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When Racialized Ghosts Refuse to Become Ancestors: Tasting Loewald’s “Blood of Recognition” in Racial Melancholia and Mixed-Race Identities

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ABSTRACT

Experiences of feeling haunted and of being in the presence of ghosts are prominent in narratives of patients/people of color in the United States and of mixed-race identity. A creative reading of Hans Loewald’s evocative statement on therapeutic action, the process of transforming “ghosts into ancestors,” is used to explore a way of being with and healing patients with mixed-race identities who are imprisoned in melancholic states. An extended case vignette of an Indian American psychoanalyst working with a patient with a mixed racial identity highlights racialized components of melancholia and illuminates specific countertransference states and enactments that can both impede and allow for the gradual and partial witnessing of racialized ghosts and their transformation into ancestors.

Hopelessly haunted

Sandra, a 21-year-old, third-year undergraduate student of Korean and African American descent is sitting in my office looking at my bookshelf with a sullen expression. “I feel like a fucking ghost. Or maybe the whole world is filled with ghosts I don’t know. It’s all messed up . . . It’s like a haunting feeling like I don’t exist in this world. I’m not anywhere really, just wandering around seeing everything from the outside. In this moment, the world is happening all around me, people are living, falling in love, fighting, having sex, living a life. I’m not. What the hell am I doing here? Nothing feels real, and I don’t even know where to start. I’ve got all this work to do; it makes me sick to even think about opening a book. I want to crawl into my bed and die. I don’t want to exist. And I hate myself for talking like this—I’m hearing what a whiny bitch I am. I walk around campus and see all of these fucking people; they look so happy and put together. I remember feeling that way with Josh and now it’s over. So, what’s the point?” She suddenly stares in my direction, waiting for an answer. I am gripped with a hopeless despair as she speaks. I can feel it inside my body as a dead weight. I’m not sure what to say. Now we are both in a space of feeling haunted.

What does Sandra mean when she says she feels haunted and that the world is filled with ghosts? Ghosts live in the liminal spaces of our existence; they do not exist fully in the moment or the past, nor are they completely present or absent. They have an uncanny

quality that makes what was once familiar feel unfamiliar and unsafe (Freud, 1919). Ghosts seem to reside both outside ourselves and somehow inside a part of us as well. We feel tormented and frightened by ghosts, but our sense that they are trying to communicate with us in a way we cannot grasp makes them strangely compelling. Despite this alluring quality, when we approach them, these absent presences may vanish. If they do linger, they lack an aliveness and humanity that we long for from them. Ghosts disturb our minds, our environments, our bodies, and our temporality. They disrupt our sense that the past can infuse the present moment with vitality and life. Instead, they leave us cold and haunted, present with absence. The image and metaphor of the ghost has been a source of creative inspiration in psychoanalytic writing and clinical practice and are deeply interwoven in accounts of experiences and theorizing about intergenerational and early childhood trauma (Cavalli, 2012; Durban, 2011; Fraiberg et al., 1975; Gatti, 2011; Moldawsky Silber, 2012). Ghosts have inspired psychoanalytic theorizing on a variety of other themes as well, including enactments (Katz, 2015), adoption (Lifton, 2010), primitive states of psychic withdrawal (Barrows, 1999), narcissism (Shaw, 2010), and creativity (Flescher, 2012; Haseley, 2011)¹

Hans Loewald (1906–1933), a visionary psychoanalyst who was deeply respected as a “radical conservatist” (Whitebook, 2004) by both classical and relational psychoanalytic traditions, memorably tells us that the role of therapeutic action is to “turn ghosts into ancestors.” Loewald (1960) writes about the need for the “blood of recognition,” which

The patient’s unconscious is given to taste so that the old ghosts may reawaken life. Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation with their shadow life . . . Ghosts of the unconscious, imprisoned by defenses and symptoms, are allowed to taste blood, are let loose. In the daylight of analysis the ghosts of the unconscious are laid to rest as ancestors whose power is taken over and transformed into the newer intensity of present life (Loewald, 1960, pp. 248–249).

In a good-enough therapeutic space, old ghosts begin to stir. They “taste” the “blood of recognition,” telling us they are imprisoned and long to be released to a “newer intensity of present life.” In the less evocative, more intellectualized language of object relations theory, ghosts represent internalized mental representations of self and others that we cannot bear, “present absences” that bury and dissociate pain to manage excesses impossible to endure or fathom (Harris, Kalb & Klebanoff, 2016a). Internalized representations in ghost-like states can also be described as *underinternalizations*; that is, internalizations that are lacking or inadequately developed, involving dissociation, “undermourned losses” and “concomitant clinical (re)enactments” that emerge in intrapsychic space (Kalb, 2015). Letting them loose to taste blood in the consulting room, to be felt, contained, and voiced, allows them to be partially laid to rest as ancestors internalized within us as a part of our shared history and vital sense of self.

Returning to the clinical moment with Sandra, can her ghosts be “laid to rest?” Sandra, along with other patients of mixed racial descent who have described similar experiences, led

¹This is by no means an exhaustive list. For a thoughtful overview of the use of the metaphor of the ghost in psychoanalytic history and its contemporary significance, see Harris et al. (2016a), *Ghosts in the Consulting Room: Echoes of Trauma in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, and the companion book: Harris et al. (2016b), *Demons in the Consulting Room: Echoes of Genocide, Slavery and Extreme Trauma in Psychoanalytic Practice*. New York: Routledge.

me to deepen my understanding of the *racial history* of ghosts. It is striking that many of my patients of color who have marginalized racial backgrounds and are living in the United States describe a feeling of being haunted by ghosts. The theme of ghosts and being haunted is so common in novels of literature of people of color that we take it for granted. Maxine Hong Kingston's protagonist in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* speaks of

Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts. Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghosts, I could hardly breathe; I could hardly walk, limping my way around the White Ghosts and their cars (Kingston, 1989, p. 97).

The image of the ghost is often evoked in novels of authors with mixed racial identities. In Danzy Senna's novel *Caucasia*, the narrator, Birdie Lee, who is of mixed white and African American descent, describes feeling "haunted" and "searching for ghosts" (Senna, 1998). In the novel *Loving Day*, Mat Johnson's protagonist Warry Duffy, who declares himself a "racial optical illusion" because of being Irish American and Black, cannot avoid feeling haunted constantly by ghosts who inhabit his inherited dilapidated home in Philadelphia (Johnson, 2015).

Despite the growing number of narrative voices over the past decade, the clinical process of working with and helping patients with mixed racial identities who live in such haunted states has been so far largely unmapped in the psychoanalytic literature. Via a creative application of Loewald's concept of "racial ghosts," this paper attempts to highlight some pitfalls and paths forward in reaching and reanimating these patients' haunted spaces.

The paucity of clinical literature on this topic speaks to an uncomfortable evasion and erasure of the subjective experience of persons of mixed-race descent: They are "ghosted" out of their subjective experience and, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Akhtar, 2014; Bonovitz, 2009; Davids, 2011; Dimen, 2011; Fors, 2018; Hart, 2019; Méndez, 2015; Tummala-Narra, 2016), are relatively invisible in psychoanalytic discourse. Jamali and Méndez (2019) contextualize this absence as inherent in an American culture that has a profound discomfort with racial multiplicity. Practices and policies such as anti-miscegenation laws, cultural stereotypes, and internalized racist beliefs uphold the illusion that race is distinct, with firm boundaries and markers. This assumption pervades United States history in the form of laws such as interracial marriage prohibitions and the "one drop rule" that categorized as Black a racially mixed person with "one drop of Black blood," thereby protecting the fiction of white purity (Bonovitz, 2009). Breathing in daily the air of these defensive collective fantasies of racial purity and assumptions of white privilege and coping chronically with the culture's disengagement with racial multiplicity, individuals of mixed race can easily feel a threat to their sense of racial existence. In response, they can find themselves in a melancholic, ghost-like state. Because their racial ghosts are often surrounded by, and suffused with, intrapsychic and familial conflicts that are more visible, clinicians can be blind to this phenomenon.

Melancholia: What has been lost?

Returning to my session with Sandra:

Sandra: Nothing feels real, and I don't even know where to start. I've got all this work to do; it makes me sick to even think about opening a book. I want to crawl into my bed and die.

I don't want to exist. And I hate myself for talking like this. I'm hearing what a whiny bitch I am. I walk around campus and see all of these fucking people; they look so happy and put together. I remember feeling that way with Josh, and now it's over. So, what's the point?"

I struggle to overcome my own momentary experience of hopelessness that I recognize as possibly a reflection of Sandra's own way of being. Is she trying to articulate some unformulated aspect of her experience that is important to her, that she needs to put into words, about this ghostly feeling? I have a sense that if I were to ask Sandra about ghosts directly, she would get intellectual – as a writer in an academic family, she can talk openly about emotional states in ways that at times feel slightly removed. I decide to go with staying with her feelings and her attacks on herself:

Me: I hear your misery and anger – it's also so powerfully directed at you. You seem to have so much shame and anger at yourself for feeling the way you do about this breakup.

Sandra: But why? He's just a boy. I feel like he ruined my life, and I don't know why. My mother tells me of course I'm upset, and it will pass after a while. But she's missing the point. She doesn't get that it feels bigger than him even. I mean, I miss him but as time passes it feels like I lost something else, but I don't know what. [pauses].

I am struck by her words: "*It feels bigger than him . . .*" Some background material about Sandra is useful here: Josh left Sandra two months ago, and her world collapsed. They met when she was a first-year undergraduate in their writing seminar. "It was like he was my twin – we got each other completely." They loved the same Russian novels, and both shared a caustic and dark sense of humor. There were differences as well, however: Josh was an athlete, "a jock, put together . . . nothing like the guys I dated in high school – back then I was all about the artsy POCs [people of color]!" Sandra joked that he was a "super-white country club boy with a secret sensitive side."

Sandra's father, whom she admired deeply, was a university professor from a prominent African American family. Her paternal grandfather was a politician and activist, and her paternal grandmother was a well-respected school administrator. Sandra's father met her mother when he was working for a year as a young visiting professor in South Korea. Sandra's mother was a graduate student. She had come from a fractured upbringing; her family had fallen apart after her father (Sandra's maternal grandfather) had left her for another woman, leaving Sandra's maternal grandmother alone to take care of three girls, among whom Sandra's mother was the middle child. She had told Sandra that she wanted to escape her mother's desperate unhappiness and neglect. When she met Sandra's father, his charisma and promise of a different life led her to marry him and move to the United States.

Sandra was born and grew up in the suburbs of Baltimore in an affluent, multicultural town after her mother emigrated to America to marry her father. Her mother struggled with the transition to America – all of her friends and sources of support came from her father's large family network. Although they occasionally visited South Korea and Sandra had Korean cousins she was in contact with, she felt more connected with her father's extended Black family and community. However, Sandra did feel that she and her mother were treated differently than her other relatives.

Throughout her childhood, Sandra struggled with what she described as "dark days." She would wake up in the morning with a sense of terrible anxiety and dread that alternated

with feelings of hopelessness, anger, and despair. She felt urges to cut herself with a knife or scratch herself until she bled. Sandra was not able to identify what triggered these “dark times,” outside of generic comments about “stress at school” and “relationship stuff . . . maybe it’s also because I had no siblings to feel less alone.”

Sandra identified as female and bisexual and had dated prior to her relationship with Josh but had never felt fully engaged sexually or emotionally until she met him. When she was with him, she felt her whole world opened up, and she felt an intimacy she had never known existed: “All of those corny love songs made sense to me.” When he ended their relationship to be with another woman, she felt her world had ended. She decided to seek treatment after a night of binge drinking and cutting her wrists and thighs superficially with a knife while thinking about his betrayal. Sandra woke up after this episode in a state of panic and dread. “I’m ashamed this is all because of a boy. I used to laugh at people like me. It’s pathetic.” She stopped going to classes. The Deans and her parents were concerned. During this time, her maternal Grandmother from Korea, who had been ailing for some time, died, and her mother had gone back to Korea to be with her sisters. Sandra felt removed from it all.

Melancholia had taken her over. Freud’s original description captures her experience: In a reaction to a loss there is “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self revilings, that culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (Freud, 1917). The breakup with Josh seems to have “broken” Sandra; her sense of existence and reality fragmented and collapsed. In our session, she feels her problem is “bigger than him” but cannot verbalize what it is that is “bigger.” Sandra’s heartbreak is reminiscent of a classic line in “Mourning and Melancholia”: in her cocoon of melancholia, she knows *whom* she has lost, but not *what* she has lost (Freud, 1917). Sandra knows she lost Josh as her partner, her lover, her friend, but she does not know *what* she has lost that was so critical to her feeling alive and why this breakup has “broken” her sense of existence. Sandra feels trapped in this haunted and ghostly state of being.

I wondered if Sandra’s melancholia was a way of managing her unbearable pain by withdrawing into herself and unconsciously keeping Josh with her in a sadomasochistic identification at the cost of her own inner vitality (Ogden, 2002). In this merging with what has been lost, hate is laced with passion in a tyrannizing way that she directs toward herself in isolated and brutal self-attacks. This understanding, however, did not speak fully to *what* Sandra had lost. What came as a surprise to both of us was her association to Josh’s white skin as a signifier for her loss.

Racial melancholia

Sandra: This sounds strange, but I think it’s something about him being white. I don’t know why that just flashed through my mind. I don’t know. I was just remembering what it felt like to touch his skin. I felt whole somehow. His white skin. That’s fucked up. I’m not sure what I’m saying here.

Me: What did it feel like?

Sandra: Like I had something I've always wanted. It wasn't just that, of course . . . [she goes on to talk about his other attributes, their time together] . . . but I felt at peace. That feeling of my body touching his body.

Me: It felt like you got something you were longing for? And now it's been taken away from you?

Sandra: [looking upset] I don't know. I feel like shit. I don't know what I'm talking about. It's stupid.

Me: You sound ashamed and upset about the feelings that are coming up right now about you talking about this.

Sandra: It's this longing I feel, to use your word, although honestly, I don't feel that word fully captures it. [Pauses.] I don't know.

Me: You don't know if I'm going to get this feeling you are experiencing?

Sandra: I don't know if you can understand this. Nobody can, I think. You're not white [sarcastic laugh] – fucking obvious I know, but from what I can see you're totally Indian. When people look at me, what the fuck do they see? I call myself Black, but some of my Black friends here don't see me that way. They see my eyes, my skin, my face and they think I'm Iranian or Latina or something. I stare in the mirror and wonder how others see me. Maybe I'm just a fucking fantasy of whatever anyone wants me to be. Maybe that's all I was to Josh.

Sandra shamefully desires to touch and be touched by Josh's body, his *white* skin. The skin serves as a point of contact, of touching/feeling, a site of an intersubjective encounter between the inner and outer self and between the self and other (Stephens, 2014). Skin color often has multiple meanings and fantasies imbued with racialized power dynamics (Tummala-Narra, 2007). Being with Josh and his skin, taking in and touching the contours of his white body, momentarily soothed Sandra's racial ghosts: "it's like I had something I've always wanted." It felt as if Sandra, in the context of her loss of Josh, was describing a racial melancholia – the experience that marginalized people of color feel collectively and internally as racial subjects (Eng & Han, 2000). The struggle for people of color in the United States to assimilate to heteronormative white ideals which can never be reached leads to a feeling of unbelonging with an internalized and collective exclusion. Assimilation is never fully possible without a loss (Akhtar, 1995), especially in the complexity of being of varied ethnic descent. For Sandra there is always a potential loss of herself as a Black subject, a Korean subject, and a minority within the larger culture. No matter where she was, the sense of being with "her people" and at home with her own skin always involved a sense of distance. Belonging was something to approach but never fully realize.

Sandra's mixed racial identity exacerbated this haunted feeling of not fully existing as a racial subject anywhere, including with me. Josh's white skin and my being "totally Indian" spoke to her sense of melancholic exclusion from both of us, her envy over what she perceived as my "ethnic purity," and her longing to find a way out of her painful fragmented experience through a fantasy of merger and union.

Reflecting on this, I was struck by Sandra's feeling that others perceived her as "Iranian" or "Latina" but not Asian. I realized that she rarely talked about her mother being Korean or

her experiences as an Asian American; she often spoke about her relationship with her mother in a forced and emotionally distanced manner. Maybe being with Josh recaptured her longing for intimacy and closeness with her mother, and in the process reawakened old wounds about her sense of being not fully identified with her mother and her Korean identity and body.

Racial dissociation

Me: I'm not sure if this is important or not, but I noticed that you said that they see you as Iranian or Latina but not Asian, not Korean.

Sandra: [looks visibly shaken, pauses]. I just felt really sad when you said that. I wasn't thinking about that. Honestly, I don't think about being Korean often. That makes me upset . . . My mother would feel sad hearing that [tears up]. I feel like shit saying this, but I don't know if I feel Asian, Korean, whatever that means. I remember going to this Korean day camp at this Church as a kid; my mother wanted me to be friends with other Korean kids, learn about being Korean. I felt totally out of place. I looked down on them at the time- they seemed like total nerds. But they weren't. I came home making fun of them, and my dad laughed, but my mother got upset [pause]. We never talked about it [pause]. I was thinking about my grandmother . . . the last time I saw her. I'll never see her again; I wonder if we will go back to Korea. I feel like I should be feeling something about her but I don't.

Me: Are any memories or images coming up?

Sandra: I remember being excited to see her when I was a kid. Going to Korea was like an adventure. But we were never close. I don't think she liked me.

Me: Why not?

Sandra: My hair. I remember she made some comment about my hair [getting upset]. I'm feeling uncomfortable right now. I don't like how this feels. It was a small thing but it really bothered me. She hugged me and pulled my hair and said, "not Korean hair!" I was polite but pissed. I remember telling my mother. She said, "Of course you are Korean. You are me and your father; don't ever feel like you are not." But that's not how it felt. Other times she would say "You are a beautiful and unique creation of me and your father, you don't have to be one or the other. You are the best of both of us." She's being nice, I know, but she doesn't get it.

Sandra's racialized ghosts were "tasting blood," asking to be heard. Her sudden experience of grief and painful memories of her racial melancholia and exclusion from her Korean maternal racial history and identity arrived unbidden and with intense emotion. Sandra's hair and her grandmother's dismissal of it as not being "Korean" felt like a signifier of her dissociative split between her lived in experience of being Korean, infused with having her early maternal care suddenly ripped away from her as "not Korean," not a part of her mother's blood and ancestral lineage. This split between how others interpreted Sandra (your hair is not Korean) and how Sandra experienced her own body and sense of self created a gap between her internal self-representation and her sense of how she was seen by

others, leaving her with a haunted sense of herself (Brouillette & Stephens, 2015; Stephens, 2014). Compounding the pain of this dissociative split was her grandmother's implicit racism toward black skin, her repudiation of Sandra's Black identity – her hair signifying her deep connection with her father's sense of himself as a Black man.

The cumulative effects of these moments throughout her life created a ghost-like, fractured internal experience for Sandra of her own skin, body, and racial identification. They existed somehow askew from how she was feeling internally and being represented by others. Sandra feels she cannot completely “own” being Black, Korean, or fully American. This experience is compounded by the collective experience of being a person of color in the United States and feeling a sense of not being what others feel you are or should be. The psychiatrist, activist and psychoanalytic theorist Franz Fanon describes a moment like this on a subway when he was suddenly identified as “a Negro.” Fanon feels like he is being “sealed” into a “crushing objecthood,” as if encased by his own skin. He apprehends others' gaze as a sensation running over the surface of his body, “first burning and shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones” (Fanon, 1952). A lifetime of moments of racial dissociation create dissociative splits in our experience, fragmenting the fabric of our intersubjective spaces of meaning and connection with others.

Sandra continues:

Sandra: I don't think you can fully get this. I don't feel Korean, or anything sometimes . . . to constantly walk around feeling like you don't have a place. To feel like if you're in one place, then not in the other [cries]. It's like a fractured existence, that's what I feel.

Sandra is desperate to have someone “get” her experience but is wary of being misunderstood. Can a “totally” Indian guy understand this experience? I suddenly felt defensive and annoyed over Sandra's telling me I did not “get it.” I felt a strong urge to tell her that I *did* get this, that as a person of color in America, I could make emotional sense of her experience. Moments of my own experiences of dislocation and exclusion arrived unbidden in the form of images and visceral sensations. One memory was of feeling shame when a Punjabi Indian man my age eagerly approached me speaking Hindi at a party where the majority of the other people appeared white. After fumbling a few words together in Hindi, I saw the disappointment and dismissal on his face that seemed to say, “This guy is not Indian like me.” I suddenly felt I was not Indian, but I was also not like the other white people at the party. My presence was in some ghostly place, in-between and nowhere, and I felt it as a chill in my bones. Feeling that chill with Sandra, I suddenly had an urge to say: “Hold on, I do get it!”

My eagerness to “get her” and to join Sandra in understanding her experience was genuine, but it was also based on a narcissistic overidentification – an implicit denial of her own unique racial experience and separateness. Her racial melancholia was stirring my own ghosts of unbelonging and moments of feeling irreparably distant from others. This urge to tell Sandra I understood her also felt like an enactment of what she had experienced with her “totally” Korean mother; she often described her mother as anxious and eager to gloss over the differences between them, possibly avoiding painful truths about areas of discrepant experiences. Despite their genuine closeness and love for one another, Sandra often experienced her mother as overly eager to join her in understanding her perspective without seeing the differences between them. Having left her mother country and family of origin, Sandra's mother had her own ghosts, experiences of isolation, and sense of exclusion

from her husband's family. Sandra's perception that her mother needed her to feel they were the same created anxiety and guilt in her, with defensive anger over their separateness. There were echoes of an intergenerational transmission of trauma and guilt in Sandra's mother's choice to escape her ghosts from the past. Sandra's mother's desire to flee her own mother's melancholic prison and her Korean family of origin in choosing Josh's father (an "other" of African American descent) was in some ways analogous to Sandra's desire for Josh, the longing for an external escape to heal her familial and racial wounds and undo her guilt over her separateness with her own mother (Dionne Powell, personal communication).

Sandra's difficulties in being seen by her mother also spoke to her daily struggle as a person with a mixed racial identity in America. A terrible dilemma follows from this need for both separateness and intimacy: Patients of mixed racial descent live in the constant possibility of misrecognition and consequent feelings of isolation. Others either overemphasize their racial distinctiveness (e.g., "You're an anomaly, nothing like us"), leading to racial isolation and aloneness, or gloss over racial differences ("See, you're just like me"), thereby negating uniqueness and implicitly creating a narcissistic relationship with the other. This narcissistic way of knowing the other also implies a power dynamic in which the attributor of equivalence is the implicit master of the truth: "I *know* we are the same (or different)."

Guilt and an "uncomfortable envy" in the countertransference

This countertransference/transference enactment with me unconsciously occupying the position of Sandra's mother had multiple layers of meaning that took time for us to give voice to. Reflecting on my reaction of annoyance to Sandra's saying I could not "get" her experience, I also felt defensive guilt over occupying the position of being an Asian "model minority" in contrast to Sandra's African American identity, similar to the position Sandra's mother held. Eng and Han (2018) note that racial relations between the fantasied binary of mainstream white culture and Black communities in America are triangulated between "model minorities," often of Asian descent. This triangulation masks complex social relations of race while preventing alliances and political connections between people of color. They note that the model minority stereotype is a myth because it homogenizes widely different Asian American and Asian immigrant groups and generalizes them as academically and economically successful with no social issues. This stereotype works to deny the multiplicity of various Asian American groups who do not fit the ideals of the majority and often sets them against and apart from African Americans (Eng & Han, 2018). Feeling the cultural burden of being a "model minority" signified my minority status as different from Sandra's position as an African American woman. This dynamic was also present in Sandra's relationship with her Korean mother, and within Sandra's own racial self-representations.

Within these complex intersections of power and privilege, later in the treatment I also experienced an uncomfortable envy toward Sandra's African American heritage. Her father's wealthy African American family was historically rooted in United States history, with a legacy of activism and intellectual rigor that contrasted with my own family of origin. I was originally born in India and moved to America with my family at the age of two. Although I "pass" as an American with no accent, on a visceral level my

experience is of being a first-generation immigrant who in some ways does not feel deep roots to United States history, despite a longing to belong. This could have contributed to the enactment of me identifying with Sandra's mother and her immigrant status and identifying with Sandra's mother's envy of Sandra's father's African American family.

What took me some time to see in my work with Sandra was how my "uncomfortable envy" of her African American heritage masked more difficult and unbearable feelings about Sandra's Blackness. Eager to "get it," consciously I felt solidarity and communion with both of us being people of color while envying her ability to be in a prominent and wealthy African American family. What was more disturbing, covered over by my claims of recognition, was my uncomfortable visceral experience and unconscious repudiation of her Blackness, which was a different kind of ghost that demanded recognition; a ghost that I had not fully reckoned with within myself or Sandra, based on my own internalized racism of Blackness and my denial of the intergenerational trauma of slavery and negation of African Americans as human subjects in American history (Wilderson, 2020).

My envy of her family and culture was based in a fetishized and defensively idealized fantasy of Blackness due to my own racial insecurities. Growing up in an interracial community that was predominantly divided between African Americans and individuals who identified as white, I struggled to understand my place and how I fit in being brown skinned and set apart from the dichotomized racial struggles in my town. Although I idealized and admired African American culture, feeling close to people of color, underneath this enthusiasm in part was a devaluation and an implicit denigration of Blackness that I feared. I superficially conflated being a person of color with being Black, which obscured Sandra's ability to feel and explore her Black identity separate from my own, and also denied the structural basis of racism based in the trauma of slavery and abjection of the black body, relegating Black subjects to a "zone of non-being" (Fanon, 1952). In this sense, my unconscious denial of Sandra's Blackness as separate from my own experience of being a person of color covered over by idealization and envy was in some ways like Sandra's grandmother's comment: "not Korean hair," dismissing Sandra's experience and knowledge of her Blackness distinct from her Korean heritage.

Later in the treatment, Sandra also spoke at length about her own envy of her cousins she perceived as "Blacker" than her, and her fantasy of wishing she was "purely Black" to feel accepted and close to them and her African American heritage. Sandra and I struggled to both embrace and know her Blackness and African American ancestry, as well as mourn the fantasy of this essence of Black "racial purity" as an attempt to heal the wounds of her biracial experience, the wish for wholeness that is inherent in all racial fantasies (George, 2016).

Returning to the clinical moment I was describing above, I wondered if Sandra was implicitly communicating her need for me to tolerate being with her experience without me trying to impose my own understanding on her defensively (Poland, 2018). I chose to stay with her experience, to stay with what felt painful to put into words:

Me: I was remembering what you said about touching Josh and being with him – that whole feeling. Maybe being with Josh took that fractured feeling away. You felt whole with him.

Sandra: (*Crying*) Yes. Now I'm left with this broken feeling.

Can ghosts ever be put to rest?

Sandra left visibly upset, and for some time after this session she continued to struggle. Gradually, however, she began to feel a shift in her way of speaking about herself and her identity. Allowing her racial ghosts to have a voice seemed to help her to feel more alive and in touch with herself and her losses. She felt less haunted and more connected by links with her racial ancestors. For Sandra, mourning was not a process of letting go of any aspect of her racial identity or history to become more “whole.” I believe that such formulations reflect a collective wishful myth about the possibility of living in a colorblind society where racial traumas can be discarded.

Sandra's healing began by allowing herself to “taste the blood” of the anguish, rage and sadness that were buried, unformulated (Stern, 1997), and dissociated from her experience. Ogden (2002) notes that living with pain, symbolizing it for oneself, and doing psychological work with it lies at the heart of the experience of healing. For Sandra, healing also involved mourning the loss of the fantasy that Josh represented – the fantasy of union with his white skin that would make her whole, set free from her racialized traumas, and repair her experience of disconnection with her mother.

Contemporary object relations perspectives on mourning emphasize mourning as an ongoing process of coming to terms with loss, psychic pain, and vulnerability with our internalized objects and relationships (e.g., Kavalier-Adler, 2007; Shabad, 2001). Mourning from this perspective does not imply a “letting go” or closure of a relationship. In contrast to melancholia, which is often depicted as a place (e.g., the netherworld, a prison, a deserted island) mourning is a process, not a state of being. There is no exorcism of these racial ghosts for Sandra – all people of color in America are perpetually haunted by lifelong present and past traumas of misrecognition and exclusion. The “tasting of the blood of recognition” and psychic transformation of a melancholic existence requires the presence of a third, a witnessing other to enliven the process of mourning. As Gerson (2009) movingly writes:

What then can exist between the scream and the silence? We hope first that there is an engaged witness – an other that stands beside the event and the self and who cares to listen; an other who is able to contain that which is heard and is capable of imagining the unbearable; an other who is in a position to confirm both our external and our psychic realities and, thereby, to help us integrate and live within all realms of our experience. This is the presence that lives in the gap, absorbs absence, and transforms our relation to loss. It is the active and attuned affective responsiveness of the witnessing other that constitutes a “live third” – the presence that exists between the experience and its meaning, between the real and the symbolic, and through whom life gestates and into whom futures are born (p. 1341).

For Sandra, there was over time a subtle but significant shift in her ability to feel more alive and to love the varied aspects of herself and her life experience in the present moment. This required a significant amount of disorientation and discomfort for me as I struggled with my own implicit essentialist fantasies about race as we confronted Sandra's traumatic experiences of racism and misrecognition. Dismantling the cultural illusion that race is distinct, with firm boundaries and clear markers led to a kind of uncanny experience of my

own racial position as well as Sandra's – a place of epistemic vertigo that led to ruptures and misunderstandings between us that continued throughout our work together.

Through this struggle, however, aspects of the dissociative splits in Sandra's racial identity gradually lessened, and she was able to have more experiences in which she could “stand in the spaces” of her racial identities with caring and respect for her multiplicity (Bromberg, 1996; Eng & Han, 2000). As the Elijah Lander character says in Colson Whitehead's novel *The Underground Railroad*: “I'm what the botanists call a hybrid . . . a mixture of two different families. In flowers, such a concoction pleases the eye. When that amalgamation takes its shape in flesh and blood, some take great offence. In this room we recognize it for what it is – a new beauty come into the world, and it is in bloom all around us” (Whitehead, 2016, p. 260).

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