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by Farhad Dalal (Dalal, 2020)

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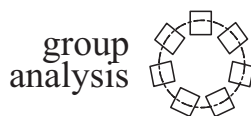
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Response



A response to: ‘Intimate Others and the Othering of intimates: The gendered psycho-politics of the entangled relational’ by Farhad Dalal (Dalal, 2020)

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although I will attempt to foreground the precariousness of my position throughout, I know such gestures can never suffice. (Spivak, 1988: 271)

what I find useful is the sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other. (Spivak, 1988: 294; emphasis in original)

Any response, is inevitably, always already (Althusser, 1971), an *intra-action* entanglement (Barad, 2007). Therefore, my entanglement with, the ‘Intimate Others and the Othering of intimates: The gendered psycho-politics of the entangled relational’ (Dalal, 2020) was in process before its existence and publication. In this case, the intimate Other is you Farhad Dalal (if I may, address you directly, intimately?) and your ‘gendered entangled relational with the intimate Other’, which is fittingly complex, because I happen to be a woman of colour and lesbian. And, yet already, my framing of who I am is fraught with problems—problems, which I attempt to explore in this response. For example, the terms ‘other’, ‘woman’, ‘colour’ and ‘lesbian’ are territorial in claiming an identity position and differentiation. My claims

to an identity position perform an essentialism that is not in keeping with my desire for nomadic, fluid boundaries and de-territorialization (Braidotti, 1991, 1994, 2011). Within the space of five sentences, I find myself slipping habitually into an unhelpful binary of Othering based on gender and sexuality, which is ‘structured by a relation of negations, and by re-affirming these negations’ (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012: 126). However, with all the inherent aporia of holding a position, aware that all positions are inevitably ‘implicated’ (Caselli, 2005: 105) and risking a kind of ‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak, 1988: 280), I do hold a position as an anti-racist feminist, and anti-capitalist activist.

The tension I inhabit is of contesting how the idea of difference is used as a mechanism of unequal power relations, whilst not resorting to the idea of difference as the key to social justice. Indeed, I have come to believe that rather than concentrating on the predicaments of difference our energies might be put to better use in concentrating on the predicaments of positionality. For me, relational entanglement revolves around the conundrum of giving an account of oneself (Butler, 2005), whilst being held to account, that goes to the heart of being in group analysis.

Black feminist intersectionality

My response reflects my Black feminism group analytic standpoint, which is simultaneously a marker of my difference to you Farhad, and marker of what I bring to the table of ‘breaking bread’ (Hooks and West, 1991) with your article and to group analysis generally. And yet, this all sounds so reasonable, so measured, so accommodating and so not in keeping with the ‘ethical distress’ I felt in entering, what for me are war zones in your article and indeed in group analysis generally. Here, what I mean is that a Black feminist intersectional position would make redundant your self-questioning reflection, ‘given that I have been writing and thinking about oppression, racism, marginalization, and so on, for many years, why had I not said anything specifically about gender relations?’ (Dalal, 2020: 422). However, in every possible orientation and permeation, your question, is precisely the problem that Black feminism responds to. The point is that oppressive structures and experience such as racism, sexism ‘cannot be treated as “independent variable[s]” because the oppression of each is inscribed within the other—is constituted by and is constitutive of the other’ (Brah, 1996: 109). The point is that

the analysis of gender in your article, and in group analysis in general, could do with explicitly embracing the Black feminist theoretical methodology of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

By way of an introduction—call it my hello—I believe we could shake hands on the point, you made in one of your books, that ‘Derrida and Kristeva . . . have yet to penetrate into the syllabuses of the analytic trainings’ (Dalal, 2002: 8). In fact, Derrida’s (2000) deconstruction of hospitality goes to the heart of the ethical distress and ambivalence that you speak of in your article, and, which we all experience in group analytic therapy. It would appear that our, no easy, task is, ‘thinking *as* hospitality’ (Frieze, 2004:74, emphasis in original; Forrest and Nayak, 2020). Moreover, my reading of your article brought these words by Kristeva to mind:

Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container . . . I lose my composure. I feel ‘lost’, ‘indistinct’, ‘hazy’. (Kristeva, 1991:187)

In my personal experience, the emotional task of psychic hospitality with my internal ‘Intimate Others and the Othering of intimates’ (Dalal, 2020) is painfully difficult. My attempts at an emotional intersectionality of ‘all my different selves’ (Lorde, 1980:121) bumps up against multiple unconscious borders. And, of course, in a racist, homo/transphobic capitalist patriarchy, the emotional task of intersecting all our different selves is dependent on the socially constructed configurations of one’s identity position, privilege and power. For example, Farhad, you point out that ‘identities are constituted out of repudiations of the Other’ (Dalal, 2020: 438). How do I/ you/ we offer psychic hospitality to those parts of us that are relentlessly repudiated? How do I/ you/ we enable an emotional intersectionality of race, sex, racism, and sexism in a racist sexist world? An intersecting dimension of this complexity is that ‘[oppressive] social structures create [oppressive] psychic structures’ (Oliver, 2001: 34). It is as Foulkes describes: ‘The borderline of what is “in” or “outside” is constantly moving . . . there is no clear-cut frontier between inside and outside, as little as between reality and phantasy’ (Foulkes, 1990: 184).

Here, Foulkes offers a useful principle and starting point, however, the deconstruction of borderlines between inside/internal and outside/external is highly political. Under the lens of intersectionality, ‘the political is psychological; the psychological is political’ (Dalal,

2020: 425) is precisely because ‘the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism’ (Crenshaw, 1989:140). Here the words ‘greater than’ is the heart of intersectionality because it is within the intra-dependency of difference, that the radical potential of intra-action can be realized (Barad, 2014). Note that the suffix ‘intra’ (‘intra-dependency’ and ‘intra-action’) rather than ‘inter’ can be used to express the indeterminate reach of entanglement which is ‘greater than’ any configuration that adds or subtracts dimensions of difference. It seems to me that the radical political potential of group analysis is in the exploration of the intra-sectional intra-actions of the group dynamics and matrix. Thus, we could think of the group matrix as an ‘[intra]communicational, [intra]actional network’ (Foulkes, 1990: 231).

Farhad, an inter/intra-sectional lens, would trouble your statement that ‘the potential *to be blind* is gendered’ (Dalal, 2020: 441); emphasis in original) and your argument that the different ‘psycho-socio-developmental process’ of men and women: ‘results in women being more in touch with the feeling realm, and as we know, feelings connect. Consequently it is more difficult for women to blind themselves to the humanity of suffering others’ (Dalal, 2020).

Notwithstanding your acknowledgement that you only refer to ‘heterosexuality, and not made mention of the possibility of other gender identities’ (Dalal, 2020: 430), and to the importance of other dimensions of differentiation (i.e race and class), the problem is you keep resorting to essentialist representations of man/men/masculinity and woman/women/femininity. Is essentialism a way of managing ambivalence?

The Black feminist, lesbian activist Audre Lorde, explains the complexity of emotional intersectionality in the following way:

I have always known I learn my most lasting lessons about difference by closely attending the ways in which the differences inside me lie down together. (Lorde, 1988: 117–118)

I am not one piece of myself. I cannot be simply a Black person and not be a woman too, nor can I be a woman without being a lesbian . . . there have always been people in my life, who will come to me and say, ‘Well, here, define yourself as such and such’, to the exclusion of the other pieces of myself. There is an injustice to self in doing this. (Evans, 1979: 72)

to lie down with the different parts of ourselves, so that we can in fact learn to respect and honour the different parts of each other so that we in fact can learn how to use them. (Abod, 1987:158)

I can say that for me, trying to sustain the task of emotional intersectionality across the different parts of myself is excruciatingly difficult. My unconscious defences function like military border patrol warding off unbearable foreigner parts of myself and whether I name it as ‘an attack on linking’ (Bion, 1959), ‘psychic retreats’ (Steiner, 1993), or ‘phobic object’ blind spots (Cooper, 1997); the effect is of marshalling military mindedness to control my internal psychic warzone. It seems to me that any account of ‘The gendered psycho-politics of the entangled relational’ (Dalal, 2020) needs to be an intersectional account, and by this I mean where the Black feminist theoretical methodology of intersectionality is explicit named and used. Farhad you state that,

In sum, I am using the term ‘entangled relational’ to highlight the messy psychopolitical *processes* which are integral to the relational. One consequence of the entanglement is that I cannot address gender without getting entangled in multiple issues like race, class, sexuality, politics and so on. (Dalal, 2020: 425)

My response is to ask, why do you not name the Black feminist concept of intersectionality in this article? My question is a political question based on the fact that, ‘[t]he shadow obscuring this complex Black women’s intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign’ (Hill Collins, 2000: 3).

Warzones

Farhad, it is no coincidence that the ethical distress you felt in your exploration of the disintegration of matter, of who you are as matter, of bordered thinking, of position and representation of gendered matter, found symbolic expression through a vast violent geo-political cartography of fragmented, conflict ridden warzones incorporating Israel and the Palestinian question; conflict zones of Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Rwanda; warring relations between India, Pakistan and China; Vietnam; Soweto; USA; the UK; ancient Greece, Persian and Byzantium empires; and Mars and Venus. Farhad, it is no coincidence that your ethical distress finds symbolic representation in the dehumanization of militarization that legitimates rape, genocide, holocaust, mutilation, disenfranchisement, abduction, torture, and murder. Your references to domestic violence, suicide and the detention centres that hold asylum seekers are not happenstance. I suggest that for all of us the idea and experience of nomadic disintegration of identity and dissolution of the boundaries of our knowing self is the

ethical distress of entanglement with others, here I include all matter as an entangled.

My experience of intra-acting with the particles of your article and the process of enunciating my response causes an embodied ethical distress that resonates symbolically with entering a socio-political context of conflict; in this case, the context of your article. To be clear, my ethical distress is conjured both by the content and the method of your article. In terms of content, group analysis requires an understanding of militarized psyches and needs to engage with the political content of militarized violations of human rights, and abuses of power. However, in terms of method, there is something about your way of negotiating the gendered psycho-politics of the entangled relational that jarred. For example, on the one hand there is the call to assemblages of intra-acting complex multiplicity evidenced in your ‘prompt and reminder, to myself as much as to the reader: that in whatever I might say about others, I will somehow also be saying something about myself’ (Dalal, 2020: 424). Whilst, on the other hand, the intersectionality of intra-dependent, indeterminate, fluidity is disavowed; Farhad, you repeatedly use essentialist representations of women’s position, women’s qualities, and developmental experience. For example, the intersectional experience of being the Black daughter of white mother, and/or white mother who maybe overtly racist, would not fit with your statement that:

Females being of the same gender as the mother do not have to establish their gender identity against that of her mother. Consequently, the girls’ early experience is that of continuity and similarity with the result that they have a more relational connection to the world. (Dalal, 2020: 428)

There is a problem with asserting gender as a primary site of continuity and similarity. Although you acknowledge ‘power relations that drive gender relations are inextricable from those that drive class and race relations’ (Dalal, 2020: 427), and say that ‘one cannot talk about one (gender) without getting entangled with various other kinds of othering processes’ (Dalal, 2020: 427), you proceed to speak about women through the single lens of gender. The problem is that, ‘[w]ith gender as the central concept in feminist thinking, epistemology is flattened out in such a way that we lose sight of the complex and multiple ways in which the subject and object of possible experience are constituted . . . There’s no inquiry into the knowing subject beyond the fact of being a “woman”’ (Alarcón, 1990:361).

Quantum entanglements (Barad, 2010)

Farhad, you explain that:

the term ‘entangled’ is drawn from quantum physics, where . . . a subatomic particle in one place in the universe is instantaneously and mysteriously affected by what happens to another particle in another place . . . ‘entangled’ in the quantum realm, is analogous to the notion of the ‘entangled relational’ in the human realm. (Dalal, 2020: 425)

Here your use of quantum physics to think about the entangled relational echoes new materialist and post-humanist approaches to entanglement (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012). However, Farhad, I must ask, and the question is political; why have you not referenced the long-standing development of these emancipatory frameworks? In an article on the gendered psycho-politics of the entangled relational, why do you not cite the relevance and significant scholarship of the feminist new materialist, post-humanist theory of women such as Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway? Is this an expression of your ambivalence?

Haraway and Barad’s use of diffraction in quantum physics focuses on diffraction of difference rather than reflection or mirroring of difference (Barad, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2010; Haraway, 1988, 2003, 2008). Feminist new materialist, post-humanist elucidations of diffraction provokes a challenge to the emphasis in group analysis on mirroring as a frame of reference for understanding group dynamics (Birchmore, 2015; Foulkes, 1964). Haraway explains that:

diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of metaphysics. Rather, diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness. (Haraway, [1997] 2018: 273)

Perhaps the complexity of diffraction within the analysis of your article, and within group analysis in general, would be enhanced by inclusion of a more diverse range of analytic lenses. In other words, inclusion of a critical consciousness that comes from interference from the intra-action lens of intersectional difference. For example, whilst Jessica Benjamin, Nancy Chodorow, Judith Butler, and Lynne Layton are fine scholars in their own right (Dalal, 2020), I could not help but note that they are all white. It seems to me that there is a

general marginalization, within psychoanalysis and group analysis of scholars in the field who are women of colour. Here, I am thinking of Margaret Morgan Lawrence, Dorothy Holmes, Kimberlyn Leary, Hortense Spillers, Claudia Tate, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, Ranjana Khanna and Gail Lewis to name but a few. Whilst the marginalization of women in patriarchy is problematic, the complexity is that not all women are positioned in the margins in the same way. Audre Lorde puts it well when she says,

in a patriarchal power system where white skin privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white women are not the same. (Lorde, 1980: 118)

To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other. (Lorde, 1979a: 67)

Psycho-politics of entangled relations: Two-fold difficulties

It seems to me that the inherent tensions of intersectional psycho-politics of entangled relations are least twofold. Firstly, any account of myself in relation to your account of yourself is skewed because my/our view is produced by where and how we are positioned. As Haraway says: 'The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished . . . Vision requires instruments of vision; an optics is a politics of positioning. Instruments of vision mediate standpoints' (Haraway, 1988: 586).

Being a fidgety kind of woman, I am continually trying out different lenses and my perspective and in turn my position is always on the move; I am forever in transition because all particles of all matter are forever in transition a sort of internal disorientating diaspora. The Surya in the moment to moment process of creating this response is a different Surya to the Surya you, or anyone else, will encounter if you read it and by the same logic, the Farhad of your article, to whom I am responding, is a different Farhad now. Here, I am reminded of Derrida's (1977) example of the shopping list, where both the writer of the shopping list (or any written text) and the other who re-reads the shopping list (or any written text) are at once both positioned as present/absent, sender/receiver. Shifting the frame from text to the speech act, is this not precisely what we are grappling with in group analytic practice (where all members of the group are in a practice)?

Within and between group sessions, members of the group are simultaneously present/absent, sender/receiver to self, each other and to the group.

Secondly, the nub of an ethical response to ethical distress is ‘the experience of the impossible’ (Spivak, 1995: np); shown in the following questions: If I/we are always ‘in motion, in transition, in movement’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000: 373), how do I/we hold each other to account, in terms of power, privilege and position? Do I wait patiently and forgivingly for you to recognize the alterity of women’s marginality? Women’s intersectional marginality is an URGENT issue. We cannot wait around. ‘We cannot pivot the centre. We cannot be moderate’ (Davis, 2016: 145). Farhad, I suggest that the absence of the Black feminist concept of intersectionality and disavowal of feminist new materialism and post-humanism is pivotal to you pivoting the centre. I suggest that your reliance on essentialist constructions of gender is, at the very least, an expression of being moderate.

In the situation, where, we are both/all implicated in the oppressive language and social constructions that we use to try to deconstruct oppressive language and social constructions, with what tools do we hold each other to account? Is ‘there a possibility of ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’ (Lorde, 1977:40) ‘in the condition of the impossibility of language?’ (Nayak, 2015: xiii). Herein lies the ethical distress of giving an account of oneself whilst holding each other to account (Butler, 2005). It is as Butler describes: ‘I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations . . . Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other’ (Butler, 2004: 23).

We are both/all undone by ‘The gendered psycho-politics of the entangled relational’. The point is that if we bear it, if we dare to inhabit the space of being ‘undone by each other’, this is the site of subversive productivity. Braidotti explains the challenge of the task: ‘Dis-identification involves the loss of cherished habits of thought and representation, a move that can also produce fear and a sense of insecurity and nostalgia’ (Dolphijn, van der Tuin, 2012: 35).

However, if my/your/our response to the ethical distress of being undone is to fall back on essentialisms, we would do well to heed the Black feminist caution that: ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original).

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