

# **Ethos, Culture and Emotions in Family Therapy**

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## **Introduction**

I want to begin by saying how pleased I am to be in Italy and to pay tribute to the work and influence of Italian systemic psychotherapists. I want to refer to a remark made by Gianfranco Cecchin, brought to my attention by Carlos Sluzki. Cecchin said : 'Don't fall in love with the story' (quoted in Sluzki 2008, 128). This was a warning that the content of a story may become a narrative which inhabits the therapist/family system and comes to entrap both therapist and clients into a self-organising process. This stifles curiosity. Sluzki was making a critique of narrative and social constructionist developments, but I think that a different part of Cecchin's statement is noteworthy. I think that it is significant that Cecchin referred to the therapist 'falling in love'. We may take 'love' to be a feeling or an emotion<sup>1</sup>. The therapist falling in love with the story implies not only the therapist's relationship with her clients, but also something which is not altogether within

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<sup>1</sup> In Western literature 'love', 'desire', 'preoccupation' are often referred to as passions. However 'love' has also been considered an emotion (Sarbin 1986) In English 'feeling' and 'emotion' are often thought of as synonyms.

the therapist's awareness. Cecchin (and Sluzki) are warning us that we may conflate our own feelings with the feelings and the outlook of our families and clients, and that we may do so unknowingly. Cecchin's warning raises the question of how the therapist can make a distinction between what belongs to her and what belongs to the family and the members of it. The danger in ignoring this distinction is that the therapist cannot destabilise the symptom/conflict sustaining narratives, as Sluzki's suggests. But the danger is also that the therapist's own narrative, emotions and outlook take over. Conflation may become domination and perhaps even discrimination<sup>2</sup>.

Of course good systemic psychotherapists have always used themselves and their feelings in their work in a more complex way, but only recently and with an increasing interest in psychoanalysis has this become recognised (Flaskas; Lannaman; Pocock; Bertrando; others). This more recent interest faces a paradox with respect to feelings and emotions. The paradox is this: On the one hand and much in agreement with traditional approaches in psychoanalysis, in the structural, systemic and strategic approaches in family therapy, emotions have been considered to be universal entities or essences, generated and located in individuals and derived from a biological heritage (Krause 1993). On the other hand, the domain of interaction, what we might also call the relational domain, has been considered autonomous. As a result, the role of individuals in constituting this domain has been conceptualised in terms of either biological or social reductionism. This has meant that differences, such as those embedded in cultural and social patterns, which may not be immediately accessible to

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<sup>2</sup> I consider that cross-cultural differences should be seen as the far end of a continuum of differences. However, the wider the differences between the parties communicating, the more scope for discrimination and inequality.

individuals as patterns, or which may be unconscious to them, have not been given much consideration<sup>3</sup>. It has therefore been difficult to link individuals to social systems or even to systems of relationships in anything but a simplistic manner.

Against the background of this description, it is perhaps a surprise to find that 'emotions' and 'culture' were central in the work of Gregory Bateson. His ethnographic work led to an attempt to develop a generic theory of relationships and became an inspiration for systemic psychotherapy. In what follows I summarise this work, which has been largely ignored by systemic psychotherapists and make some suggestions about what we as clinicians can learn from it. I will comment on some implications both for systemic psychotherapy and for the dialogue between modern and postmodern approaches. I will discuss these points with reference to an example of my work and I will be talking about performative rather than indexical aspects of emotions.

### **Bateson's Naven<sup>4</sup>**

As an anthropologist Bateson carried out field work in the Iatmul community in New Guinea in the late 1920s. The Iatmul are a society of shifting agriculturalists and their kinship organisation, and by that I mean the

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<sup>3</sup>Feminism and social constructionism (narrative therapy) have paid attention to this complexity with respect to clients. With respect to the therapist, the recent interest in the therapist's 'self' (Lannaman) and 'power' has reflected an acknowledgement that a similar complexity applies to the therapist. However, this latter debate has tended to emphasise inner dialogues (Lannaman ) and except for a few (Krause 2002; Bertrando 2007), has not engaged with the social and cultural patterns, which constitute the contexts of therapists themselves, but about which they may be, and often are, unaware.

<sup>4</sup> Bateson 1958

principles which organise both the groupings and the orientation of their family relationships, is patrilineal with a matrilineal emphasis for certain purposes. Unusual for his time, Bateson began his investigations of Iatmul society by focussing on one ritual. This was the *naven* ritual. This ritual involved adolescent boys and their real or classificatory mother's brothers or uncles on their mother's side. The central relationship enacted in *naven* was one between a mother's brother and his sister's son. When a young man had performed a task that showed that he had come of age, such as having made a canoe for the first time or more recently having purchased a motor boat (Silverman 2001), men who were his mother's brothers, dressed in filthy women's clothes, smeared themselves with ashes, bound themselves with the string pregnant women used and adorned themselves with large lumps of sago, conveying a demeanour of 'utter decrepitude' (Bateson 1958, 12). These men, these mother's brothers then ran through the village looking for their sister's sons, who themselves were most likely to be hiding or to have run away. When a mother's brother found his sister's son, he ran up to him and rubbed the cleft of his buttocks down the length of the young man's leg. This gesture was recognised to have sexual overtones. The sister's son must then quickly fetch something valuable and gave it to his uncle. The whole thing was embarrassing for the sister's son, but it also took place with much hilarity and mockery. A *naven* could also mark the celebration of other occasions and when women took part, they were dressed like men with feathers, headdresses and ornaments made from the bones and teeth of enemies killed in warfare.

Bateson assumed that this could not be the latmul 'blindly' following a cultural tradition, because for the ritual to persist it must have a function for the persons involved, either consciously or unconsciously. So why were and are the latmul doing this ritual? Bateson argued that *naven* performed an integrative function both psychologically at the level of individual persons and sociologically at the level of latmul society. In this emotions played a central role. As I said latmul society was and is mainly patrilineal. This means that from the point of view of descent, inheritance and rights and obligations in law, the important relationships which connects a person to others, were those which could be traced through men and fathers. However relationships traced through women were also recognised for certain purposes. For example, in disputes a person's love and care for relatives on his/her mother's side could carry more weight than those on the father's side. One such relationship is of course that between a mother's brother and his sister's son. So central in the context of *naven* was some notion of individual sentiments and feelings as opposed to the laws of latmul society. In addition, the emotional outlook of men and women normally (ethos), were the opposite of what they conveyed in the *naven* ritual. In everyday life women were expected to be co-operative and self-effacing, whereas men were expected to be fiercely competitive and flamboyant. By providing opportunities for both men and women to experience emotions which were not normally an aspect of their own gendered social personhood, *naven*, Bateson argued, contributed to psychological integration. There were similar effects for relationships between groups<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See Krause 2007

Being trained in the British school of anthropology, Bateson was bound to be somewhat constrained by a functionalist outlook. However, now, with our privilege of hindsight, we do not have to make teleological assumptions about the function of *naven*, (assumption that the purpose of a process is also the explanation for it). What is of interest to me is Bateson's attempt to link individuals with the social and cultural patterns in which they participate and how he, Bateson, himself made sense of this. For this we have to look to the two Epilogues of Naven, the book, one published in 1939 and the other in 1958.

### **The Epilogues**

The family therapists amongst you may already have recognised the relationship between the Iatmul mother's brother and his sister's son as one of schismogenesis. In the Epilogue of 1936 Bateson himself thought that this idea was one of his original contributions. He defined schismogenesis as 'a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals' (Bateson 1958,175). In common with other anthropologists at the time (Benedict ; Mead) Bateson had described the relationship between Iatmul men and women, and the *naven* ritual, from the point of view of an emotional outlook or *ethos*, which was standardised or could be described as a pattern in Iatmul society<sup>6</sup>. However, schismogenesis could be identified in other aspects of interaction and communication, such as for example in Iatmul thought as exemplified in the classification of names and totems (*eidōs*), in the kinship rules as we have

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<sup>6</sup> This was a term coined by Ruth Benedict to convey cultural patterns in emotions, ideas, institutions and personalities (Benedict 1934).

seen (*structure*) and in the relationships between groups (*sociology*). But here was a difficulty. On what criteria could bits of *naven* be pigeon-holed into these different aspects? Bateson decided that it was not possible to say that *naven* was pure emotion and concluded that where one puts any one bit of culture depends on one's point of view. His own observations could not be presented as if they were 'hard' or 'objective data. This is 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead 1967) and where a postmodern turn seriously begins to emerge in Bateson's approach (Marcus 1985). Persons can be influenced by emotions, which are standardised according to cultural and social context, but *ethos* itself is not an explanation, it is a class of observations adopted by the scientists. It is a hypothesis.

To these insights Bateson added another and this one concerned change and diachrony. In the bulk of *Naven*, the book, Bateson had emphasised a synchronic picture, a snapshot of what was going on in a moment. By the time he wrote the 1958 Epilogue, Bateson had discovered cybernetics and learning theory. With this schismogenesis came to be seen as a more complex and circular multi-circuit information system incorporating change, feedback, learning and therefore also the idea of learning to learn. For example, an individual in a symmetrical relationship with another would tend to expect such symmetry in future encounters both with this person and perhaps with others as well and this person in turn would learn symmetrical behaviour. The same would be the case for complementary relationships. Schismogenesis was now defined as a two-person subsystem, containing the potential for a circuit which might go into progressive change. It should

therefore be described in a more general language (Bateson said 'higher') than any language used to describe individual behaviour (Bateson 1958,297).

### **The Ethnographer and the Systemic Psychotherapist**

We have now arrived at the point where modern family therapy began. Bateson's immediate legacy was not the emphasis on local details of meaning and symbolisation in *naven*, it was not emotions, culture or the even 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness', but talk about meta-order, meta-systems and abstractions. The early family therapists did not pay much attention to the process of how Bateson had arrived at this point. In fact in some ways they rejected Bateson's view in favour of more simplistic behavioural approaches<sup>7</sup>. However, we are now post-modern or at least to some extent post-modern. We are more interested in social systems than in mechanical or cybernetic ones (Krause 2002; others), our conceptual tools consist of 'more-or-less patterns' (Krause 2002), local knowledge (White; ), multiple voices (Anderson), the self of the therapist (Flaskas , Lannaman ? , 2007) and dialogue (Seikulla; Bertrando 2007). From this point of view, what might we find in Bateson's ethnographic work? I will make three points.

Firstly, because emotions and feelings tended to be conceptualised as being generated inside individual bodies and not as socially or culturally constructed, it was not possible to examine these ideas within a systemic and relational framework (Krause 1993, 2007). Emotions have tended to be taken for granted and not seen to pose particular difficulties for the therapist. But Bateson's ethnographic work was *aimed* at understanding *latmul* culturally

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<sup>7</sup> Bateson falling out with Watzlawick

constructed patterns (or standardisation) of emotions, that is he *assumed* difference. He described how his ethnographic enquiries had produced a random note-taking and a mass of disconnected material and how in the midst of this, one detail of the *naven* ritual had struck him with great force. This was the realisation that the transvestite mother's brother figure was a figure of fun. He wrote: 'My whole mental picture of *naven* had been wrong, and wrong because, though I had been told what was done, I had no idea of the emotional aspect of the behaviour' (Bateson 1958,259). It was the *naven* ritual and the emotions it evoked, against the background of other local details, which provided a clue to an understanding of the latmul<sup>8</sup> men's and women's ethos.

Secondly, the traditional systemic psychotherapy position on emotions and feelings was a long way from Bateson's 1936 view in relation to the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness'. This questioned standard practice in the social sciences, in which bits of observations are put into categories, which a priori were decided upon by the observer. Bateson argued that this method does not work for ethos, because ethos cannot be captured only from the emotional tone of an observed behaviour. The relationship between the emotional content of a particular behaviour and the emotional orientation of a culture also has to be considered. This means that ethos has to be understood intuitively and impressionistically.

Finally, Bateson had an idea which could explain how this knowledge could be generated in the first place. From photographs of public ceremonies he observed that latmul women wore men's ornaments. This meant that

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<sup>8</sup> Supported by others for example Silverman.

transvesticism was a normal phenomenon in Iatmul society and not just associated with *naven* or with the orientation of individual Iatmul. He turned to his own experience of transvesticism. In English culture horse riding was a violent gendered activity with a sense of physical mastery and contrasted with other activities suitable for women. He considered that this context explained the masculine emphasis in the clothes women wore when they rode horses (Bateson 1958,200). The explanation of transvesticism thus was to be found in the context of it. But whether or not the same emphasis is placed on transvesticism in Iatmul and British society, to begin to understand Iatmul interaction and communication, Bateson needed to listen to a kind of transference, which triggered his own experiences of gender in his own context. It was thus as a participating observer that Bateson became aware of the resonance and this resonance became the anchoring points in connecting, attuning and even guessing (Bateson ?; Krause 2002, 2009) about the meaning of the Iatmul material.

### **Case material**

From Bateson the ethnographer we therefore have a method which moves back and forth, between the general and the local, between similarity and differences, between conscious seeking of detail on the one hand and intuition and unconscious engagement on the other. Bateson began by assuming differences, but also found that within this frame his own experiences were relevant. In this process emotions play a dual role. On the one hand we cannot assume that a particular behaviour denotes a particular emotion without first considering the general emotional outlook. On the other

hand as for the ethnographer, emotions provide anchorage for resonance and attunement across cultures and differences for the therapist. I will illustrate how this opens up possibilities for systemic psychotherapists, particularly when working cross-culturally.

The E family were referred to the NHS clinic, where I work, by their General Practitioner. This family consists of Anna, who is a slight white 31 year old British woman from a rural area not far from London, where her father owned a large farm. She was close to her father, who died at the age of 73 when she was 19. Anna's mother, twenty years younger than her husband, did not work and Anna remembers her as a cold, unsupportive woman. Anna is a primary school teacher and has a sister, who is 18 months younger than her. Anna is married to, but estranged from Bernard. Bernard is a high ranking Police Officer. He is a 32 year old tall black African man from the Ivory Coast. He is a Muslim and the eldest of 7 siblings and his parents both died some time ago. He is close to his siblings and his extended family (sends them money) in the Ivory Coast and his family made efforts to connect with his in-laws. The couple met in London nine years ago. Anna had had black boyfriends before and her mother had objected to this, but in the case of Bernard she softened, because he was charming and Anna agreed to have a church wedding. Anna became pregnant with twins soon after. The twins are identical, two boys, Daniel and Eric, just turned 8, and they live with Anna, who now has a new partner. The boys model for a major British children clothes company. For the last two years Anna and Bernard have had very little contact and are not able to talk about divorce. Daniel was referred because he and his mother were locked in an exhausting daily tussle: Daniel

found it very difficult to put on his underpants and his socks when he was getting dressed to go to school in the morning. He could not tolerate his underpants being crinkled or bulging if his penis became erect. He could also not tolerate any crinkles or bulges in his socks. His mother had to help him and getting dressed became a daily catastrophe with Anna losing her temper, Daniel becoming less and less able to get dressed and his brother making helpful suggestions. Eventually they would get to school very late and sometimes not at all. Daniel and Eric were sometimes looked after by their maternal grandmother and with her there was less of a problem, because Eric always helped Daniel more. Occasionally, the boys were looked after by their father in his house without much of a problem. As it turned out it was not just Daniel who was a worry. Soon after meeting with Anna and the twins I heard that Eric was bullied at school and that he worried his mother by saying he wanted to die.

The expectation was that the aim of our work would be to help Daniel. He did not show any signs of other compulsive obsessional behaviour. During the first phase of the work I had learnt a great deal of detail about the family's life, which like Bateson, I struggled to put together into some kind of understanding. So for example I had already experimented with 'unique outcomes' (White ) and this experiment told me that Anna was as involved and 'attached' to the daily routine as Daniel. The emotions which were communicated during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> sessions provided clues for me.

The 6<sup>th</sup> session with Anna, Daniel and Eric was characterised by extreme and persistent anger and murderousness within a competitive interaction which seemed to devour everyone. Anna described how the twins

fight each other, how the mornings were worse than ever. She said 'I can't cope', 'I feel num', 'I hate tension' 'I feel like a rabbit stuck in the headlights'. She said 'I wanted a child because I wanted someone to love, but I do not want to be looking after twins'. Anna said that she wished she only had one child and her posture, she was lying in the chair leaning back as if 'on her back', conveyed a pervasive sense of hopelessness, but was also provocative. Around her the boys were fighting. A kick from one turned into a fight on the floor with the two of them entangled using play animals and their feet as weapons, hitting each other anywhere, on the head and on the body. In one such sequence this exchange took place:

Anna:           What shall I do to make you stop?

Daniel:         Put Eric out of the house.....

Eric:            Kill Daniel.....

Eric sits on Daniel's foot.

Anna: (to Daniel) Just move, it would stop if you just moved .....

BK:             Eric is being very provocative.....How long do you think this will go on for?

Anna gets up and drags Daniel across the room and sits him on the chair and says

Anna:           Don't do it. One of you have got to stop. One of you have to take the initiative and stop. A lot of other mothers have an older child – they can say 'you are the older one' – I do not want to compare you. I am constantly stuck in this little pond of trying to be fair. Life is not fair Daniel. It is not. It never will be.....Just

because you are twins don't think that life is going to be fair. I am trying my best. I tell you that all the time'

The session finished soon after that with Anna acknowledging that the whole family has a problem. We also discussed the possibility of Bernard attending some sessions. There followed two sessions with the whole family and then we agreed that Anna and Bernard would have a session on their own. This couple session also contained some very strong emotion.

I began the session by saying that I was aware that this was a difficult meeting for both of them. I said that my concern were primarily the boys, but that this concern also extended to each of them. I wondered whether they had come with some thoughts about what they wanted to do. Anna said that they had been to couple counselling before, but Bernard did not like it. I asked who wanted to begin now?

Anna.: It is not something I feel easy bout...I know that Bernard feels very cross about the situation and that he will remind me that I asked him to leave. He wants to blame me and he thinks that he has done nothing wrong – I feel differently....

BK: How does this translate into what you want here?

Anna: If Bernard will understand – I have tried before .....if he would ever understand here

BK:(to Bernard) What are you hoping for?

Bernard: First of all – if you do not mind - It is sometimes good to talk and to expose someone.....But it really shows an insecurity when someone is exposing someone again and again for no

reason..... I beg your pardon...I want to ask her not to expose me....She said that I did not like going to counselling .....

ufff...that is in my face.....she will never say what happened before..... When we went home (after the counselling session)

..... *Bernard stands up*.....Anna ! in all respect to my parents, I will not lie (*puts his hands on his heart*) I swear on their grave. You came in like this (*kicks the nearest chair and waves his arms about*) 'this will never work – I do not want you here, We need to stop. Do you not understand?– I do not want you in my life. When I met you I was not in a good frame of mind'.....

Silence for some moments, *Bernard sitting down and burying his head in his hands*

Bernard:; I went through a hard time with this family...what I went through I would not want anyone else to go through..... Anna what did I do to you?

*Bernard begins to sob and moves to the door*

BK: Please do not go Bernard, please stay so that we can work on this....

*Bernard sobs for several minutes by the door*

BK: (to Anna) Did you realise that Bernard feels like this?

Anna: I have never seen him cry.....

*Eventually Bernard comes back to his seat*

Anna: Now I do not feel that I can say anything.....I feel that Bernard has a problem with money ... he wanted to keep his own Barclay account.....

BK: Can I just say that I think that Bernard coming back to sit down is a sign of extraordinary good will. It is not easy for a man to break down like that and to come back to sit here with two white women.....

### **Emotions and Meaning**

The feelings communicated in these sessions in some ways were unmistakable and probably cross-culturally recognisable. I myself felt stubborn and determined in the face of the aggression expressed by the twins and the inactivity of Anna. I remember reprimanding the boys sharply when they began to use items from my desk as weapons. I was shocked at Bernard breaking down in front of me and felt that I managed to help him stay in the room by the skin of my teeth. The sequences of Anna's anger and Bernard's vulnerability remind me of the *naven* behaviour, not just because of the complementarity, but also because like *naven*, the session felt a bit like a ritual space where some behaviour and some expressions of emotions were reversed. There were hints of other communications with other values in details which I had heard about before. At the same time, as Bertrando as argued<sup>9</sup>, I did not need to come up with some magical formulation, which would set things right. I was not going to be the heroine (Bertrando 2007). Much more modestly I saw my work as providing some understanding which I could use as a guide to what I myself would do next, how I would position myself, and hope that this next step might provide some new information for

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<sup>9</sup> See also Palazzoli et al 1989

everybody. For this next step I needed to try to understand the ethos of Anna and Bernard.

There are two parts to this. One is Anna's and Bernard's own family context, influenced by the social and cultural backdrop of their lives at different points in time. I had heard aspects of these local details during the first phase of the work and this helped me have some ideas. This process of working with the past and the future was an attempt to supplement the snapshot synchronic picture with a diachronic one in a manner described by Palazzoli et al (Palazzoli et al 1989). But I also aimed to keep both cultural and family aspects in mind. That is not to say that I know everything there is to know about Anna and Bernard, rather I am trying to show a connection between what I do know and how this informed me subsequently<sup>10</sup>.

Anna was brought up in a white rural area of England, with a cold mother, with a close relationship to her father. She felt emotionally deprived (perhaps that her sister was preferred over her) and that there was more emphasis on etiquette than on closeness, love and support in her family. There were few relatives around. She was anxious in school, had few friends but as she grew older she also provoked her mother with her choice of boyfriend and partner. It felt like a desperate statement when Anna said that she was looking for someone she could love and who could give her love. She seems to have adopted a parenting style very different from that which she herself experienced, perhaps as a reaction. She also wanted to be more independent than her mother was. Bernard has a large family and he is the eldest living male member. He is loyal to his family and to the memory of his

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<sup>10</sup> In this sense we are never in a 'not-knowing position'. (Krause 1998, 2002; Bertrando 2007).

parents. His family have embraced his in-laws with an effort to make connections between them as two groups. Bernard is hard working, a good cook and competent in looking after his sons. He is gallant and polite and uses assertive body language as opposed to Anna's more passive style.

Perhaps Bernard might remind us of the strutting dominant men in latmul society. He also comes from a patrilineal society and he has a confident and respectful demeanor. Certainly Anna is not the quiet self-effacing latmul. Rather her defiance covers up a frailty. Between them an interaction seems to have evolved in which Bernard responds to Anna's frailty with masculine control and responsibility and also a sense of what is proper, to this Anna reacts with defiance, rebellion and lack of resolution, to which Bernard responds by more of the same or by becoming angry and removing himself from the scene. These interactions are no doubt also underpinned by different egocentric and sociocentric expectations with respect to emotional outlook, gender and individuality in couple relationships<sup>11</sup>.

The other aspect is the current social context, that is to say the social and cultural forces, which influence our lives at any one moment. In this respect Anna, Bernard and I myself are living in the same social and political space, namely in multicultural England, in the capital and I think we all describe ourselves as middle class. What then could I find in my own social context which resonated with the dynamic as I experienced it?. It was obvious that Anna was a white woman and Bernard a black man and that in the current context of British society these social aspects of Anna and Bernard have their own dynamic, in which social constructions of gender and race are

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<sup>11</sup> Socieocentric vs. egocentric is one way of summarising this issue, but this is an emphasis rather than a typology.

entangled. In this social dynamic both Anna and Bernard are victims from different points of view, Anna as a woman and Bernard as a black person. The symmetrical and competitive fight between the two boys, their twinship, Anna's battle with fairness all seem to echo the same dilemma at different internal and external levels, namely between similarities and differences and the meeting of needs and demands. I bore in mind that at the most general socially constructed level, namely that of social categories, the shifting nature of this dilemma may become fixed by the colour of a person's skin. This perspective added discrimination and humiliation to the emotional content of the interactions I have described and led me ponder how to introduce this theme. I chose to punctuate the sequence above by referring to myself and Anna as 'two white women' and Bernard's good will. After that Anna told me that about 10 months ago Daniel and Eric had been preoccupied with wanting to be white, but now they wanted to change their own brown skin for black skin. Bernard talked about incidents in which Anna friends and her mother had openly been racist towards him and Anna had not stood up for him. I felt that while Bernard's expressed and communicated his humiliation, this also echoed Anna's family experiences, a bit like the *naven* ritual in which, all be it in a distorted form, one gender gained some insight into what it feels like to be the other.

### **Emotions in a relational perspective**

I want now to draw to a close by giving a sketch of how I see the different aspects of my work with this family. Hopefully this will provide a view with some coherence. I have been talking about performative rather than

indexical aspects of emotion, but it is probably in the study of emotion terms that we find the strongest evidence for cross-cultural variation in the recognition and expression of emotion (Hare ; Lutz, Lynch). More precisely, I have been talking about the expression of emotions rather than about emotions, as there is no necessary straightforward correspondence between the two. Gestures, language, body language and intonation marked the occurrence of emotions in the sessions and presented an opportunity for glossing them and in this way the emotions affected the interaction. This is the adaptation to an emotional ecosystem, which David Pocock spoke about and this system may arise out of contemporary, remembered or fantasised relations and play an active role in determining these relations. Crapanzano has suggested that in this way emotions 'help call the context' (Crapanzano 1992,343), and this was Bateson's point about schismogenesis. As David also pointed out, one important context, which emotions help to call, is the context in which the infant learns to mentalise. I think that it is because of the emotional tone and experience of any context that an infant, child or anyone of us learn not just to mentalise, but also the meaning of social rules and cultural premises, consciously or unconsciously. It was probably this intuition which led Bateson to connect ethos and culture methodologically.

Along with his contemporaries Bateson described 'culture' as a 'whole'. With postmodern ideas and the influence of Bateson's own work, we have come to be less sure about boundaries and more interested in the role of the person as an agent. The trouble with this has been that continuity has been lost and relationships have tended to be portrayed as endlessly created and re-created without attention to the conditions under which these processes

take place. Modern anthropologists consider continuity to be more illusory, although still important. Rather than referring to a particular body of ideas or traditions, I therefore prefer to consider culture as the sustained expectations of and ideas about a particular social space in which persons participate. Without such expectations no action makes sense, but the illusion may only be gradually realised or not at all. A society, a culture or any social space therefore have no ontological status apart from what is collectively attributed to it. However, these expectations still play a role in interactions and in any learning situation.

In the family described here differences in skin colour went along with marked cultural differences. This may not always be the case, although I do maintain that cultural differences always have a particular potential for opening up schisms and becoming vehicles for economic, political and psychological differences and that skin colour or physical characteristics may become the crudest and most primitive symbols of this. Conversely, I also think that in practice skin colour and other physical characteristics over time tend to become markers of social and psychological identity and therefore also symbols of different ideas and expectations about social spaces. This is why, although not all families from mixed race marriages, contain the interaction I have described, probably in the British and European context all have to face some of the same issues. These ideas provided another layer to the themes of fairness, competition, authority, anger, sadness, passivity and humiliation in the family stories of Anna and Bernard. In addition there was a hidden inversion in the unfettered aggressive coercive attachment strategies (I wonder if David agrees?) of Daniel and Eric in that they seem to be reacting

to different styles and strategies adopted by their mother and father now and in the past. This is schismogenesis across generations.

What about my own gloss of the emotions? What epistemology am I using? I go along with Bateson in his 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' in that my gloss is mine and does not necessarily correspond to the emotions experienced by Anna, Bernard, Daniel or Eric. Nor can I know all the meanings of the emotions they experienced. What I do know is that they occurred and that they changed the context. I make sense of this because I assume that I share with all other human beings a condition of being human<sup>12</sup> and it is this that makes what I know about myself and my clients possible in the first place. I assume a foundation for a kind of resonance or intuition, which opens up the possibility of an awareness of it so that I may experience its presence or absence. At another more general level, I hold a body of both conscious and unconscious expectations about myself and my social context and here I think that I have a responsibility to include all that I can from social and political processes. These two aspects guide my discovery of the family's experiences, my level of curiosity and my enquiry. The therapy proceeds by moving back and forth between my assumptions and my familiar and social context and the particular local details and experiences of my clients. But it is in the therapy room and through the vehicle of emotions, that my experience may come close to theirs and it is this which ought to educate rather than stifle my attention.

Britt Krause

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<sup>12</sup> Referring to certain capacities, language, symbolisation, suffering, reproduction, ageing etc



