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## In the shadow of occupation: Racism, shame and grief

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### ABSTRACT

In Freud's seminal paper on mourning and melancholia, he distinguished between those who are able to mourn (i.e. relinquish their loved object or an idealised self) and those who become melancholic (i.e. forever lamenting the lost 'object'). Freud also wrote of the 'shadow of the object' that denotes dark or hidden facets that could be considered around occupation. This paper adopts these theoretical perspectives in support of a deeper analysis of meaningful encounters that occurred within qualitative research studies with occupational therapy professionals and students. The authors describe researcher and participant moments of shame, loss, and grief in relation to encountering aspects of race and racism within their respective studies. Data were analysed utilising theories of intersubjectivity, critical feminist and race theory, and psychoanalysis within the qualitative research traditions of reflexivity. The paper proposes that the acknowledgement of the potential separation from or loss of the 'other' (research participant), of oneself (idealised researcher or professional) and/or the professional endeavour can allow for an authentic relationship and new learning to occur. The authors suggest that within a professional rhetoric of positive outcomes that can be achieved through empowerment and enablement, a shadow of a disavowal may be cast on complexity and complicity, which could prevent or limit the painful and necessary process of mourning to proceed. Our experience suggests that occupational science research and professional discussions which include stories of shame, grief and loss/failure can enable the development of ethically reflexive professionals who can learn from misunderstandings and their (inevitable) mistakes.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

Occupational science; Freud; Mourning; Melancholia; Qualitative; Reflexivity

This paper reflects on underlying issues that emerged in two different research projects that looked at the narrative representations of experiences of occupational therapy students and occupational therapists. Both authors have considered how the shame of racism and the unacknowledged aspects of privilege provided a shadow of knowledge within the research processes. These empirical discussions are framed through theoretical arguments on the dark side of occupation (Twinley, 2013) and processes of grief, mourning, and melancholia (Freud, 1917/

1955). The presented analysis and conclusions are situated alongside the complementary, yet geographically dislocated, voices of esteemed occupation-centred scholars who bookended the 2018 World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT) Congress in Cape Town, South Africa.

In those keynote addresses, the speakers discussed the need for a critical lens to be applied to current neo-liberal market related values that have supplanted a sense of community and relationship in health care work (Ramugondo,

2018), and called for a radical revision of education and ways of working that reinforce and reify colonial superiority (i.e. scholarship developed and disseminated by white, middle class, heterosexual women) (Whalley Hammell, 2018). These strong advocates for change demanded that professional groups respond. What is proposed in this paper is a starting point – the cultivation of a more consistent reflexive inward gaze to examine what individual and collective action (or lack of) contributes to the realisation or perpetuation of broad relational injustices.

To begin, background context to the framing analytic tools will be presented. Following, will be an overview and detailed discussion of how a new ‘gaze’ affords an alternate interpretation of the events under analysis. Each author writes in her own words of her research ‘dilemmas’ and analytic discussions. The first author recounts her own unconscious processes while the second author revisits an observed ‘casual’ conversation and subsequent participant reflections. Both studies underwent and received institutional ethical review and approval and all names and identifiable details have been altered to retain confidentiality. In the final section, a collective reflection on how an alternate theoretical lens casts light into the shadows, to bring shared themes of shame and grief into the occupational discourse.

## Background

The authors, who undertook research in different countries, framed with differing theoretical foundations and distinct professional socialisation of themselves and the participants in their studies, began to see an emergence of previously hidden elements of the personal and professional narrative – a disavowal of a knowledge of oppression and prejudice within its own communities. Shame or grief can exist within all people and professional groups. However, these narratives were difficult to identify until the authors considered Freud’s (1917/1955) perspectives on grief, which arises from a significant loss. According to Freud, the experience of a profound loss can be of a loved person or an ideal, especially when that ideal is of oneself. “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss

of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (Freud, 1917/1955, p. 243).

The authors have used a psychoanalytic understanding of the loss of an ideal self (and/or profession) to consider how this can allow for a deeper understanding of relationships and qualitative research findings. Feminist critical theorists (Haraway, 1981; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Oakley, 1981) have suggested researchers must interrogate their class, gender, and race-based assumptions while doing ethnographic, in-depth qualitative research. We contend that is hard to do when there is a strong desire to present oneself to the research community as a ‘good person,’ an ethical researcher, and a fair observer of human experiences. Taking courage from the words of Professor Elelwani Ramugondo and Dr Karen Whalley Hammell at WFOT 2018, we propose that by acknowledging the shame of privilege-based assumptions and mistakes there is potential for re-engagement with the research findings and process to see it anew. This honesty lies in the realm of researchers’ use of reflexivity (Finlay, 2003; Holmes, 2013; Pillow, 2002) and requires a deeply authentic review of ‘moments of meeting’ (Elliot & Bonsall, [in press](#); Stern, 2004), which can be shameful when made ‘public’ in professional or research disclosure and dissemination. If not understood and articulated, however, the potential harms and resulting shame remains hidden and very little learning or progress can occur.

Perspectives on shame as a dynamic in psychoanalytic therapy (e.g. Akhtar, 2016; Mollon, 2002) or as a consequence in education settings (Bynum & Goodie, 2014; Zembylas, 2008) are present in other practices and scholarship. This paper addresses the potential influence of shame in occupational science where the researcher and/or participants, educator and/or students, discover (uncover) unconscious bias in their interpersonal relationships and responses, readings, and understandings.

## *The shadow side of our best intentions*

Twinley (2013), in her article on the dark side of occupation, considered that the term occupation



205 does not necessarily mean a wholesome health-  
giving use of time but could be something that  
is done which is destructive and demeaning.  
She stated that use of the term 'dark' was not  
intended to suggest there were 'two sides,' e.g.  
light and dark, but that occupation was "com-  
210 plex and multidimensional ... has aspects  
which are less acknowledged, less explored and  
less understood ... has aspects to it that have  
been left in the shadows" (p. 302).

The authors explore this shadow here, within  
and across research, scholarship, and practice.  
The word 'shadow' denotes the complex nature  
of being human and offers a link between what  
215 is intended consciously and what may be  
enacted unconsciously (or outside of conscious  
awareness) that could be harmful and hurtful.  
We all have a shadow; it is part of what makes  
us human. Nicholls (2013) stated:

220 ... what had been lost in the modern occu-  
pational therapy [and occupational  
science] discourse is the incorporation of  
a shadow. With hope comes despair,  
225 with love hatred and with pragmatism a  
sense of bewilderment and confusion in  
day to day life. ... in the profession ...  
there are unanswered questions, difficul-  
ties and periods of unease. By discussing  
230 the 'other side' of our experiences we  
may be able to engage in further critical  
thinking, and learn from each other.  
(p. 27)

235 This paper looks at how this shadow side can be  
explored and used for further understanding of  
relationships in qualitative research and pro-  
fessional encounters. Freud (1917/1955), in his  
seminal paper on mourning and melancholia,  
240 used the word 'shadow' as he considered the  
unconscious processes that a person can use to  
avoid working through complicated loss of a  
person or object and/or place that represents  
one, including that of an image of oneself.

245 Freud (1917/1955) distinguished between the  
two aspects of a profound loss, saying they begin  
in the same way but have very different out-  
comes. The first, termed mourning, ends with  
a letting go of the 'beloved' and a renewal of  
250 energy for a future life. This can be seen by the  
first author's neighbour who, following the

prolonged illness and death of a beloved hus-  
band, decided to put in a new kitchen to their  
home of 40 years. Her previous occupations  
had included family meal preparation and  
award winning confectionary. When asked if  
255 she was happy with the renovations, she smiled  
and said "*Frank [not his real name] would  
have loved it!*"

According to Freud, the second outcome of  
grief could be 'melancholia.' This is a sorrow  
260 that never ends and the person wraps him or  
herself in the loss and is unable to live fully  
or love again. In melancholia, an all-consuming  
grief, and at times grievance, allows people to  
incorporate the lost object into their daily rou-  
265 tines so relentlessly that Freud described it as  
"thus the shadow of the object fell upon the  
ego" (p. 249). Here Freud suggested that the  
ambivalence felt towards the lost object (e.g. a  
person, country, or an ideal self) cannot be  
270 worked through or relinquished; it is taken in  
by the ego in order to exert some control  
over it. This process of holding onto the loss  
is part of unconsciousness, but one can often  
275 see examples of it in everyday relationships.  
For example, when a friend or colleague  
seems unable to move beyond an experience  
of a painful end to a relationship or work  
place. They talk again and again of their hurt  
280 and sense of betrayal as if it happened a short  
while ago, when it may have been several  
years previously.

When viewed through this psychoanalytic  
gaze, everyday situations reveal 'hidden'  
285 dynamics and broader, institutional-level chal-  
lenges appear. In her WFOT paper, Dr Fasloen  
Adams (2018), the newly elected head of an  
occupational therapy programme at the Univer-  
sity of Witwatersrand, South Africa, stated that  
290 for a new decolonised curriculum to be envi-  
sioned, a period of mourning needed to take  
place. This seemed highly relevant to this cur-  
rent paper, which considers that unless the  
past can be thought about and issues of shame  
295 and remorse worked through, very little change  
can occur. In a country (South Africa), whose  
history is one of brutalising racial violence  
towards the majority (black) population, for  
real change to occur in education, health and  
300 socially responsible citizenship, there is much  
to be worked through and mourned.

## Racism and Shame

The first author's research was a psychoanalytically informed ethnographic study of the unconscious social defence mechanisms which operated in the discourse of occupational therapy. It was undertaken in two clinical occupational therapy departments in public hospitals using three linked data gathering methods: participant observation (Hinshelwood & Skogstad, 2000; Hunt, 1989; Skogstad, 2004), free association narrative interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), and inquiry groups (Hoggett, Beedell, Jiminez, Mayo, & Miller, 2006). Twenty-one therapists took part in the overall study; 11 from London, UK and 10 from Cape Town, South Africa. The happenstance of using two different countries as fieldwork sites highlighted how the personal (i.e. therapist's biography) and contextual (i.e. social/political) history affected the occupational therapists' conscious and unconscious motivations for undertaking their work.

The analysis of the data incorporated reflexive accounts by the researcher, including the researcher's and participants' dreams. The use of dreams as part of the research methodology drew on the work of Segal (1986), an eminent psychoanalytic writer, and Lawrence (2003), who developed the method of 'social dreaming.' Working with dreams and considering their layered personal, social and cultural meanings can be used outside of the private, or some consider privileged, sanctuary of intensive psychoanalysis. "The dream is not just an equivalent of a neurotic symptom. Dream work is also part of the psychic work of 'working through'" (Segal, 1986, p. 90). Dreaming can, therefore, be considered an occupation that supports processes of working through all that is evoked during our waking hours (Nicholls, 2017), including the less conscious aspects of research involvement (LeVine, 1981).

The researcher, a white Zimbabwean-born older woman, had previously worked in both countries as a clinician and a university lecturer, and in many ways saw herself as aware of, and sensitive to, socio-political undercurrents in both contexts. Several events during the research process 'outed' her internalised unconscious racism, which fundamentally affected how the

research data were understood. These revealing, painful omissions and shameful mistakes could have been avoided (i.e. hidden, left undisclosed) except for the author's commitment to reflexivity, and the emphasis she had placed on working with the dreams she had in relation to the research project.

One such example occurred while undertaking narrative interviews with South African occupational therapists. In one interview she attributed racist words and thoughts to a white Afrikaans therapist, which on closely listening to the recordings of the interviews and reviewing the transcripts, were never said and therefore belonged to the researcher herself.

Another transgression transpired when the researcher was listening to the recording of an interview with Nassrin, a black South African senior therapist who had studied many years previously at a predominantly 'white' university. When Nassrin spoke of the painful time she experienced of being discounted and ignored by her white fellow students and lecturers, the researcher changed the subject. The passage of dialogue below followed the researcher asking Nassrin about her experience of being 'black' in this 'white' university class:

*If I reflect on it ... there were still ... subtle divisions or rifts that were very much what we had brought with us ... and our experiences coming to university and where we started from were very different journeys ... we were in the new democracy, and there is a level of tolerance which I did experience ... I didn't feel as if I was on the outside ... but I did feel I had a lot of catching up to do ... It is not so much ... that my experiences weren't acknowledged ... I saw lots of people in my class as having more opportunities than me and I think that that exposes you ... and learning so much about myself and discovering hobbies and things I never knew ... for lots of class mates those were things they engaged in already. ... I'm not saying it took away from my experience and my childhood and that not being rich but ... I don't think that was really engaged with ... because I don't think others were aware that they had missed it ... and so they*

405 *didn't engage ... it didn't feel like I knew something that they were learning from ... I don't know if I am making sense and I didn't know what I had learnt so I didn't share it unless I was asked. (Nassrin)*

The researcher reflects on this shameful error in a field note:

410 *I wish I could say that I replied 'that must have been hard,' or acknowledged that she was discounted, placed outside a group, that her subjugated knowledge was lost to the group, that her experience was valid, and that we had all contributed to that feeling of not being held in high esteem ... But I didn't. I changed the subject. I said 'Weren't there an unnaturally high number of male students in the class?' She laughed and said there were, she wondered where they were now. I couldn't believe I had done it – I don't remember doing it at the time, but it was there, on the recording and transcribed for me to see.*

425 The researcher reflected further on this blunder in her notes.

430 *It wasn't what Nassrin said that was difficult to understand (coded hidden communication), it was how it made me feel when I heard it. And so I pretended that it was just the same as the other 'minority groups' in the class. Why? What was so awful that I couldn't respond with appropriate empathy? I had to look at my cultural legacy. I was part of a first-generation white family in Zimbabwe, my grandfather had been a personal friend of Cecil John Rhodes. I have a certificate that says I was from a 'pioneer' family. It was this word 'pioneer' that alerted me to the wording and colonial assumptions in a significant text in occupational therapy, in fact one of the most quoted articles in the profession to date: Mary Reilly (1962) Occupational therapy can be one of the great ideas of 20th century medicine.*

450 In that article, Reilly (1962/1985) stated that occupational therapists always had a pioneering spirit; however, this is written alongside pioneers

455 discovering a land (America) waiting to be 'explored and populated.' But here is the rub – the America that is being written about already had people there. This post-colonial lens (Dalal, 2002) on the way that first nations people are positioned in professional journals and in the personal history of the authors, unlocked a painful past of shameful assumptions about superiority of knowledge and culture. The authors suggest that it is in relooking at assumptions encoded in professional literature and in the personal histories of researchers that shame is encountered.

460 If it is potentially shaming to talk about shame (Brown, 2015), why would someone choose to do it? The first author suggests that by acknowledging shame she was able to critically explore an unconscious understanding of a key element in the research. This would not have been possible if she had avoided her shame, hidden it, or as her reflexive use of a dream event suggested, buried it (Nicholls, 2017). Acknowledging her unconscious racism revealed a truth buried within a constructed narrative of goodness (her own) and with it, an epistemological violence, performed against those whose voices are represented in research projects (Ramugondo, 2016). In other words, without acknowledging her part of the construction of the 'other,' the researcher could not fully know or understand what had occurred. The author was fortunate at the time of doing the research that she could discuss her shame with her two supervisors and began to read what white South African authors (e.g. Straker, 2004; Swartz, 2007) were writing about how they were working with their guilt and shame. In an email to her supervisors she wrote;

490 I have been struggling with the data from and about South Africa. It has felt exposing of my colonial racist past and so has been painful (and shameful) to contemplate. I have been reading about white guilt and racism. What I think Straker was saying is that the desire to 'do good' by many whites in South Africa (esp. during apartheid) was a type of fetish wherein 'doing good' they could assuage their feelings of betrayal and failure. 495 Those two words echoed so strongly for 500





me. Failure: that all the ‘good work’ will never change what has been lost (the loss is profound – she calls it ‘unending grief’). Betrayal: that the moral values which liberal ‘whites’ believed in did not match the realities of where and how they lived and the privileges that they enjoyed and had being white in a western world. ... So where does that leave me, well I am less critical of (punished by) my ‘failure’ to be more empathetic in the interviews and it is so important to think about these things because if I don’t there is the temptation to bury them and hope they won’t be discovered ... (and that is what my powerful dream about killing the two black men in the garden and burying them in a trunk was really about). My struggle now is to report on what was and then reflect on the difficulties of naming race. (Nicholls, 2010, pp. 186-187)

If a profession or discipline is to acknowledge its mistakes from the past, it may well need a period of mourning to come to term with the loss of this ideal.’

### ***Shame as a critical lens***

bell hooks (2003), a feminist scholar, educator, and social commentator suggested that:

If disillusionment is one of life’s natural forms of contemplation, the experience of dislocation is another. This happens when we are forced by circumstance to occupy a very different standpoint from our normal one ... what we are able to see depends entirely on where we stand. (p. 21)

What we are suggesting is that the acknowledgement and acceptance of shame can offer a similar ‘dislocation’ of position when working ethically and reflexively with others. Framed another way, shame is the emotion of failure (Hoggett et al., 2006), typically relating to who we are and our potential feelings of inadequacy and deficiency. The authors suggest that shame focuses on the self (ego) whereby the shadow of the object falls upon the ego, contributing to

experiences of melancholia. Both of these perspectives are echoed with vulnerability within the reflective research notes above.

The earliest roots of shame, according to psychoanalyst Mollon (2002), begin when the baby sees itself in the mother’s eyes as not being her most loved and adored ‘other.’ This occurs crucially in two ways, when she is seemingly disapproving or unresponsive to his or her desires (for the breast, a smile, or cuddling) and again later when he or she realises that mother has another who she definitely prefers to sleep with and next to, in intimate and exclusionary ways. This realisation of the mother having another is considered the ‘classic’ oedipal crisis and links with the difficulty that the baby may have in separating from the mother and seeing her (and others) as separate and necessary for their survival. It is this difficulty in separating that psychoanalytic theory considers to be the cause of fundamentalist thinking and/or racism, as adults attempt to control others, not consider them as separate and equal (see Davids, 2006).

Using a psychoanalytic understanding, shame can occur when people realise the expectation they had of a situation, another, or themselves is less than what they had hoped for. Consider the feelings that occur when turned down for a romantic first date or an application for promotion. There is a further reading of ‘in the other’s eyes;’ the loss of face when seen in one’s own eyes of what should have been good, proper, right, and moral to be and do in the face of human rights abuse, such as white people in South Africa. This is where the work of Straker (2004, 2011), Swartz (2007) and Zembylas (2009, 2013) can help us think about ‘white’ shame as a lived reality for many academics and healthcare workers in South Africa, other post conflict societies and those with a colonial past, as inferred previously in reference to Reilly’s encoded assumptions about pioneers.

We suggest that if shame becomes self-consuming, it may prevent a psychological or occupation-based move into an action that can repair or reconcile a misunderstanding or hurt caused to another. Here we consider Freud’s (1917/1955) suggestion that the person who has lost an image of themselves as being kind and good (the ideal) may retreat into a well of shame (melancholia) or deny its existence, projecting their

shame onto those around them, who are seen as racist, misogynist or cruel, or by holding onto a grievance (Weintrobe, 2004). We are proposing that it is by owning one's shame and naming it that the punishing self-reproach can move into a more reparative act and offer a creative discovery of the 'other.'

Sally Swartz (2007), a Zimbabwean-born psychotherapist, gave voice to her work as a white psychotherapist with black clients:

I ask a patient to share her experience with me, and slowly we learn together ... and I allow myself to be curious, not ashamed of my ignorance. ... We name our black and whiteness so often that it is an entry, not a barrier ... There is a carnival of voices, hers, mine, her language and mine, which we translate for each other. Through this, I begin to grasp – not wish away – the deepness of her grief, the burden on her of a racist past, to accept that it is unendurable for us both, and to do my job: to face the implications for us both, without looking away. (p. 188)

According to Swartz, to work with shame you have to acknowledge that you feel it, not hide it away or expect the person you tell to accept your version of the story. Shame is a profound (deep) acknowledgement of the loss of an ideal self, and if not encountered and mourned it can become an entrenched sense of self-righteousness, where there is no opportunity to learn from or love an 'other.'

### In a Different Voice

This section of the paper pertains to research undertaken by the second author, a modified ethnographic study informed by narrative phenomenology and person-centred ethnography (Elliot, 2015a, 2015b; Elliot & Bonsall, in press; Hollan, 2001, 2008; Mattingly, 2010). The heading is inspired by the title of feminist scholar Carol Gilligan's (1982) influential text of the same name, though is not drawing parallels to the content that follows beyond an acknowledgement of the resonance of its themes pertaining to self, identity, and justice. The study centered on the examination of the narrative representations of second year, masters' level

occupational therapy students from an American university, who participated in a 2-week intensive learning experience in a West African country. These students, part of a larger cohort of students and rehabilitation professionals, were shadowing and partnering with local community resource workers who supported families and children with disabilities in different village settings.

One of the aims of this doctoral research was to examine the temporal and spatial dimensions of experience, namely the contributions of anticipation, participation, and reflection in the construction of narratives of an immersive experience widely purported to be 'amazing' or 'life changing' (Elliot, 2014). The project was situated within anthropological, transformative learning, and occupational science bodies of knowledge; the preliminary analysis drew heavily from the critical ethnographic perspectives of culture and tourism (i.e. Bruner, 2005; Jackson, 2012; Rosaldo, 1993). While themes of race and privilege were evident in the experiential, occupational and narrative data, they were named with uncertainty, hesitation, curiosity, and frequently within the broader discourse of culture. This analytic interpretation will not be thoroughly discussed here, rather is mentioned as a narrative point of reference and implies potential complicity that exists within occupational science scholarship (Beagan & Etowa, 2011).

The adoption of alternate analytical perspectives and voices (Mewes, Elliot, & Kim, 2017) contributes to a nuanced representation of the complexity of lived experience and the narrative construction of the same. Therefore, positioning data pertaining to race within the gaze of psychoanalytic theory enables new insights and tensions to be revealed, and lends support to the claim of Nigerian novelist Chimimanda Ngosie Adiche (2013) in her book *Americanah*: "Of all their tribalisms, Americans are most uncomfortable with race. Sometimes they say 'culture' when they mean race" (pp. 351-352). Naming race, culture, and privilege are all acknowledgements of the expectant 'difference' that awaits a traveler; seeking new landscapes or becoming temporarily immersed in geographically relocated learning contexts is to expect 'Otherness.' However, otherness as a dichotomy – self-other, subject-object – fails to reflect the fluidity



and relationality of otherness; we are always both (Jackson, 2012).

When placed within the analytic lens of mourning, the dialogue of race, shame, grief, and the burden held when this weight is not relieved, is extended. Culture, travel, international immersive learning, and globalization also echo Freud's (1917/1955) conceptualization of mourning for the loss of an ideal. Imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1993), the mourning of lost cultures, links the globalized consciousness and subjective unconscious. Freud proposed that "agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed" (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 69). This statement has timely relevance when considering the necessity for a decolonised curriculum and critical, situated awareness within the scholarship around occupation (i.e. Farias & Laliberte Rudman 2016; Galvaan, 2015; Ramugondo, 2015; Simaan, 2017). This paper aspires to join that 'call for action' with its empirical lens framed around the racial tensions inherent between mourning and melancholia when looking at shame and grief. In the next section are selected narrated and reflective moments that occurred 'in the field,' during the 2-week learning opportunity in West Africa. These moments were witnessed, therefore not hidden, though their resonance and perceived or feared implications do appear to exist in the shadows.

### ***This is all so beautiful***

While walking through a local village after an initial visit to the home of a single mother and her daughter with significant physical and occupational limitations, Thomas, the community resource worker, asked Alma, an American student, what she thought of the village. Walking behind the two of them, this response was overheard – "I think this is all so beautiful!" Thomas' follow up question, whether similar types of communities existed in America, brought forth Alma's answer – "Yes."

As a participant observer in this ethnographic phase of the research, a part of and apart from the group (Jackson, 2012), there was a curiosity about this exchange. What did Alma mean by beautiful? Recorded in the researcher's field notes (Elliot, 2014), the reflection deepened:

*The colours of the buildings? The adobe style structures with reinforced tin? The way the light splayed through the different shades of earth and dust? The simplicity of life that her fellow travellers had appreciated? This was a relatively poor village. Can poverty be beautiful? We were stumbling over uneven ground. All around us were buildings in apparent degrees of disrepair yet which also contained much life and history. When Alma ascribed beauty as the summative adjective, I wondered about her intention.*

Alma shared later that her eye was drawn to the colours and contrasts in the village; she was seeing beauty in difference.

When the researcher met with Alma for an interview several months after she returned home, this conversation was still resonant for her.

*I said to someone later that day, 'I feel so silly that I said that.' I felt almost like, 'Oh my gosh, you weird, white American girl. You're coming ... making their life into some grand experience for me. Like, I get to leave, and that's their life.' I meant it as a compliment, but I realized after I said it that could have been interpreted very differently. It's, like, 'This is so beautiful. You guys live in these red houses.' And, they're, like, 'These are dirt houses. We would much rather live in ... you know.' I don't know. I had a lot of feelings after that came out of my mouth. ... I don't know if he thinks that it's sort of shallow that I don't see what else is going on there. Like there was a lot that's not beautiful there. (Alma)*

Working with anthropologist Edward Bruner's (2005) critical exploration of travel to inform the initial analysis revealed some possible truths evident in this exchange and resulting reflection. Race is named by Alma and appropriated into her narrative representation of this brief encounter – *weird white American girl*. She also noted the travel privilege she holds, that of departing – *I get to leave. This is their life*. This exposure to 'beauty' was temporary. There is an evident separation – us/them, here/there; a recognition

of the Other. According to Bruner this recognition of or blindness to the Other is reflected within our own positionality. Here or there.

Although the elite may try to avoid the Other in First World cities, making a conscious attempt to overlook them or not to see them – an absence of sight – they go to the touristic border zones with the specific objective of looking, for in tourism there is voyeurism, an overabundance of seeing. The Other in our geography is a source of disgust; the Other in their geography is a source of pleasure. (Bruner, 2005, p. 194)

Alma's comments to Thomas, and later in an informal research conversation with the second author, do not implicate her as possessing conscious judgement about the village or the lives of its inhabitants. As she reiterated, she was associating beauty with difference. Yet there also appears to be an internalized conflict within Alma about what meaning may be ascribed to this observational and interpretive dichotomy – she was still reflecting on this brief moment months after it occurred. Further evident in this excerpt is Alma's construction of an imagined dialogue with inference and interpretation by Thomas (the 'Other').

### **Psychoanalytic gaze**

It is at this point that the inclusion of an alternate analytic and theoretical gaze provides deeper relational and reflexive insight. Shifting away from broad touristic and narrative contrasts of visitors and locals, poverty and privilege, and casting an eye into the intersubjective space between Thomas and Alma, invites unconscious consideration of the acceptance of separation and difference. This may not solely exist between these individuals but also within them, though our focus here is within Alma. Benjamin (2004) claimed that acceptance, the recognition of one's own difference, is necessary to facilitate the release of an ideal view of the self. Such a process does not always cast actions or comments fluidly nor simply into this relational space.

Alma appears to be concerned that her Western, socially acceptable platitude, "*It is all so*

*beautiful*" might have been interpreted by Thomas as patronising. On a different occasion in a different village, another research participant Kimberly admitted that she felt like she needed to suppress her personality and culture because it might be deemed 'American.' Taken together, Alma and Kimberly both narrate a reflexive discomfort (Pillow, 2003) suggestive of an inability to mourn the loss of their idealised selves; the self that is curious, open, and respectful. Alternatively, these two student narratives might denote the influence and grief contained within the unrealised yet still desired emotional connection to this foreign context, its people, and the occupational opportunities to which they anticipated contributing. Their intention to engage closely with the Other failed to recognize the fluidity of otherness (Benjamin, 2004; Jackson, 2012).

In these relational encounters, the Other is in fact themselves, the Americans, the foreigners. Alma's desire for approval from Thomas and Kimberly's concern that she be seen as more than 'American' appear to be real. Deep relational engagement requires sight not blindness of the Other, including the recognition of self as Other and the "responsibility for bearing pain and shame" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 33) that may accompany it. For Alma, mourning and melancholia may exist at the intersection of the acknowledgement of her own failure to be empathetic, humble, and honest with Thomas and the situatedness of her discomfort with the constructedness of race and privilege.

### **Occupational Science Considerations**

Hindsight can offer many rich reflections that are not often available at the time of doing a research project or working with a marginalised community. There is much in modern society that invites us to be 'the best we can be,' and acknowledging mistakes and moments of deep shame is difficult to do. There are many things the authors of this paper wish they could re-do or un-do, and in writing their accounts, even more regrets were encountered. Uncovering the shame students experience in medical education, Bynum and Goodie (2014) suggested that we should find ways of researching shame



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that can lead to building “shame resilience” (p. 1051). We hope this paper may begin some of this conversation amongst occupational science researchers and learners as they encounter people and topics that can expose their grief, shame or mourning of, and at, the past, as lived in the present.

As a scholarship that seeks to understand the complex interplay between what people do as individuals or within communities (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015) as contributing to who they are in their personal, collective and social identities, such considerations seem essential. The advancement of occupational science may be further supported by the intentional cultivation of networks of critical friends and safe reflective spaces whereby the illumination of shame-inducing events incurred during empirical processes or therapeutic practices may be revealed; shadows only exist in the presence of light. By casting an intentional gaze into the less conscious or hidden dimensions of being human, the shameful aspects of making mistakes, having unacknowledged privilege or assuming a ‘healthy’ lifestyle choice for another could become part of a deeper critical reflexive process when doing research into occupations. As qualitative researchers are encouraged to ‘embrace bias,’ perhaps there can be an additional call to ‘out’ moments of shame as a lens to understand the lived world of others and ourselves.

### Concluding Thoughts

In this paper we have suggested that within professional networks, particularly those committed to the exploration, empowerment, or enablement of occupational beings, the rhetoric of the positive outcomes and reification of the ‘ideal’ may cast a shadow of disavowal on complexity and complicity, which could prevent the painful and necessary process of mourning to proceed. Our experience suggests that practical, educational, and research discussions that include stories of shame, grief, and failure or loss can assist in developing ethically reflexive professionals who can learn from misunderstandings and (inevitable) mistakes.

No single analysis can derive the complete ‘truth’ of interpretation or meaning, particularly

when considering how and if the shadow of occupation exists within the discipline’s scholarship. Similarly, no singular approach to eradicate racism and inequality or absolve shameful burdens exists. Nevertheless, this paper and similar critical presentations at the WFOT 2018 Congress have powerfully named all individuals – therapists, scholars, community members – to consider themselves activists and agents of and for change. The adoption of a psychoanalytic perspective as the lens through which to examine race, racism, and intersubjective otherness introduces the unconscious into this discourse.

Alongside the psychoanalytic insight, we have presented selected voices from critical race theory, black feminist theory, and acknowledged the WFOT keynote speakers articulation of neoliberal values that have been present in the construction and colonisation of knowledge of occupation and its practices and study. We, and they, are suggesting that the ability to acknowledge failure, to reflect on the loss of an idealised position or claim, and to accept and tolerate the shame of having got ‘it’ so very wrong, will enable a process of mourning. From this grief arises the potential to attempt a more meaningful engagement.

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