# Murderer, Mad Man, Misfit? Making Sense Of The Murder Of Zahid Mubarek<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article addresses the question of why Robert Stewart killed Zahid Mubarek in Feltham Young Offender Institute in April 2000, with the aim of asking what it would take to prevent more young people becoming as hateful as Stewart had. By re-examining Stewart's voluminous correspondence, and the records and reports about him placed in the public domain during the course of the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry, the article explores the acute loneliness, lack of self worth, and desire to be wanted that Stewart's peculiarly sexualized expressions of racism betrayed. The article argues that Stewart's racism was fuelled by powerful defences against loss that had been built up in childhood and reinforced by the acute estrangement from family, friends, and a woman Stewart considered to be his 'girlfriend'. In custody, Stewart felt intimidated by his emotional dependency on others; he started to feel persecuted by Zahid Mubarek precisely because his Asian cellmate was one of so few people in whom he could confide. The cycle of mutual projection that had come to characterise life on the wings in Feltham blinded many of the staff there to the vulnerability of both Mubarek - an Asian prisoner locked up with a highly disturbed white racist – and Stewart – a deeply disturbed young man with very limited experiences of adequate care.

# **Unanswered** questions

It was the Public Inquiry, in the end which came closest to answering why it was that a known violent racist was placed in the same cell as Zahid Mubarek on the 21st March 2000 ... It is not fanciful to suggest that the murder of Zahid Mubarek was a wake up call for the prison service in the same way that the murder of Stephen Lawrence was a wake up call for the police force. (Khan, 2006: 5)

In the weeks and months leading up to March 20, Stewart had been bragging, boasting and daydreaming of this: nailbombing the Asian communities of Southall and Bradford; doing the same to Brixton and Brick Lane; killing 'Gooks'; bashing 'Pakis'; and bringing death and destruction to anyone who wasn't like him. Zahid

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wasn't like him ... Like the wind through the trees, Stewart moved invisibly through the Public Inquiry, and shook everything in it. I ... recall reading the very earliest medical and psychiatric reports of this boy from a troubled home ... Robert Stewart was not treated very well. But it would be insulting to Zahid's parents to suggest that Stewart was a victim like Zahid so unfortunately became. I don't mourn Robert Stewart's squandered life as I mourn Zahid's. But I do worry about it. I worry about the dozens, possibly hundreds, of Robert Stewarts we're creating all around this country. How will we recognise them? What does it take to see their hate and deal with it differently? (Dias, 2006: 7)

If the Inquiry into the murder of Zahid Mubarek was as loud a wake-up call for the prison service as the Macpherson Inquiry had been for the police (Macpherson, 1999), the failure of social scientists to engage in any depth with the former must surely tell us something about the poverty of our disciplines. Mr Justice Keith's report for the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry documented the catalogue of failures in the prison service that contributed to Zahid Mubarek's murder, linking a string of 'systemic shortcomings' in all of the prison establishments where Robert Stewart had been incarcerated with the 'culture of indifference and insensitivity which institutional racism breeds' (Keith, 2006b: 4). These included the many failures to collate and consider evidence of mental disturbance and acute dangerousness in records kept about Robert Stewart's time in prison; a lack of resources and underinvestment in a dangerously overburdened prison service; the virulent racism of some prison officers and many prisoners; the absence of viable procedures for prisoners experiencing racial harassment to get their complaints properly investigated; the lack of a properly administered race relations strategy; and overcrowding, enforced cell sharing and poor management by prison governors at Feltham, leading to morale problems among the wing officers as well as reduced quality of life for remand prisoners. The 88 steps Keith advocated to rectify these shortcomings included: the end of enforced cell sharing and the implementation of risk assessment in decisions about cell allocation; much more comprehensive systems of information sharing and management; the implementation of a 'violence reduction strategy' that makes prisoners 'think they have let other prisoners down if they resort to violence' (ibid: 37); mental health screening and routine reviews of prisoners' emotional well-being; diversity training and the adoption by the prison service of the Macpherson definition of a racist incident (ibid: 48).

The Inquiry Report was in many ways an authoritative blueprint for change but, with the steps designed to deal with issues of discrimination not beginning until recommendation 79 one could be forgiven for wondering what was meant when Keith claimed that 'racism' remained at 'the heart of the Inquiry' (ibid: 3). Equally perplexing is the fact that the conclusions to neither the concise nor the full version of Keith's report mentioned racism at all, whether institutional or otherwise. Instead, both documents asserted that the 'focus of the Inquiry' was on 'violence in prisons, specifically attacks by prisoners in their cells' (Keith 2006a: 32; Keith, 2006b: 552). Stylistically, this made the 88 risk-reduction 'steps' that followed seem more self-explanatory (2006b: 2), no doubt enhancing the urgency of the report's prescriptions to policymaking audiences. But in the absence of a fuller analysis of why the murder happened, it may also have appeased those in the prison service keen to 'minimise the cause of institutional racism in Zahid's murder' without being seen to abandon the issue altogether (Grover, 2006: 10). The truth is, however, that, as Dexter Dias (2006) the Mubarek family's barrister points out in the second of the quotations with which this article began, Robert Stewart's racism haunted the Inquiry in ways that were not always confronted, his hatred an ill-understood and invisible presence that chilled everything it touched. How Stewart and Mubarek came to be sharing a cell was quite rightly the principal focus of the Inquiry. But, as Dias reminds us, we still need to consider some more fundamental questions about how it is that, despite all the reforms generated by the Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, this country continues to produce men like Robert Stewart; and what it would take to 'recognise' these people properly, and to 'see their hate and deal with it differently' (Dias, 2006: 7). This article attempts to address these questions by applying psychoanalytical insights to the many letters Stewart wrote in prison and the voluminous records and reports placed in the public domain about him during the course of the Mubarek Inquiry.

## The murder of Zahid Mubarek

At 3.35 am on 21 March 2000, Zahid Mubarek was in bed - although not necessarily asleep – when his cellmate, Robert Stewart, struck him at least seven times with a dagger he had fashioned earlier that week from the leg of a wooden table. Zahid was serving the last night of a prison sentence imposed for breaching the terms of a community sentence for theft. When Zahid's family were able to visit him in hospital they saw not the child whose return they had eagerly awaited, but someone whose 'abhorrent injuries made him simply

unrecognisable – he didn't look human' (Amin, 2006: 4). As his uncle remembers, this 'otherwise handsome young man was reduced to a bruised, bloodied, swollen featureless face' (ibid). Zahid Mubarek died without regaining consciousness a week later on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2000. Zahid Mubarek's family's six and a half year struggle to find out why their son was sharing a cell with Robert Stewart began there, as did a concerted effort on the part of the Home Office to avoid answering the Mubarek family's questions.

Although this was not his primary task, Justice Keith did what he could to explore Stewart's motives for killing Zahid Mubarek (Keith, 2006b: 24). After considering 15,000 pages of documents relating to Robert Stewart and the institutions in which he had been held, Keith was unable to identify a 'definitive reason' for the attack and contented himself with highlighting a number of possibilities:

Stewart himself claimed that he did it to get out of Feltham, which was a place he loathed. That resonated with one of his letters in which he had talked of killing his cellmate if that was what was needed to get him transferred. Maybe it was his ultimate attempt to get on equal terms with Travis [another prisoner with whom Stewart had become friendly], whom he had always looked up to. Maybe it was his virulent racism which made him see Zahid as a target, his prejudice being fuelled by his time at Feltham. Maybe he was re-enacting scenes from Romper Stomper. Maybe it was simply that because he had not got bail, he was not going to let a "Paki" like Zahid enjoy his freedom. It could have been a combination of all these factors. And it may be that he had no motive at all. His lack of concern for other people or for the consequences of his actions meant that he was *not constrained by the things which would restrain a normal person.* At his trial, he said that he just felt like attacking Zahid. Perhaps it was as *simple as that.* (Ibid: 641; our emphases)

For some commentators it was indeed 'as simple as that'. Tabloid and broadsheet newspapers alike seemed satisfied with the notion that Stewart was a 'violent racist psychopath', frequently citing as evidence a paragraph from what became known as the 'extreme measures' letter written on 23 February 2000:

If I don't get bail on the 7<sup>th</sup>, I'll take extreme measures to get shipped out, kill me padmate if I have to, bleach me sheets and pillowcase white and make a Ku Klux Klan outfit.

Many media accounts of the murder suggested that Stewart, having written a letter in which he asked the recipient if he had seen 'dat film, starring me', may have copied the behaviour of Hando, the neo-Nazi lead character in the film Romper Stomper (Kelso, 2000; Casciani, 2006).

The evidence presented to the Inquiry, however, suggests that Stewart's motives were by no means 'simple' and that no single explanation for his behaviour will suffice. First, the psychiatrists who interviewed Stewart before and after the murder did not consider the film to have had any causal effect. They could not agree on a diagnosis of psychopathy either, and were not unanimously persuaded that the assault on Mubarek had been racially motivated (Gunn, 2004). The balance of opinion favoured the idea that Stewart was not suffering from a diagnosable mental illness, but a 'personality disorder' which, while 'severe' in his case, did not necessarily differentiate him from the many other young men in British prisons who are similarly afflicted (Keith, 2006b: 8). As his solicitor was to observe, what made Stewart stand out as 'strange' was how incredibly 'difficult to connect with' he was. This lack of 'emotion', an 'eerie calmness', 'almost detachment', had been picked up and commented on earlier in his life by the many mental health specialists with whom he had come into contact during a troubled adolescence (Singh et al, 2003: 33). Second, while Stewart did write about having to share a cell with a 'Paki' whom he regarded - perhaps stereotypically or perhaps because Mubarek was a convicted thief struggling to come off heroin - as 'lazy' and lightfingered, there is no evidence to suggest that he particularly disliked Mubarek or said anything overtly racist to him before or during the lethal assault (Singh et al, 2003: 37-9). From Stewart's perspective, he and Mubarek 'got on reasonably well' (Nayani, 2000: 45). Stewart regarded Mubarek as 'alright' and 'safe' with him (ibid: 32; Singh et al: 37-9). He felt he could 'talk' to Mubarek (Joseph, 2000: 4) probably because, unlike many other prisoners at Feltham, Zahid did not ridicule him. Third, given Stewart's knowledge of the prison system, the notion that he killed Mubarek in order to get 'shipped out' of Feltham seems rather implausible. There is good reason to believe that Stewart did want to be transferred back to Hindley (one of the many institutions he had been in before arriving at Feltham). It is evident, also, that his friend Maurice Travis had suggested killing his cellmate as a means to this end. But Stewart himself would have realised that, if he was convicted of either the offence for which he was on remand, or any other serious offence, he was unlikely to be returned to Hindley, a relatively small young offenders institution and remand centre which took neither lifers nor prisoners over the age of 21.

#### **Robert Stewart**

Having denied that he was a racist during his trial, Stewart's written admission to the Inquiry five years later that 'racial prejudice played some part' in his murderous behaviour was potentially revealing (Stewart, 2004: 5). If someone had asked him *what part* prejudice played we might have learnt a little more about why he did what he did. Certainly, Stewart's talk about 'race' in his letters and in his conversations with Mubarek suggests that, since so many of Stewart's racist utterances were, from his perspective, about other things, 'racial prejudice' was indeed only 'part' of the explanation for his violence. Moreover, Stewart's disclosures to the psychiatrist Dr Phillip Joseph (2000: 4) suggested that he had experienced the attack as cathartic in a way that he was not able fully to articulate, at least in socially acceptable terms. In the end he may have resorted to the 'shipped out' explanation as a way of accounting for something horrific that:

... he knew what he had done but not why... He went on to say the attack was a bit like wetting the bed. He said, 'I know I am doing it, but you just carry on until you wake up more'.

(Joseph, 2000: 6)

Experienced as an almost involuntary, even warming, release, bed-wetting usually becomes a source of shame for children as they find themselves accountable to others with greater self-control (Gau and Soong, 1999; Morrison, Tappin and Staines, 2000). A bed-wetter until he was at least eight years old, Stewart was in good position to deploy this metaphor in explaining his feelings about the attack on Zahid Mubarek (Nayani, 2000: 7).

Stewart's psychiatric reports hint at a deeply unhappy childhood. His mother had never been able 'to be physically affectionate towards him', even when he was a 'baby she had found it difficult to hug him' (Haddad, 1990). When at the age of nine, Robert started stealing, it was discovered that his mother bought him things instead of showing her affection psychically, and she was 'counselled about the need to make him feel wanted and secure' (Keith, 2006a: 77). With the possible exception of his brother Ian, who also spent most of his adolescence in care homes and custody, there appears to have been no-one else willing and able to make the young Robert feel loved. Stewart was bullied by his aging father; a man who beat his sons 'badly' and had hit his wife (Singh et al, 2003: 35; Kelso 2000; Orr, 2000). In infant school Stewart was both 'top' of his class and the most disruptive pupil his teachers had to deal with

(Judd, 2005). So insecure was he at school that he scrubbed his own face out of a photograph because he thought he was 'ugly' and attempted to destroy the work of pupils he thought were cleverer than him (Judd, 2005). The psychiatrist Tony Nayani (2000) who gave expert opinion at the trial, described Robert Stewart's home life as poverty-stricken and emotionally impoverished. Nayani cited from the report of a psychiatrist who assessed Stewart when he was nine. This psychiatrist discovered a boy who regularly told lies, had no friends, and would scratch himself until he bled (Nayani, 2000: 7). As an infant, Stewart broke into his school and flooded it (ibid). Aged 10 he also set fire to the school's noticeboard and a girl's hair. Aged 13, on a night when he had run away from home, Stewart set fire to a shop in Middleton near where he used to live (Deo, 2004: 2). All things considered, it is hard to believe that his mother was being entirely honest with herself when she claimed that Stewart had been a 'happy child' (ibid). Indeed, when social services suggested placing the then 14 year old Robert in care, his mother indicated that she was desperate to 'wash her hands' of him (Nayani, 2000: 10), as she already had of his brother. And this is precisely what she proceeded to do. When Stewart was hospitalised because of injuries to his face, neither of his parents went to visit him (ibid: 14). They did not go to see him when he was in custody either; but never provided any explanation for their unwillingness to do so (ibid: 15). Nor did they talk to him about why they had separated (Joseph, 2000: 3). Although Robert sometimes claimed not to be 'bothered' by them, these parental failures were a perennial source of worry to him (ibid: 2).

While he was in custody Stewart often took out his frustrations on his own body. Much as his teachers had done when, aged 13, Stewart had slit his wrists during a science class (Nayani, 2000: 9), staff and health workers at Feltham were later to dismiss Stewart's self-harming behaviours – including occasions when he swallowed razor blades and set his cell on fire - as manipulative acts designed to win attention or intimidate others. He signed many of his letters 'Mad Hatters' and was known to 'talk' to his cell walls (Stewart, 2000: 377, 396 and 405). Interestingly, given what has been said about his virulent racism, Stewart had the words 'Bob Marley' (Taylor, 2000: 6) tattooed on his forearm as well as the letters 'R.I.P' on his forehead. Other prisoners interpreted this latter tattoo as a death threat and some tormented him about it (Casciani, 2006). But it could equally plausibly have signalled Stewart's own psychological need for *peace of mind*, or conveyed a sense in which he continued to feel disturbed by the *loss* of someone or something important to him. He knew he was 'cracking up' in Feltham (ibid). Three years after Zahid Mubarek's murder, Stewart was to tell a team

from the Commission for Racial Equality that someone should have known he was a 'timebomb ready to explode' (Singh et al, 2003: 12).

As a teenager Stewart became particularly sensitive about being bullied. After his expulsion from school Stewart's family had to move because they were being victimized by a gang of youths (Nayani, 2000: 16). Soon after this, in Werrington Young Offenders Institution (YOI) in Stoke-on-Trent, Stewart threw bleach at a prison officer whom he considered to have 'taken' him 'for an idiot' (ibid: 12). After his release Stewart joined a gang who, armed and masked, committed a series of robberies. Later, serving time in Stoke Heath YOI, Stewart conspired with Maurice Travis, an old friend from his days in care, to slit the throat of a fellow inmate by the name of Alan Averall whom the pair considered to be 'bullying' or otherwise, 'takin [sic] the piss' out of them (Various, 2004: 1040). In HMP Altcourse, Stewart (by then aged 18 or 19) stabbed two other prisoners in the face, one of whom he believed had 'robbed' all his 'stuff' (Nayani, 2000: 21). Stewart said he had originally made the weapon he used to kill Mubarek in order to protect himself from the 'gangstas' who were bullying him (Stewart, 2000: 323). The fear of being bullied often disturbed his sleep, and had done so again on the night of the murder (Nayani, 2000: 38). He wished the black prisoners who tormented him 'would shut up' (Stewart, 2000: 446).

Gaining sadistic pleasure from anticipating the suffering of others seems to have been another way in which Stewart coped with his inner torment. Asked why he had set fire to a girl's hair during his school days, Stewart said he did it 'for fun' (Shapiro, 2004: 2). In his early teens, 'Paki-bashing' became 'just something' he and his friends 'did' to pass the time (Judd, 2005). Much of the more fantastical racism expressed in Stewart's letters was accompanied by 'Ha' or 'Ha, ha' in parentheses and text annotated in this way included passages in which he mused about the injuries he had inflicted on Zahid Mubarek and others where he identified with Hitler and Hando, the anti-hero of *Romper Stomper* (Stewart, 2000: 435). There was also a peculiarly sexualised quality to much of Stewart's humour, especially his racist joking. While he was in Feltham, Stewart harassed a female prison psychologist with whom he considered himself to be 'in love' (Various, 2004: 2344). He asked his brother to send her 'a wreath and the gas man at 3 o'clock in the morini'' (Zahid Mubarek Inquiry, 2005), together with some 'Ann Summers catalogues' (ibid.). Indeed the offence for which Stewart was on remand at the time of the attack on Mubarek involved the harassment of a 38 year old white woman who worked as a chat line operator and had 'mixed race' children. Stewart alleged that she had

been 'cheeky to his brother' (Taylor, 2000: 4). He had written letters to the woman demanding sex, calling her a 'nigger loving slag' (Zahid Mubarek Inquiry, 2004), and enclosing some of his pubic hair (Various, 2004: 1296). Stewart told the police it that this was just a 'joke' (Ibid). But after receiving letters suggesting that her children would be murdered, the victim was left feeling 'terrified' to leave her own home, 'extremely ill' with 'depression', and 'paranoid' about being followed (Ibid).

Stewart himself was not necessarily opposed to mixed race relationships, for he had dated black 'girlfriends' before he was sent to prison (Judd, 2005). It was the idea of black or Asian men having sex with white women that particularly disturbed him. For example, he complained to his brother that their younger sister, Karen, was 'pregnant to some erm black man' from Moss Side: 'rumour has it ... but the gap will be narrowed out if a jigaboo pops out' (Stewart, 2000: 23). Stewart's much cited 'extreme measures' letter was also laden with miscegenation fantasies addressed to a female prisoner Stewart regarded as his 'girlfriend'. How and when their relationship began is not clear, but it seems more than coincidental that prison officers noted marked improvements in Stewart's behaviour - deserving of 'some kind of recognition' – in the summer of 1999 shortly after the two of them had started corresponding (Keith, 2006b: 12). The relationship between Stewart and this woman had deteriorated by the winter of 1999 and, in the 'extreme measures' letter, he begged her for reassurance that she had not left him because of something he had said to her. He said he no longer believed that she had engaged in 'interracial Pakistan sex' and hoped she had not 'divorced' him because of this 'figment' of his 'imagination' (Stewart, 2000: 391-3). Yet, despite his conscious awareness of its unreality. Stewart struggled to free himself of this troubling fantasy. In a letter written to Maurice Travis, Stewart downplayed his feelings about this girlfriend. He claimed he was not 'arsed' about her, it was she who was 'in love wiv' him: 'I just have to say, "I love you" in each script to keep her sweet!' (Ibid: 373). One might have taken this assertion at face value had Stewart not then gone on to say:

... some Paki tried to get fresh wid her in some restaurant in Hyde and she bit his tongue off and smashed a wine glass ... in his face. I'll kill the Paki bastard if I catch him. (ibid: 374)

The woman had, in fact, already explained to Stewart (in a letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 2000) that she had never 'even kissed a fuckin' Paki', but this did not settle the dispute between them. In a letter written the day before he killed Mubarek, Stewart wrote to his girlfriend: 'I keep

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thinking I have said somert wrong' (ibid: 440). Then, in a desperate attempt to persuade her to resume the relationship, Stewart promised that, should she 'forget to write back' he would not 'keep harassing' her and 'become a "stalker" (ibid).

If Tanika Gupta's (2005) reconstruction of what followed is to be believed, Stewart tried to discuss the problems he was having with Mubarek asking him if he too had a girlfriend. When Mubarek said he did not, Stewart explained that he had threatened to 'chop off' his girlfriend's 'head'. Mubarek tried to change the subject and began playing a track by the Notorious BIG. When he asked Stewart what kind of music he liked, Stewart responded:

Not this shit. Not this shit. Not this shit. Look at my fucking house. Look at my fucking car. Look at my fucking birds ... Jigaboo, gangsta rap shit ... I hate it. (Gupta, 2005: 79-80)

This kind of offensive language may well have been part of Stewart's standard vocabulary. But given how many times Stewart had covered himself in excrement during his imprisonment and the fact that he reported 'feeling pretty shitty' around this time (Nayani, 2000: 38), one has to wonder if there was some deeper significance to this scatological tirade for it was in this context that Stewart wrote, on the eve of the murder, about his intention to:

... nail bomb the Asian community of Gt Norbury, St Lumm Road and them areas. Its all about these illegal immigrants getting smuggled in here, Romanian beggars, Pakis, chinks trying to take over the country, and using us to breed ½ casts.

(Stewart, 2000: 446)

Letters he wrote a week after the assault on Mubarek suggest that Stewart may well have regarded Zahid similarly. After seeing that 'two whites' were accompanying the Mubarek family to court, he was eager to know who the 'young pretty white girl wiv her mam' was (Stewart, 2000: 308 and 472), and encouraged his brother to use some of their tried and tested 'phone antics' on his behalf (Society Guardian, 2004).

## Miscegenation, melancholia and motive

There is now a vast literature that draws parallels between contemporary discourses about race, race-mixing and 'cultural hybridity' and the often obsessive concerns about miscegenation that justified some of the world's worst abuses of black and indigenous populations: lynching in the southern states of the US; apartheid in South Africa; the forced

assimilation of Australia's stolen generations; and the disproportionate number of 'mixed race' children taken into care in Britain after the Second World War to mention only the most obvious examples (Hendricks, 2001; Ifekwunigwe, 1998; Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005; Kovel, 1971; McClintock, 1995; Papastergiadis, 1997; Phoenix & Owen, 1996; Rich, 2005; Young, 1995). Despite its theoretical complexity, however, hardly any of this literature explains why a minority of white people in Britain today remain so preoccupied with racial purity, a colonial ideology of little obvious relevance in contemporary society and regarded as crude and anachronistic by most people. Fortunately Paul Gilroy's (2004) book *After Empire* helps us to address this conundrum.

Gilrov begins by drawing attention to white Britons' 'inability to face, never mind actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and mood that followed the end of Empire and the consequent loss of imperial prestige' this entailed (ibid: 98). The British, Gilroy argues, cling neurotically to the mythology of the 'great' anti-Nazi war of the 1940s because it keeps potentially unsettling knowledge about their nation's fall from grace at bay. Gilroy suggests that, because there has been no mourning of empire's passing, because we cannot and will not let it go, a cultural melancholia has set in. The symptoms of this melancholia include: a neurotic self-loathing projected out in the form of xenophobia against immigrants with whom we are imagined to be at war; political ambivalence about admitting to the enduring damage done to former colonies by British imperialism; recurring anxieties over the prospect of British subjugation to the neo-colonialist war-mongering of the USA; and an inability fully to relinquish the 'race-thinking' that supplied the antonyms and dualisms through which English national identity has historically been defined. While welcoming the emergence of convivial youth multi-cultures in Britain's metropolises, Gilroy notes how some people in Britain have become unconsciously dependent on the 'certainties' of 'race' to 'keep their bearings in a world they experience as increasingly confusing' (ibid: 116). It is when these certainties are exposed as false that pathological hatreds are most likely to be unleashed. Today's hatreds, Gilroy explains, arise not, as they did in the heyday of colonialism, 'from supposedly reliable anthropological knowledge of the stable identity and predictable difference of the Other', but because 'the Other's difference in the commonsense lexicon of alterity' appears impossible to 'locate' (ibid: 137).

Different people are hated and feared, but the timely antipathy against them is nothing compared to the hatreds turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and the

partially familiar. To have mixed is to have been party to a great civilizational betrayal. Any unsettling traces of the resulting hybridity must therefore be excised from the tidy, bleached out zones of impossibly pure culture. (Ibid)

Did Robert Stewart perceive Zahid Mubarek as some kind of 'half-different' but 'partially familiar' mixer whose otherness he found hard to fathom? Did Mubarek come to symbolize for Stewart 'a great civilizational betrayal' whose excision would serve some kind of purifying function, expunging the 'shitty' feelings he was experiencing along with the arrival of the smuggled immigrants whose corrupting presence he so feared? There is evidence to suggest this was so in Stewart's behaviour and writing, but in order to see it one has to engage more fully with the notion of melancholia as it has been conceptualised psychoanalytically.

#### Lost love objects in psychoanalytic theory

Freud's own description of the melancholic (1917) bears an uncanny resemblance to Robert Stewart. Freud defined the melancholic as someone who cannot get over an emotional loss whether it has been caused by death or estrangement, or is the result of being 'slighted' or 'disappointed' by a significant other. Consumed or 'eaten up' by such an unbearable loss, the melancholic cannot love again. Instead of working through their feelings, melancholics swallow them whole in a form that is barely digestible, and do all that they can to prevent them from returning to conscious awareness (Cheng, 2007: 138). In keeping the loss down the melancholic experiences a sense of self-torment. Consciously, the melancholic 'is not of the opinion that a change has taken place in him' yet, unconsciously, he 'reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished' (Freud, 1917: 246). Although his feelings 'of shame in front of other people ... are lacking' (ibid: 247, my emphases), he takes 'refuge in narcissistic identification' – an omnipotent love of the self that finds all difference intolerable, that brings 'hate ... into operation' whenever the other's difference is encountered (ibid: 251). Substitutive love objects are sought so that 'sadistic satisfaction' can be derived from their 'suffering' (ibid). What Freud called 'erotic cathexis' is 'carried back to the stage of sadism which is nearer to that conflict' (ibid: 251-2) and unbearable feelings of powerlessness are kept at bay by 'thoughts of suicide' alternating with 'murderous impulses against others' (ibid: 252).

One of the most emotionally detached young men the professionals who examined him had ever met; prone to mutilating himself and twice a killer; shameless in his racism; inclined to revel in the suffering of others; and repeatedly involved in sending menacing letters to older women whose sexual attention he craved, Robert Stewart undoubtedly displayed many of the symptoms of pathological melancholia. Why this was so, however, is best explained through the work of Melanie Klein and the object relations school for whom Freud's psychodynamic depiction of melancholia provided much inspiration. Describing the difference between *mourning* when people 'withdraw' libido from their love objects (their internal perception of the lost loved one) and displace it onto new objects (new loved ones), and *melancholia* when libido is instead 'withdrawn into the ego', Freud noted how the latter serves:

... to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged as a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. (Freud 1917: 249, emphases in original)

In Kleinian theory this agentic, forsaken object is typically understood as the child's internalization of an unrelinquished fantasy of its first love object, its mother whom, out of necessity, it perceives as omnipotent. Being able to see its mother as a person in her own right -a whole object - rather than simply an extension of the self requires that the child works through these conflicted emotions, moving between what Klein calls the paranoid schizoid and depressive positions. The transition demands a form of mourning, involving the resolution of feelings of guilt and depression, because the fantasy of the mother as both completely controlled and all-controlling has, if psychologically healthy development is to ensue, somehow to be given up and replaced with a more realistic conception (Klein, 1935, 1940). Relational theorists regard the parents' ability to show to the child that they can withstand its hostile attacks without responding retributively as key to this process. The extent to which parents are able to withstand their child's hostile attacks shapes the child's capacity to come to terms with its own hostility and aggression. The less it is afraid of its own hostile feelings the more the child is able to contemplate making reparation for the retribution it has phantasised exacting, and the more it is able to consider life from the perspective of significant others.

We know Robert Stewart's experience of growing up was nowhere near as emotionally enriching as this. His mother had never been able to make him 'feel needed' and ultimately wanted to 'wash her hands of him'. His father's chastisement of his children and their mother was brutal. Robert Stewart's childhood photos reveal him to have been 'angelic looking', but Stewart considered himself so 'ugly' that he erased his face from one of them (Judd, 2005). He must have felt completely unloved. Klein observed that children who feel unloved struggle to free themselves of persecutory anxieties and are therefore prone to intense fear and hatred (Hinshelwood, 1991: 142). Unable to mourn the loss of the ideal mother of their phantasies, the unloved child is confused and mixed up, terrified that his hatred will damage all those he loves or depends upon. He may 'identify' defensively with the 'internal deadness' he unconsciously perceives he has instilled in his own mother (ibid: 143): the identification of the ego with the abandoned or forsaken object described in Freud's classic essay. Manic defences are liable to be mobilised to fend off the internalised dread to which this identification gives rise. Consequently, badness - often associated among young children with defecation (ibid: 162) or, in Stewart's words, 'shit' – is constantly attributed to others, who may in turn come to be perceived as repulsive and menacing through the process of 'projective identification'. This makes it difficult for the unloved child to form new relationships since other individuals tend to be perceived as unknowable and strange 'partobjects' as opposed to complete people. Their very externality – the fact that they see things differently - threatens the unloved child, who responds by trying to possess, control or destroy all those who appear more emotionally complete than they are (Benjamin, 1998: 86). When this spiralling of projective hostility is consistently uncontained, the inner world of the unloved child is experienced by them as 'in bits', the extremity of their psychic splitting destroying the capacity to feel (Hinshelwood, 1991:158-160). Sadistic tendencies are liable to emerge as the retaliatory harm anticipated from those dominated - whether in reality or only in fantasy - is acted out (ibid: 408).

#### Stewart's subjectivity

On all the available evidence, Robert Stewart seems to have been prone to adopting this kind of acutely persecutory, incessantly retributive mentality. His early experiences of an abusive father and a mother who did not want him may well have sown the seeds of his fluctuating identifications with the positions of 'victim' and 'victimizer'. The way he behaved as a person, and the sheer amount of time he spent in closed institutions during his formative years, must have further diminished his chances of encountering other people with whom he could form alternative, less polarised forms of identification. His brother Ian and his friend Maurice Travis – themselves quite disturbed individuals – together with the imprisoned girlfriend he wrote to were among the few people with whom Robert Stewart had any kind of lasting or meaningful relationship. Robert shared his preoccupation with miscegenation and racial purity with his brother, and it seems possible that there were specific developmental reasons for their common interest. Both boys routinely referred to their mother as 'Fat Mama' (Judd, 2005), a term synonymous with a genre of sexualised ridicule directed primarily at middle aged black women by younger black men. One has to wonder how the Stewarts' father justified his violence towards his wife. Did he denigrate her in sexualised and racialized ways? And if so, did his sons identify with their father's aggression towards her?

What we do know is that, in one way or another, a crudely sexualised racism came to facilitate the projective identification through which Stewart dealt with his intensely persecutory anxieties. By imagining himself as the chivalric protector of white women threatened by sexually predatory black and Asian men, Stewart could attribute his vulnerability – his need to be wanted - to the former, while disowning the corrupting, dirty, dangerous and hostile parts of himself by attributing them to the latter. The chatline operator Stewart harassed, his sister, and his girlfriend were all perceived by him as *at risk* from those being 'smuggled in here' and 'using us to breed  $\frac{1}{2}$  castes'. As a defence against the dread of confronting the emotional deadness of his childhood identifications, the 'smuggled in' immigrant reminded Stewart of the permeability of his own mind and the extent to which he was at risk of being both overcome by an identification with a lost loved object that had been so hard to swallow, and attacked by all those persecutors against whom his hostility was directed. Because all of this was negotiated below the level of his conscious awareness, Stewart tended not to perceive himself as a racist. From his perspective, his concern with race was tangential to his absorption with sex, violence and retribution. He identified, as best he could, with other male bullies - his father, his brother, Maurice Travis - because he felt intensely persecuted. In an unusual moment of self-reflection, he saw something of himself in Romper Stomper's Hando, a character the film's director Geoffrey Wright conceived of as an 'intelligent but frightened misfit', self-evidently 'rigid' and 'brutal', but also, and most significantly, 'low' in 'self-esteem'. Men like him:

... detest and are terrified of change, because in order to keep up with it, they would have to change themselves. Deep down, they feel that they're not capable of doing this, so they try to hang on to the past by delving into the arcane, ferocious nonsense of the Third Reich. (Smith, 1993)

Deep down Stewart too must have wanted to change, however much this prospect frightened him. No longer a juvenile, the criminal justice system had given up any pretence of being able to settle him back into a law-abiding life. Far away from where he had grown up in Manchester, Stewart was friendless in Feltham. The recognition Stewart craved, but perhaps only rarely deserved was hard to manufacture. As Ruby Millington (2001), former writer-in residence at Feltham, remembers the 'clinging to innocence' that characterises the way prisoners on remand wings react to their predicament, generates a culture of defensiveness that makes trusting relationships between prisoners and staff alike difficult to sustain. Denial of guilt and vulnerability foster acute splitting and projection among inmates that, in turn, generating bullying and a fear of mental ill health. Wing staff are often ill-equipped to detoxify prisoners' hostile projections and alleviate their fears. Perceiving Feltham's senior management to care little for their working conditions, many of the personal officers Millington remembers were little older than the prisoners themselves. Most felt demoralised and unable to contain the persecutory anxiety that was a feature of everyday life on the wings around the time Zahid Mubarek was killed.

In the same way that adolescent prisoners idealise harshness and brutality and denigrate tenderness, there is a large amount of splitting and projection among staff with minority groups being used as receptacles for certain characteristics. A cycle of mutual projections takes place which paralyses relationships...

(Millington, 2001: 114)

Stewart was one of the prisoners who became the receptacle for the hostile projections of other inmates' and officers' in Feltham. On the wing his menacing appearance invited ridicule. He had nightmares. He wrote incessantly. He begged his 'girlfriend' to forgive him for implicating her in his vile fantasies of miscegenation. Her loss of interest in him can only have underscored what an unlovable person he had become. Even as he became aware of how outrageous his miscegenation fantasies were, Stewart could not let them go. He felt consumed from within and overwhelmed from without. He tried to talk to his cellmate about his girlfriend, and - remarkably, given how unnerving he found Stewart - Zahid Mubarek tried to listen. We know Stewart saw Mubarek as *both* a 'Paki' and someone who was 'alright' and 'safe' with him. Given that they were both 19 year olds who had been excluded from school with histories of problematic drug use and involvement in car crime, the two of them did have things in common, however convenient it may be to think otherwise. In considering this

commonality, Mubarek may also have reminded Stewart of everything he would have liked to have been: good-looking, easy-going, untroubled by a chaotic love life, and about to be returned to a family who missed him and still loved him dearly in spite of his bad behaviour. But Mubarek could not identify with Stewart's murderousness, or contain his pain. He was, in Gilroy's (2004: 137) words 'half-different' and 'partially familiar', perceived by Stewart as smuggling uncomfortable thoughts into his head, being better than him, judging him, making him feel 'shitty', no longer the 'safe cellmate' but yet another ethnic 'gangsta' reminding him of how insignificant he was. For Stewart, as for many incarcerated killers, murder was:

... the ultimate act of self-defense, a last resort against ... "losing one's mind", an attempt to ward off psychosis or "going crazy". [...] It is an attempt to hold off paranoid delusions; the riddling, tormented feeling that one is being spied on, watched, hexed by an evil eye, gossiped about, ridiculed, and accused of possessing character traits that shame-driven men find intolerably shameful ... (Gilligan, 2000: 75-6)

By attacking Zahid Mubarek Robert Stewart protected himself from losing what was left of his mind. Consciously he knew what he had done but not why. Unconsciously, Stewart experienced the attack as cathartic because it forced Zahid to feel the tortured inner turmoil with which Stewart himself had to contend. By projecting his hate into Zahid, Stewart prevented himself from acknowledging the menacing misfit he knew other's perceived him to be. By physically incapacitating him, Stewart could imagine that Zahid was the trapped and powerless outcast he himself was. By spilling Zahid's blood across his bed, Stewart made his own sheets seem relatively clean, unblemished, *bleached* white (again in Gilroy's (2004: 137) terms). By bludgeoning Mubarek's *handsome* face out of all recognition he was symbolically erasing the 'ugly' features of the unloved child he had always been, and the unlovable young man he had become.

## Conclusion: Containment, recognition and the role of psychosocial studies

What does it take to see the hate of men like Robert Stewart, to recognise it, and to deal with it differently? In relational psychoanalytic theory, *recognition* involves the 'processing of [the] other's psychic material, and its integration in intersubjective expression' (Benjamin, 1998: 29). While simply *seeing* the other's hate might involve processing it mentally, *recognition* involves a succession of transformative measures of containment and

identification. It involves taking in the other's hate, feeling it, thinking it through and acknowledging that something similar, if not identical to it exists within ourselves, but without being destroyed or overwhelmed by it. This kind of recognition was something people were increasingly unwilling and unable to contemplate in relation to Robert Stewart. When he was a young child, his parents were largely oblivious to his feelings. Some of his teachers, on the other hand, did notice his hate, but tended to dismiss his behaviour as mere attention-seeking. The psychiatrists and social workers called upon to respond to his behaviour spotted its connection to an acute emotional need to feel wanted, but ultimately failed to do anything about it. While Stewart's parents remained unmoved by his needs, he turned his hate outwards in increasingly volatile ways. The more he did this, the less people noticed the self-loathing behind it. Nobody doubted the adolescent Stewart was a dangerous manipulator. Everyone perceived him as emotionally detached. Fewer and fewer people were willing and able to reach out to Robert Stewart, to work through his inner turmoil intersubjectively, to identify with his hate and the self-loathing that underpinned it. His brother and Maurice Travis colluded with it, fuelling Robert's bizarre fantasies of purity and danger. Prison officers kept their distance while other prisoners ostracised and tormented him. Before the murder few people, aside from Zahid Mubarek and the girlfriend Stewart wrote to, took the time to listen to Robert. The cultures of insensitivity, indifference and institutional racism ensured that no-one thought twice about the consequences of placing Zahid Mubarek in a cell with Robert Stewart. The cycle of mutual projection within Feltham made it almost impossible for anyone to see and identify with the vulnerabilities that were firing Stewart's hatred.

Zahid Mubarek died because of the incapacity of prisons to offer him and Robert Stewart good enough care, because prisons equate 'secure containment' not with the emotional labour needed to 'hold' and detoxify the troubled inner worlds of so many disturbed young people, but with reducing the immediate risks that prisoners pose to their keepers and the outside world. As Justice Keith ably documented, it was not only Stewart's inner world that was 'in bits'; so were the key sources of information about him, dispersed across hundreds of uncollated documents or locked up in the minds of wing staff and fellow prisoners. This is another reason why Stewart's hatred was so hard to recognise. When cut into pieces, his extremism did not always look like racism. His letters to his girlfriend, and to the other women whom he had harassed, appeared to be primarily about sex. His references to 'Pakis' and 'niggers' did not set him apart from other prisoners and prison officers who were sometimes 'blatant' in their use of racial epithets and whose insensitivity to the needs of minority ethnic prisoners was more generally all apiece with the culture of denigration and brutality that had come to pertain in the remand prison. The same could be said of the wider scaremongering about asylum seekers indulged in by many politicians and Stewart's obsession with 'smuggled in immigrants'.

Making sure that prisoners from minority ethnic groups never have to share cells with violent racists is perhaps the simplest way of ensuring that we prevent racist murders *in prison cells*. But sequestering men like Robert Stewart away – away from those who are similarly vulnerable, away from those whom they mistakenly imagine to be to blame for their incomprehensible inner turmoil, and away from those who might conceivably be willing and able to care for them – is only going to fuel the persecutory anxieties and retributive sentiments they express through hatred and violence. If we want to deal with what causes this hate differently we must be prepared to identify, as best we can, with the ugly, mad and maddening qualities unloved children attribute to themselves. We must be also be willing to help them to detoxify the poisonous mentalities that overwhelm them, and prepared to show them that other sources of identification, however remote, are available. Unless we can find ways to open up these possibilities, both within prisons and within the communities that exist outside of them, the melancholia that makes ethnic intolerance permissible in Britain will remain untouched and unchanged. Opening up these possibilities, I would argue, is one of the most important contributions psychosocial studies can make both to addressing the violence, neglect and abuse and abuse too many young people still live with, and to preventing public tragedies like the murder of Zahid Mubarek which, as this article has shown, are caused by failures of emotional containment at many interpersonal, organizational and societal levels.

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