

GRACE NOTES XXII

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE considers the importance of relational ethics

I AM STRUCK by the amount of anger there is swelling through our public spaces, office politics and domestic settings, which is ultimately coming to reside in the spaces between inter-personal dynamics across real and imagined relationships. As a therapist I wonder if that anger is masking fear as seen in Franz Fanon's (1962, 2008) seminal text on racism *Black Skin, White Masks*. This book is an exploration of research into the black psyche in a white world which has given rise, among other things, to movements such as Black Lives Matter. While anger is important for the affirmation of identity in creating a sense of ourselves in the changing nature of our environment, I also see anger as usually masking fear and vulnerabilities.

Like a dripping tap we are experiencing one stressful event after another – at home, at work and in the spaces in-between. There is a growing sense of feeling that one is being treated unfairly, feeling fragile and drifting into an angered state. Looking around it is easy to see how, for many who 'manage' anger, what hides beneath is most often fear. Fear is sustained and reproduced by cultural scripts, repertoires and schemas (Drego, 2006) which are mediated through our associated knowledge and memory of stories passed between people. Cultural scripts communicate rules about ways of being and doing in relationship. From a Turkish cultural perspective, anger is an emotional state expressed symbolically as a trespasser: *Haddini astın* can be translated as being pushed beyond our boundaries (Askan, 2006). Boundaries are borders that define, reduce or expand, the space contained within and beyond them – the space between and within things (Siddique, 2015).

Ethics is about relationships (Siddique, 2015). It is through those relationships that we make meaning of the environment /situation we find ourselves in. Relational ethics offers a language for witnessing and taking responsibility for the experiences of suffering of the 'marginalised other' (p71). Boundaries and borders are essentially about relational ethics. They play a significant role in knowing where one person ends and the other begins in creating and maintaining relationships and dependencies. Relational and contextual ethics affirm emotion and ways of being in the world and within the

intimate spheres of life.

Stories and script beliefs offer familial experiences containing process in the form of mythology. Myth is a connection between the unknown and known; narratives shaped by circumstances and a set of meanings contingent on interpretive space for recovery and recognition of meaning. For example, in Greek mythology Ares as the god of anger was appeased by the people giving offerings. Offering food and drink to anger is about feeding that hunger. Could we as therapists be seen as offering sustenance?

If we consider that the ultimate goal for Transactional Analysis is about achieving growth through 'autonomy', then living in this climate of fear and anger raises issues for us. How is it possible, in the current climate, for anyone to be self-determining?; where taking responsibility for one's own actions and feelings focus on the here and now of the relational encounter – and yet this is influenced and affected by the surrounding environment? One aspect of our Transactional Analysis training is being able to look at and hold the social cultural landscape (Berne, 1968, Drego, 2006) as well as the internal psyche of our clients. How much anger is not only generated from personal traumatic experiences in our childhood, but also from wider political and social environments? These include racism and other micro-aggressions, as well as the present restrictive political environment in the UK and US which allow/encourage repressive and offensive language on social media and in everyday conversations. What responsibility do we, as psychotherapists, have in mitigating the circumstances causing fear and anger? How do our actions fit with working with relational ethics?

References

- Aksan, M. (2006). *Metaphors of anger: an outline of a cultural model*. *Mersin Üniversitesi Dil ve Edebiyat Dergisi*, 3(1):31-59.
- Berne, E. (1968). *A layman's guide to psychiatry and psychoanalysis*. New York: Simon and Schuster
- Drego, P. (2006). *Freedom and responsibility: Social empowerment and the altruistic model of ego states*. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 36(2):90-104
- Fanon, F. (1962, 2008). *Black skins, white masks*. London: Grove Press
- Siddique, S. (2015). *Bhaji on the Beach: Teaching Relational Ethics in India*. *Man in India*, 95(1):65-72



Dr Salma Siddique CTA(P) PTSTA is a clinical anthropologist, researcher and academic in counselling and psychotherapy at the University of Aberdeen. She works with RTEs on a consultancy basis for research skills and CTA prep. groups.