Experiences during the war—displaced and abstracted from history, citizenship, and the law, humiliated, separated from families and friends—living in refugee camps, and for some, concentration camps.
>3. Experiences of living in the UK—relocating and rebuilding lives and diasporic communities

The research is both transgressive and regressive. Working together with the Bosnians in the Midlands through participatory action research (PAR) proved to be transgressive across three levels of praxis. The first level is textual, performed through documenting their life stories as testimony to the humiliation, suffering, and genocide they encountered at the hands of the government, army, police, employers, hospitals, medics, and former friends and neighbours. The second level is visual, performed through the production of art forms to re-present their life stories with the help of freelance artists, saying the unsayable. The third level combines the visual and textual elements shared with others – audiences in community spaces, gallery spaces, civic centres and universities, and supports and fosters dialogue, understanding and processes of community development.

Challenging and resisting dominant images and stereotypes of "refugees" and "asylum seekers" and making this work available to as wide an audience as possible can also serve to raise awareness, as well as educate and empower individuals and groups. Dominant images and stereotypes include those of victim, passive, and dependent and do not reflect the courage or resistance, as well as the need for building self-esteem, self-identity, and cultural identity, in the face of tragedy and loss (see Harrell-Bond 1999; Adleman 1999).

The project is emancipatory/empowering, critical, and reflexive. By both narrativizing and re-presenting/reimagining history and lived experience the vital importance of opportunities for social renewal, for creating "citizenship," for re-imagining identities and communities against the backdrop of British law (and at local level the mediated structures and processes of statutory and voluntary organisations both horizontally and vertically) emerge. The role and purpose of PAR, the vital role of the arts in processes of

social inclusion, the civic role and responsibility of the university and the vital importance for creating safe spaces for dialogue that might support processes of restorative justice and reconciliation are also discussed.

Clearly there is an urgent need to develop interventionary strategies based on collective responsibility and what Benhabib (1992) has called a "civic culture of public participation and the moral quality of enlarged thought" (1992, 140) in relation to work in the area of humiliation and dignity. How can ethno mimesis address this?

The experiences of the people concerned must be listened to and acknowledged, and advocacy networks must be developed to operationalise their voices through participatory action research. Recovering and retelling people's subjectivities, lives, and experiences is central to attempts to better understand our social worlds with a view to transforming these worlds. Such work reveals the resistances, strengths, and humour of people seeking asylum, as well as knowledge of and a better understanding of the Legitimation and rationalization of power, domination, and oppression. Drawing on Shierry Nicholsen's work, the photographs presented here have the capacity to arouse our compassion while not letting us forget that what we are seeing is socially constructed meaning. Through re-presenting the unsayable, the images help to "pierce" us, bringing us into contact with reality in ways that we cannot forget—ways that counter the "postemotionalism" of contemporary "me"- dominated society that Mestrovic (1997) details so carefully in his work.

Our work in the UK envisions/imagines a renewed social sphere for asylum seekers and refugees as global citizens, with our eyes firmly fixed on the "becoming" of equality, freedom, and democracy, through processes of social justice, cultural citizenship, egalization and mutual recognition and renewed social and public policies - in the spheres of polity, economy, and culture.

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