Editorial

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Welcome to the Spring edition of The Journal for Psychosocial Studies. This volume does, we hope, support the notion that good things are worth waiting for.

We feel very proud of this edition. The five papers contained in it are extraordinary in a whole range of different ways, and we have felt privileged to have had an excuse to read, ruminate on and re-read them. They seem to constitute nourishment, for us and we hope other struggling and institutionally 'starved' academics and practitioners. Here we have brain food and heart food; stimulants for flagging creativity and tired minds, surges of energy for howls of (out)rage, and the reflective spaces for quiet contemplation. We very much hope that you find the papers in this issue equally energising. Please do get in touch with us, or with the authors, if you would like to comment.

The first paper presented below, is C. Fred Alford's essay: 'Depoliticizing Moral Injury'. In the week that the Hillsborough stadium victims' families 27 year struggle for truth to be established, in the face of the lying, distortion and victim blaming of senior police officers, and some newspapers and politicians, the damage that abdication of all moral responsibility by key state institutions can wreak, it is prescient to examine the notion of moral injury.

Alford's context is the contemporary USA, and the growth of the idea of moral injury within the (military) Veterans' Association where, similarly to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, it is used for understanding the experiences faced by soldiers and the damage these experiences cause. Alford's definition of the idea references expectations, meaning, values and the inter-relational issue of trust. He says 'A moral injury occurs when an act shatters the moral and ethical expectations of soldiers and others, including expectations about fairness, the value of life, and the expectation that others will tell the truth.' This is monumental, powerful and life changing.

Alford teases out two main critical strands from this. Firstly, that within the military, the approach to the suffering that veterans have experienced in relation to this, is focused on helping soldiers deal with *their* shame and guilt at e.g. killing civilians in Vietnam, but not so much the politics of these situations. Their experiences were the products of decisions taken or ordered by senior military staff. They, not individual soldiers, ordered the killings –some of which mistakenly or cynically killed civilians; and some of which were hushed up or even rewarded- which still pray on the minds of these men.

Political acts, then, but individualised as experiences of guilt, powerlessness and moral disorientation.

The second theme taken up by Alford is how, though currently mostly limited to the military, such a notion could be extended to civilian life, when the powerful betray normal ethical 'decency' (Hillsborough being a case in point) and the shattering of identities which can follow from such a shattering of belief in honesty and honourableness of institutions and indeed intervals. 'The betrayal of what's right, by somebody in power'.

Alford's analysis was primarily undertaken in the context of the USA, but with immeasurable resonance for understanding the relationship between the state and the individual (that sounds so friendly and equal, perhaps the concept of 'damage done by …') almost universally. A similar claim can be made for the next paper, by Matthew Bowker, which discusses a specific area of concern in relation to young people in Japan. Again, both the specifics and the 'universals' with which they are inflected offer a nuanced and rich experience for the reader.

Hikikomori is a psychological condition – a mental health problem – effecting a large number of young people in Japan (estimates vary- perhaps 25% at some point between 16 and 30 years), and with slightly more males than females effected. The person concerned typically stops leaving the house (usually the family home), effectively isolating themselves in their rooms for protracted periods of time. As the condition is intensely stigmatising and shaming, parents might hide the situation, which prevents help reaching the child, and also inadvertently impacts on the extent to which epidemiological factors are

understood by medical services and the state. The sufferer is in hiding, and parents may compound this.

Bowker sets out the background carefully, and with equal care looks at the contemporary understanding in Japan of the notion of Hikokomori as, primarily, a 'culturally bound' syndrome, only evident in the last couple of decades, in this relatively rich, technologically advanced society. Unlike most forms of mental health struggle in the UK, the theory so far has suggested this is a 'disease' of affluence. The sufferers have been portrayed, crudely, as spoilt rich kids, at best parasites and at worst also abusive or even criminal, and this is compounded by over-indulgent parenting styles. The paper then offers a critical examination of these perspectives, considering whose interests they serve and what additional damage they compound occasion. In addition, Bowker considers what kinds of things these young people might be going through: the inter-relational states of trauma suffered and the (absence or presence of) experiences of caring between parents and children (analogous to Winnicott's notion of 'holding'). That the victimisation of young people with mental health problems, currently offered, has much in common with those burgeoning in the USA ('the me generation', 'fragile narcissists') is thoughtfully proffered. Ideas connected to how relational thinking may advance understandings based less in swingeing cultural criticism, and more in a consideration of how psychological damage may arise and impact on struggling young lives, are developed as a dominant theme.

The following paper, Myna Trustram's Performing the psychosocial: An enquiry into forgetting, leads us down a different route, where we can amble, shamble, become lost and stumble on the unexpected notions and ideas that spaces and pauses nurture.

Trustram's s highly experimental and intriguing piece sets out to explore how one might perform the psychosocial. From the beginning, a position of uncertainty and inflects the work, as she queries initially 'Was it possible to present something imperfect that was still worth receiving?' And what defines the piece begins to unfold – that it is steeped in the psychosocial discipline's

ambitions to blur boundaries: arts and humanities, intellectual and emotional, inner and outer.

Whilst acknowledging that all conference presentation is performance, Trustram sets out to introduce a rawness and reflexivity in the exploration of self and 'audience' in the here and now of the conference presentation setting. Choosing the overall theme of memory and forgetting, and making the analogy of 'loss and grief' (the loss of what one was seeking when one forgets, the desire for forgetting in grief), she proceeds an examination of the nature of performance and whether/how 'it might be added to the psychosocial repertoire', and through this subverts the cerebral nature of academic engagement in such situations, thereby instituting a more emotional experience.

This is a rich experience for the reader, in terms of tone and breadth of ideas as the paper unfolds, but particularly in terms of emotional engagement. There are places where this is moving and beautiful, for example in in the visceral candour with which she writes of experiencing grief and loss. And of remembering: learning by heart, in this case, a poem and what the experience of such learning might be able to arouse.

This offers us wisdom from Bion and Butler, Jaqueline Rose and Christina Rossetti, Martin Creed and Maxine Peake. Profound ideas are tangled up with each other: whizzed in a blender. It's performative feast - the tastiest nurturing.

The title of Peter Redman's paper on the nature of psychosocial theory instills a sense of both expectation and reassurance. 'Once more with feeling' demonstrates that there are new ways of coming at this debate: new ideas to convey in ways that are erudite and stylish. And, as Peter Redman underlines from the beginning of the paper, the psychosocial is very much still in a phase of disciplinary evolution and therefore reliant on regular review and debate. What we have here then, is an exploratory journey through some of the complex terrain of contemporary psychosocial thinking, with a confident and enlightening guide. Three key areas of discussion are given a particular focus: the relationship with the other approach know as psychosocial (as in, for example, psychiatric

usage which has neither social structural thinking nor psychoanalysis in its analysis), the newness of psychosocial terminology and the relation between the discipline and another, established discipline, psychoanalysis. This latter discussion particularly introduces a great deal of original reconsideration of some persistent, fundamental debates in the field.

From the frame to the brush-stroke: the next paper is a psychosocial discussion of contemporary welfare services in Denmark, some of which will be familiar to UK readers for whom the neo-liberal shrinking of the welfare state and its impact on individuals is an acute practice concern. 'A psycho-societal perspective on neoliberal welfare services in Denmark: Identification and ambivalence, by Linda Lundgaard Andersen sets out to examine the crucial issue of how professionals in these services can respond to change and learning. In a tradition of something like Isabel Menzies-Lyth seminal 'Social systems as a defence against anxiety: an empirical study of the nursing service of a general hospital', Andersen critically discusses the organisational defence mechanisms at work in Danish welfare professions, and how these permeate the individuals therein, as they are permeated by the new public management policies currently dominant in the state of Denmark. The seemingly contradictory – or at least not evidently corresponding- government policy drives which, as Anderson sets out, attempted to introduce rationality and efficiency with ideals of greater participation and local democracy, gave rise to anxiety and ambivalence in many workers experiencing the dilemmas inherent in this. Keeping faith with a grounded psychosocial approach ('the social in the subject and the subject in the social, meaning that human beings' inner conscious and unconscious worlds form and are formed by the societal world') the paper also draws on learning theory to engage with the notion in change situations. Not unlike Alford's work however, that the decisions of policy makers in the context of the state bruise people's capacity to function well-hurts their inner worlds, is clearly underscored here. Discussing social work, for example, Andersen makes the point that 'the individual is de-politicised and disempowered by organisational processes of displacement whereby the social worker's experience is reduced to a personalised and privatised conflict'. The state's systems 'rationalisation' of

resources, persistently stymieing the ethics and values of such professionals in relation to the struggling subjects of their interventions, will be experienced 'in the shape of subjectified reactions like ambivalence, relinquishment or resignation'. The Danish experience elucidates, as does Alford's work, how powerlessness is experienced individually as failures of the self not, or as well as, failures of the system.

This, then, we hope offers five excellent original contributions to the field of psychosocial studies. Please do get in touch with us, or with the authors, if you would like to comment.