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**ABSTRACT**

The practice of paying non-household members to do the reproductive labour of looking after children has a long history. The nanny phenomenon is closely allied to colonialism where servants administered ruling class needs. In South Africa, nannies are most often historically disenfranchised, working class, black woman. Beginning with Freud's self-analytic considerations of his *kinderfrau*, through the post-war British object-relations tradition, scholarly reflection and later empirical research, have at best been anecdotal or *en passant*. The present study specifically concerned white apartheid-era men's memories and subsequent appropriation of the experiences of being cared for by a nanny. Having a theoretical home between narrative and psychoanalysis, it began with the assumption that as much as there are deeply rooted unconscious motives and conflicts, white apartheid-era men demonstrate identity strategies which are intensely local (situationally realised) and global (dependent on broader conditions of intelligibility). In-depth interviews with nine research participants extended Frosh et al's (2002), Hollway's (1989) and Hollway and Jefferson's (1997; 2000; 2001) "free association narrative technique". The data was analysed in its thematic and narrative aspects. Results revealed that nanny memories comprise two distinct kinds of stories, dubbed "remembered black hands" and "kaffir se plek" narratives. In "remembered black hands", recollections were imbued with tenderness, love and care; these were heart-warming stories of what it was to be the object of nanny's ministrations. In these accounts they affirmed the importance of nanny's place in the home: be it in daily care, as an ally, a retreat, a player in the family drama, even imbricated in their childhood sexuality. In "kaffir se plek" narratives the protagonists were situated in social space, recognised and granted identity. There were canonical imperatives to accept that nanny's personhood counted for nothing, that she was dispensable and that she had a distinct, lesser place in the social order. The co-existence of these competing stories signify her position at a rupture in the fabric of apartheid life. Participants' resolutions to this anomaly entailed compromise formations, the specific forms of which were considered. Kristeva's reconsideration of the diachronic relation of the Lacanian registers of Imaginary and the Symbolic in the light of abjection provided a developmental framework to understand how the little boy's early intimacy

could be transformed into his later assumption of his master's mantle. Where the extant literature is willing to concede that nanny exists screened behind parental imagos, the present investigation takes this further suggesting that repression, screen memories and "eclipsing" (Hardin, 1985) are an inevitable means of accession to political subjectivity. Results suggest that for those who would have been cared for by a nanny there are traces of this experience to be found in memory, the unconscious and their very sense of self. Nanny's continued existence in the minds of her charge takes various forms - as (usually fond) memories, a real relationship or as a symptom.

**Key Terms: Apartheid, Boyhood, Culture, Domestic Worker, Extraparental Care, Male Identity Development, Masculinity, Memory, Nanny, Narrative, Nonmaternal care, Other mother, White Studies**

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 *Some Personal Musings on the Black Nanny-Little White Boy Relationship*

I want to consider a relationship that has fundamental personal significance: one that is buried in the deepest recesses of my own psyche, but one, too, that is idiosyncratic to a South African way of life<sup>1</sup>: Not only has this relationship played a formative role in my emotional development and my most private unconscious, but it too has deep psychological significance in the lives of many millions of white South Africans. As children, innumerable white South Africans are looked after, or perhaps more appropriately, are reared by a nanny<sup>2</sup>. It is this relationship, more specifically the relationship between the domestic worker, a black woman<sup>3</sup>, and the little white boy that

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the text of the thesis the personal pronoun “I” will be used. For some (e.g. Ratele, 2002) this is a politically transgressive gesture in the sense of violating scientific cannons of objectivity, rejecting the division drawn routinely between the everyday or anecdotal and academic theorisation. I accept that the production of knowledge is not universal and timeless but dependent on certain kinds of historically specific communicative acts, hermeneutic assumptions and power relations. The intended use of “I” is certainly not to privilege my own position. Rather it is to affirm a self consciousness about the effects of using language, that the researcher never occupies an unsullied, dispassionate position for s/he is inevitably always embroiled in research enterprise. The location of the self in the practice of theorisation is important since the role of the researcher’s own experience is the mediating term (Squire, 2002). Indeed to retain the personal brings issues of self reflexivity and interpretation. I will return to this question under **2.1.2.5** *Experience as the Preserve of the Personal, the Phenomenological, the Personal Everyday of Way of Life*.

Related to my hermeneuticist assumption that meaning is never linear, I will employ footnotes throughout the text of the thesis. Footnotes in these terms are veritable hypertext. For Freud this is the overdetermination of psychological meaning. For Lacan this is the *point de caption*, nodal points like the upholstery button where many threads of signification cohere.

<sup>2</sup> The terminology “domestic worker” has been subject to debate. Sanjek and Colen (1990, p. 1) deliberately eschew “stigmatised terms such as ‘servant’, ‘domestic’ or ‘domestic worker’” to engage with this phenomenon and insist on their substitution with ‘household worker’. I have elected not to do this. For one thing, “domestic worker”, “girl”, “nanny” and “maid” are all part of South African colloquial usage. For another, as Bujra (2000, p. 3) puts it “today’s political correctness is tomorrow’s social gaffe”. But perhaps most importantly - the contested nature of the nomenclature is central to the lived experience: domestic workers fight about what they should be called, in an effort to snatch some self respect in a demeaning situation. “How they are called by their employers is not always the name they give themselves” (p. 3). Notwithstanding this debate, my preferred term is “nanny” inasmuch as it specifically refers to this woman’s childcare duties.

<sup>3</sup> “Black” as referred to in this thesis comprises the historically disenfranchised. This being said, nannies in this study mostly were so called “African”, in the terms used under apartheid.



comprises the central problematic of the present investigation. Specifically this thesis will concern itself with those generations of white men, born under Apartheid (pre 1994), who spent a substantial portion of their early years in the custody of this woman.

The impetus for the present study can be found in a series of somewhat disparate personal anecdotes. As a middle class white South African, I, too, was looked after by various black nannies over the course of my early life. To that extent, as a starting point I looked to the data of my own personal history. As I pondered the contents of my psyche with respect to the nannies of my early life, I felt sure that whilst my experiences may have been unique, in certain fundamental respects they were similar to what a great many of my peers had experienced. Informal chats with friends and associates confirmed my suspicions. What must be borne in mind here are the statistics: in South Africa, domestic service has over many years remained the single largest source of employment for black women. It is estimated that over a million people are involved in it, comprising 11 percent of overall employment in the formal sector of the economy (Grant, 1997; Momberg, 2003); this sector is larger than mining or agriculture. There was, notwithstanding, another source of corroboration. As a psychotherapist, I have repeatedly been privy to the manifestations of this early relationship in the unconscious lives' of my patients. The vicissitudes of this relationship emerge most commonly, indirectly, in a series of eruptions in early adolescence and later adult life. What characterises these symptomatic phenomena is that the subject is somehow unable to sufficiently account for his own psychological products (his thoughts, feelings or actions). Indeed, what is not said is usually more telling than the subject's explicit explanations. This is the stuff of the Freudian symptom. These unconscious products, like dreams, jokes and parapraxes, are compromises between a repressed and a repressing force. The compromise formation or eruption is a means by which two diametrically opposed psychological entities - wish and defence - are reconciled and thus admitted to consciousness (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1983). It is the symptomatic emergence of this relationship that comprises the data from which I begin my consideration. Before we do that, though, I would like to elaborate this relationship by means of personal accounts derived from the school playground, the consulting room and a couple of examples from the wider social context.



### 1.1.1 Stories from the School Playground

The year is 1976, I am thirteen. It was the dawning of my and my peers' adult sexuality. Two topics of discussion hold sway for many a playground hour: they were the mechanics of sexuality and "kaffir bashing".

Thirteen was a time of a perhaps first conscious consideration of ourselves as sexual subjects. Where woman in general became the subject of extreme interest and curiosity, somewhere on the outreaches of consciousness the woman who was referred to often was black. For some of the boys it was a time to try out their now mature sexual organs and to dabble with a new sexual identity. Part of the gossip centred on those boys who had "done it". Then again, even more taboo were those who had "done it" with a woman of colour. As much as having "gone all the way" inspired awe, it also invited scorn. The playground grapevine told us that for some it had been with a domestic worker, with the domestic worker's children or perhaps with a black woman who exchanged sexual favours for money (a prostitute). Harking back to the schoolyard, I recollect the boys making plans for a weekend first sexual foray, a visit to a local prostitute - she was a black woman. For those not brave or fortunate enough to have precociously become wise in the ways of the world, there was the tittering of schoolboy scatology where the body parts of particular women become the subject of enquiry. It was not uncommon for a domestic worker or black woman, to be the object of such banter.

Politically speaking 1976 was a significant year: it was the year of the Soweto school uprising; a time when black children stood up to their oppressors, resisting Afrikaans as a compulsory school subject. The peaceful calm at home was not quite what it seemed to be. Standard 6 was the first time boys were called upon to complete their military conscription forms. This would have served to stir schoolboy longings to become men, to do their duty, to enlist for their compulsory military service and do violence to the black man. For these youngsters the two years 'whites only', compulsory military service was the state's official sanction of violence against this 'other' race. Some of these children

would have been privy to adults' revelling in stories of "border duty" atrocities inflicted on the black man.

Monday mornings were a time of retelling of the exploits of the weekends. No doubt there was a great deal of bravado and exaggeration. Playground time was often filled with stories of racial hatred: machinations, yarns and for some, accounts of doing violence to a person of colour. Each week we were regaled with accounts of "kaffir bashing"<sup>4</sup>. "Kaffir bashing" was common parlance in the schoolyard - it involved a group of whites, in this instance schoolboys, who as a group, violently assaulted a black man or men. Plainly it was always a violent act, it was always a cowardly act - the black man was always outnumbered, or for one reason or another he was unable to fight back. Commonly we found the man dragged off the street, put in the boot of a car and taken to some desolate place where he was beaten to a pulp. The reason for this act was never questioned, it was always assumed understood. What was taken for granted was that this other was another species, vermin. The hatred was always genuine. It was a brutal attack on his person, on his existence, on his sexuality. The resemblance to the most shameful part of American and German history (Klu Klux Klan lynchings, Nazi gas chambers) was not incidental. South Africa has a long history of racial violence. To that extent "kaffir bashing", harking back to the early days of colonisation, was not especially unusual. That these schoolboys were children, who had and continued to have a relationship with a caring domestic worker, made such enactments curious. The ferocity of the 'kaffir bashers' actions, the unmitigated hatred, was so extraordinary that we recoil in horror. We cannot but puzzle at the psychological basis of such behaviour, particularly in the context of having been so loved by this woman. What is particularly curious is that not only had most of these boys been cared for by a black nanny but that as they bragged of their exploits, the woman they would have most likely returned to that afternoon, would have been their 'black mother'.

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<sup>4</sup> "Kaffir", originally meaning unbeliever, harks back to the days of colonization. It is deemed to be the most derogatory of all racial insults. Like "nigger" in the US, the term is meant unequivocally as an affront. Memmi (in Kedijang, 1990, p. 6) observes: "colonized people are never characterized in their individual capacity, but as an anonymous collectivity".

### 1.1.2 Stories from the Consulting Room

Together the previously cited examples may not seem to add up to more than a series of highly idiosyncratic personal recollections. Friends and associates disconfirm this and in fact, suggest that such occurrences were common to the ‘whites only’ apartheid schoolyard. Over the years in long-term psychoanalytic psychotherapy practice, I have now become used to seeing nannies referred to as significant attachment figures by both adults and children. Discussion with professional colleagues would serve to affirm the recurrent, unbidden appearance of the nanny in their patients’ narratives - whether it be in symptomatic fragments or direct recall. In 1979, British psychoanalyst Isca Saltzer Wittenburg visited South Africa. Her sojourn provided the impetus to the formation of the Johannesburg Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Study Group (Hamburger, 1992). Notwithstanding, at one particular clinical meeting she urged practitioners to develop psychoanalytic models germane to the local situation. Purportedly, she admonished the participants for the failure to give sufficient credence to the nanny - a common feature to the supervisory case presentations of the evening in question (Hamburger, 2003). To further illuminate these questions I offer the case of Mr. Z.

#### 1.1.2.1 *An Unexpected Profligate*

Mr. Z. began psychotherapy in his 65th year. His presenting complaint was his predilection for cunnilingus with black women, usually domestic workers. This behaviour, beginning in his early adulthood, had over many years put a strain on his marriage and life in general. What prompted entry into psychotherapy was a belief that his wife had discovered his penchant, whence life, as he knew it, was no longer possible. Mr. Z.'s marriage was a childless one of some 30 years standing. He reported loving his wife deeply and having a satisfying sexual relationship with her, despite his infidelity of many years. For Mr. Z. himself, his desire for illicit sex was inexplicable. He spoke of being overtaken by an urge that once satisfied afforded him relief, reinstalling a sense of psychological integrity, recovering an aspect of himself. His compulsive ritual of going to

the “blacks only” domestic workers’ quarters on top of his apartment building was both profoundly humiliating for him, at odds with his conservative moral codes, yet curiously comforting. The sexual contact afforded excitement and pleasure but could never be a complete intercourse. In the Freudian argot he was stuck on fore-pleasures.

Mr. Z. certainly cut the figure of a most unlikely profligate. Indeed the domestic workers with whom he chose to have sexual relations were “improbable partners”, an “alien presence” (Allapack, 1975), for Mr. Z. was mired in the ways of Apartheid. His attitudes and political consciousness were in line with those of his generation: he was a conservative, a racist, despite his lifelong intimacy with black women. The emotional conflict engendered marked disquiet. Mr. Z. was acutely aware of the criminality of his actions. He knew full well that the nature of his promiscuity was punishable by law<sup>5</sup>. Thus his actions not only provoked pronounced feelings of guilt (especially vis-à-vis his wife) but also provoked a sense that he had spent more than half of his life “on the run”. Manifestly, there was a masochistic quality to Mr. Z.’s symptomatic behaviour: in his own book his actions were beyond the pail, infused with filth, degradation and contamination. Indeed his symptoms were very much at odds with his presentation of a strait laced, highly proper person.

Regarding his early history - Mr. Z. was an only child. His parents were both remarkably uninvolved in his care to the point of being neglectful. They appear to have been highly narcissistic individuals who devoted most of their lives to work and their own enjoyment. The presence of the domestic worker in his early life was conspicuous: the warmest, probably most loving care he received in his toddler years was that given by a nanny. She stood out not just as an important caretaker, but also as the single beacon of concern in his childhood. Simply making the link between his symptomatic behaviour and his early experience of care had immediate favourable therapeutic consequences: Mr. Z's sexual acting out soon diminished in frequency. As he came to recognise his nanny's

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<sup>5</sup> Section 16 of the Immorality Act of South Africa of 1957, in place at the time, stipulated that it was unlawful to have sexual relations across the colour bar. Such an offence was punishable by severe jail sentence. For an interesting socio-legal consideration of these matters see Carr (1987).

contribution in the face of his parents' disregard, the conflicts this provoked, inter alia, his sexual enactments ceased and he assumed a more satisfying life in general.

### **1.1.3 Stories from a Wider Context**

Before spelling out my research aims I will conclude with two fragments from the broader social context. The first concerns an apartheid 'grey area' - so called multiracial nightclubs of the 1980's and the last concerns a most interesting exchange between a little boy and his nanny captured on film.

#### **1.1.3.1 1985 - *A Downtown Johannesburg Nightclub***

Some time ago a colleague and I conducted a piece of ethnomethodological research towards an undergraduate sociology project (Goldman & Richardson, 1985). Specifically I want to put this material under the microscope, refracted though the light of the domestic worker-child relationship. What is being suggested is that for a moment we make the (untoward) assumption that most of the participants observed in this study would have been looked after by a black nanny over a significant portion of their early lives.

As I hope will become evident, "Pick-up rituals at a Downtown Johannesburg Nightclub" falls within the same spectrum as Mr. Z.'s fraught sexual enactments. Sexual relations across the colour line are in themselves unremarkable, having little or no particular meaning. For the participants, however, it was the larger context of South Africa in the mid 1980's, a time when the Immorality Act was still in place, that gave this particular form of "fun" or "having a good time" its unique and specific significance. For the researchers, "slumming it" entailed making their way to the seedy, so-called black side of town. Making our way into this "foreign territory", we the researchers shared with the other white participants the sense of being trespassers. The barely lit interior of the

setting, moreover, was not merely the commonplace darkness of nightclubs; it signified this as an illicit place, a place where taboos were transgressed. Simply put it was an opportunity for sex. In our research we detailed the transaction between the steamer and the prostitute – examining the wide variety of personal styles employed by the participants in the fragile negotiations of money for sex. Inevitably what we described was a caricature, for where prostitution (payment for sex) was one form of the encounter it was not the only form of relationship. To that extent, our account was a gross simplification of what actually went on at the Midnight Star. For our purposes, it is important to understand what these men were doing, specifically in the context of what I assume of their early histories, namely having been cared for by a nanny. The paradox plainly manifest in our discussion with participants was that these were particularly politically conservative individuals (to call them out and out racists would not have been an exaggeration) and yet they indulged in trans-racial sexual relations. In their licentious behaviour they stood at a critical intersection. There was a compromise formation in the classic sense - between the taboo (loving/sexual) wish provoked by early experiences with the maid, and warding off of these in their identification with the prevailing legal and political values. Central to the compromise is a failure to appreciate the anomaly; the subjects could not really see what was at stake. Simply asking them how they reconciled the contradiction in themselves took us no further. Their likely retort was that “this is an easy way to get sex”.

#### **1.1.3.2 *A Snippet from a Film Documentary***

I have a clear memory of a snatch of the opening scene of an anti-apartheid documentary. Try as I might I was unable to locate the name or source of this documentary. In the opening scene we are drawn into what appears to be an ordinary domestic situation. As we make our way inside we soon recognise that there is much more happening than what appears on the surface. The wide angle shot slowly focuses in and soon we are well within the home’s privacy. We are made aware this is the home of a particularly conservative white farming family. There is a little boy of about 5 or 6 in a state of

jubilation: he is playfully being thrown in the air by the nanny. He is naked. The nanny's arms are strong and reassuring. What first strikes one about the child's nakedness is its 'innocence'. This is the sort of exchange we might find between any mother and her child. Suddenly the camera cuts to the little boy's penis: he has an erection. We are left to ponder what all this means....

## **1.2 Summary**

There is something manifestly disquieting in all of these examples. Confounding these matters further is the unsettling sense that forthrightness is proscribed. Trying to understand my early life and that of my contemporaries, the nanny's presence is not immediately apparent. It does not take much, though, to recognise that her vaguely remembered presence is somehow decisive. The various examples would offer strong suggestion that the domestic worker was a significant presence in the lives of many white men. Even as the manual and emotional labour within households is turned into waged work, it is vital to the child recipients of this care. The critical point is that living in the white family as she did, over many years, a special relationship developed with the child. This attachment is not something spurious or immaterial that we can simply ignore or dismiss, for it assumes fundamental psychological import for the child. Evidence from the consulting room would lend support to the view that the nanny's psychological importance was crucial – she was often a fundamental source of childhood succour. For many patients she was the de facto mother, the primary attachment figure over many years. In spite of this, she remains a shadowy presence, a figure that is so easily dispensed with in reality or intrapsychically. Even the child's constructions of her are intersected by hegemonic discourses of the day: she is of the 'other' race, a servant and second class citizen. As much as living with her is associated with very strong loving feelings, notions of "nanny" are associated with hate. One is never sure, but there is a distinct feeling that, for the child, whatever the contact with the other race is (whether sexual or violent), she is always present.



### 1.3 Aims

To study white South African children's' (both girls' and boys') remembered experience of being looked after by a black nanny is an interesting enterprise in itself. I, however, have narrowed the investigative focus to white men only. My reasons for this election are founded in psychoanalytic averment that patriarchy bequeaths little girls and little boys very different developmental trajectories to negotiate. In these terms, concentrating specifically on men will enable a more sustained, fine-grained treatment of the issues.

In the same vein the historico-cultural context in which the nanny caretaking experience occurs has a crucial bearing on outcome, both at the time of the experience and in what remains at adulthood. It structures the experience in fundamental respects. Specifically I would argue that the experience under the apartheid milieu was a very different kettle of fish to what it might be under post-apartheid. Inevitably such considerations bring into sharp focus the fact that, in general, white men were the beneficiaries of racist, economic and patriarchal oppression.

In the present investigation the institution - paid domestic work - is considered at a particular moment of South African history, namely the latter years of apartheid. Not only this, but the nanny-little boy dyad is examined through a particular vantage point - through the eyes of only one of the participants – the white child. In general terms the concern is with how the experience of being cared for by a black domestic worker is psychologically appropriated by white male subjects. More specifically the intention is to elicit personal accounts, from the white boys, now men, of what they recalled of this experience. Narratives of these memories constitute a primary data set. This then takes us to our first aim, namely to describe the white man's recollections of his experience of being looked after or cared for by a black domestic worker/s.

Taking us beyond stories and reminiscences are our secondary aims. Essentially here the concern is with the psychological ramifications, if any, of the experience/s of being looked after by a black domestic worker. Put in propositional form – the present research

holds that this caretaking experience is not simply one among a lifetime of experiences but one that has significant bearing on the development and life histories of our subjects. To elaborate the question – what, if anything, had happened to those experiences. Have they simply been filed away as memories, or do they continue in another form in our participants’ psyches? To state the second aim succinctly - has something either wittingly or unwittingly been ‘done’ with the experiences of being looked after by a black nanny and if so what? ‘Done’ as used here concerns the psychological work or processing that has been applied to this experience. At its most basic, this may be the subject’s (witting and unwitting) attempts to retain or dispense with these events.

To recapitulate our twofold aims in simplified form: Firstly we ask for detailed narratives of what remains of apartheid white men’s experiences with their childhood nanny. Secondly we ask about the form of her continued existence (how she continues, if indeed she does) in the psychological life of our participants. Overall, then, the concern is to explicate the constitutive offerings of unconscious process and discourse in the particular and circumscribed context – the relationship between the black nanny and the little white boy.

#### ***1.4 The Ensuing Thesis Chapters***

The little white boy’s remembered experience of being looked after by his nanny will not readily be located in a single, ready at-hand body of scholarship. There are many reasons for this. These will be dealt with in due course. Be that as it may, in order to grasp this relationship in its complexity I have been obliged to constitute a literature review by stepping a meandering course between disparate theoretical interstices. By way of a map, the ensuing chapters, conceptual precursors to the research proper, will be previewed.

**Chapter 2** concerns the theoretical context in which the present research occurs. Specifically “the remembered experience of being cared for by a nanny” will be considered between the determinations of culture and the unconscious. As a point of

entry, attention will be given as to how white middle class men have persistently evaded scrutiny. As we shall see, the categories “whiteness”, “middle classness” and “masculinity” mark out for themselves the place of exalted, transcendent signifier - “monopolising otherness to secure and illusion of unfettered access to subjectivity” (Fuss, 1994, p. 21).

The substance of the chapter comprises a fairly detailed explication of the notion of “remembered experience”. I begin outlining how experience, narrative and memory are related to one another. “Remembered experience” has been defined as the construct by which to understand the relationship between the little white boy and his nanny for a variety of reasons. Firstly there are conceptual reasons: “remembered experience” is conceived of as an interface between the discursive and the non-discursive. To arrive at this point requires some theoretical contortions. As much as experience cannot be viewed outside or prior to discursive moments, it, nevertheless, retains within its boundaries the psychological (the unconscious), that which cannot easily be spoken. In making this move we must apprehend the necessarily “doubled” nature of the self (Probyn, 1993) – both discursively constructed and experientially lived. Remembered experience, thus defined is the place where it is possible for psychoanalysis and discursive approaches to peacefully coexist alongside one another to their mutual benefit. Secondly are phenomenological ones – a wish to not stray very far from the personal, lived relationship. Experience is chosen not because it offers direct, unmediated access to truth, but rather because a discursive approach is insufficient; it cannot retain fidelity to the idiographic, personal quality of participants’ accounts and foster self reflexivity in the sense of the psychoanalyst’s constant mindfulness of the counter-transference. Finally, there is the feminist’s valorising of (women’s) experience in the production of knowledge in order to permit a multitude of different experiences.

Having established a space for both culture and the psychoanalysis, the remainder of the chapter looks at what the specific constitutive cultural and psychoanalytic contents of “white boy being cared for by black nanny” might be.

In **Chapter 3**, I trace the discursive context that gives shape and form to the “nanny situation” in which ‘Klein Jannie’ and his nanny, our primary protagonists, find themselves. It is these cultural and historical antecedents of this institution that provide the ground, the conditions of possibility for what can occur between our two participants. The relationship, as we shall see, is a node within a wider network of power relations. It comprises specific ideological and material underpinnings. In the modern capitalist economy childcare as waged labour is an opportunity for mothers to shift the burden. Patriarchy imposes upon them to another woman. Things were not always like this: specific forms of childcare are themselves neither natural nor invariant, but rather socially created. Considered historically, we discern how the essentially practical question - caring for the young - gets subsumed in particular discourses, which have and had rather different intentions. Originally, childcare was a communal enterprise, only subsequently becoming defined as the province of women and mothers. The institution of nannydom itself has a long history. We follow this course through the emergence of the wet nurse and subsequently the Victorian nanny. The colonial heritage of the local institution marks South African domestic work in very particular ways. For one thing, what is at stake here is not a relationship between employer and employee, but between master and servant. As we shall see, this inserts her in the anomalous position of both insider and outsider.

**Chapter 4** concerns psychology’s engagement with the nanny phenomenon. These begin in the commonplace psychological assumption that the childrearing context is crucial to later psychological outcomes. Notwithstanding this appreciation, psychology’s attention to extra-parental care, specifically to care of this sort, is rather paltry. Nanny herself is a victim of Freud’s parapraxis, the elision of his *Monika Zajic* - his *kinderfrau* - from his self analysis. In spite of Freud’s omissions, psychoanalysis - with its developmental emphasis, has given this relationship more sustained attention than any other approach. As much as British preoedipal theorists have considered these matters, they hardly move beyond the simple issue of disrupting primary maternal attachment. Briefly we traverse the empiricists’ similarly facile treatment of these matters before moving beyond psychological scholarship for a psychological understanding that might close the lacunae.

In **Chapter 5** we turn our attention to the methodology employed in the present study. In **Chapter 6**, under results, actual interview extracts will be presented to capture the variegated qualities of informants' accounts, before finally proceeding with a theoretical discussion of findings in **Chapter 7** and a conclusion in **Chapter 8**.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEORETICAL CO-ORDINATES OF THE PRESENT STUDY: STANDING AT THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

#### *2.1 Mapping the Theoretical Terrain in Broad Brush Strokes*

##### **2.1.1 White ‘Apartheid’ Men as Research Participants – the Invisibility of the Centre**

In South Africa, the category “white man” has long stood as a signifier of power and privilege. As a group, these are perhaps the most unfamiliar subjects of all to the researcher’s gaze. This is because an identity based on power never has to develop a consciousness of itself (Pajaczkowska & Young, 1992), the “dominant discourse tries never to speak its name. Its authority is based in absence” (Griffin, 2000, p. 20). Edward Said’s path-breaking book Orientalism (1979) underscores how the hegemony of the dominant has an unmarked character in contrast to those who are “othered”. It establishes the standard of evaluation for both groups, naturalising the difference, ultimately privileging itself. Dominant ideas are understood and taken for granted in contentions like “we act like we act” (Frosh et al, 2002). Whiteness, middle-classness and masculinity, in these terms, have an invisibility or absent centre. If we take three aspects of ordinary identity in our culture, those of being white, being middle class and being male, we find processes which maintain this identity as the cultural norm, an absence, a negativity, with the power to define itself only in terms of what it designates its opposites. What is clear is that the processes through which such people are constructed as Other, along dimensions of gender, race, class, sexuality and so on, is profoundly cultural and involves the use of language as an instrument of power. While in racial othering the “black man must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon, 1982, p. 10), the converse does not hold true; the white man can be white without any relation to the black man because the sign “white” exempts itself from a dialectical logic of negativity.

The black man is “fixed’ by the violence of the racist interpellation. Claiming for itself the exalted position of the transcendental signifier, “white” is never a “not black” (Fuss, 1994). Likewise the middle classes want to deny their dependency – as a class economically reliant on the surplus value produced by waged labour. In the same way patriarchy naturalises men’s power over women.

### **2.1.2 Generally Speaking - Operationalising our Problematic**

In setting out to explore the relationship between the little white boy and his nanny there are a number of feasible theoretical-methodological lines of approach. One way would be to extend well-established international methodologies to a South African context. In the empiricist mould we might take a robust operationalised parameter, like attachment, and test this in the local instance of white children and their nannies. Correspondingly, we could compare local white men reared by nannies with their overseas counterparts on distinct psychological outcome variables. We could even do ‘sentimental’ research of the humanist-phenomenological variety where we might consider the nanny and little boy relationship as an unusual person-to-person encounter. What all of these exclusively psychological approaches have in common is that they refer to our two participants’ meeting as mere happenstance – the chance encounter between two, each with their own idiosyncratic psychologies and histories. While this is in part true, there is another sense in which by treating everything else (specifically the context in which the relationship occurs) as an extraneous variable, one is led to a fatal missing of the point. It is not just that the experience of being looked after by the nanny cannot be spoken coherently in unadulterated psychological terms, but that the relationship is unintelligible in the absence of culture<sup>6</sup>. For culture informs what takes place, who relates to whom and how they relate and with what effect. These discourse aspects precede and structure the person-to-person relationship. Children are inducted through language into particular social and cultural processes, but at the same time they are important agents in their own

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<sup>6</sup> Culture here is meant in the sense of being constituted out of social engagements, understood broadly as patterns of ideological and material encounters between any person and other people, and between people and social institutions (Connell, 1995).



social construction and in the ongoing construction of culture itself. Children are right from the start negotiating power relations through the dialogues in which they are involved and which position them in particular ways. In modern times children being looked after by surrogate caretakers occurs within specific sets of class relations. Nanny-little boy is a cultural site where disparate ‘given’ narratives are engaged. These narratives may contain messages about appropriate behaviour and about ways of conducting relationships, but they can also be used by children to explore, negotiate or resist a variety of beliefs and values and to represent themselves in different ways (Wetherell, 1996).

In this context the local experience of being cared for by a nanny under apartheid was quite distinct from any other historical time and any other geographic place. To produce a deracinated account, devoid of historical and contextual coordinates is to produce yet another inconsequential psychological text that must surely take its rightful place gathering dust in the university library. Of course there are never any guarantees of relevance. Notwithstanding, I set my sights much smaller. From the outset, I do not want to offer a ‘grand theory’ of nannies and little boys, but rather I want to look at a specific generation/series of generations of men’s experience of this relationship. I must accept the historical condition involved in speaking - that in years to come questions of white men and nannies will be immaterial, looked upon with the curiosity with which we look upon dinosaur bones or the phrenologist’s instruments.

It is apparent that white boys’ experience of being cared for by a nanny will not easily find one, single theoretical home. What is required, then, is a framework that recognises the constitutive role of culture but also one that appreciates “agentic struggles” (Frosh et al, 2003). Any thoroughgoing analysis of our white men will have to understand that men are emotional beings with unconscious desires and phantasies<sup>7</sup> and that they are profoundly affected by factors such as social class and race. “White men’s experience of

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the body of the thesis I employ the English psychoanalytic (more especially Kleinian) spelling distinction between “fantasy” as conscious daydreams and “phantasy” as an unconscious process. American psychoanalysis certainly does not make this discrimination. For further interesting discussions on these matters see Laplanche and Pontalis (1983).

being cared for by a black nanny” stands at a juncture between a series of fairly distinct scholarly spaces. Edley and Wetherell (1995, p. 97) offer consolation for the employment of a multidisciplinary approach: “No single theory or academic approach can hope to capture and account for every facet of even a single man’s life, let alone the lives of black men and white men, gay men and straight men, and men of all different socio-economic classes”. In our consideration we will find ourselves between disparate fields: social theory, men’s’ studies, post-colonial studies, psychoanalysis and what has been called “postfeminism”. Each of these different theoretical perspectives has its contribution to make to understanding white men and their experiences. The brunt of the explanatory burden will be borne by discursive and psychoanalytic understandings.

### **2.1.3 Between Experience, Narrative and Memory**

In the present instance, “remembered experience” was the principle means of making sense of the little boy’s appropriation of the relationship between his nanny and himself. Defining this as the investigative domain obliges an exploration of the complex cross-stitching between experience, memory and narrative and non-narrative forms of representation (which includes forgetting).

Experience is an ontological concept before it is anything else. Experience per se, at least until it is apprehended, until it is spoken is no(thing). As the existentialists inform us, experience is a process; it is the state of forever becoming. “Experience is always conjunctural, located in the backwardsness and forwardsness of the historical present” (Probyn, 1993, p. 21). It occurs “ .... only in an activity of production.....it cannot stop....its constitutive movement is that of cutting across” (Barthes, 1986, p. 37).

Spoken or remembered experience is another matter altogether. To inscribe experience, whether memorially or as narrative, locates us in the corridors of epistemology. Now the spurious and contingent perceptions comprising experience are given a context, are constrained and humanised. To narrate experience is to organise it, to codify it, to capture

it in a moment and solidify it. We might say that before we have narrated or inscribed experience we do not know it. The opposite is true, to invoke experience or memory is to invoke its representation. And that is narrative or story making. Narrative is an essential resource in bringing experiences, including the past, into conscious awareness. Narrative arises out of our experiences of the world and our efforts to describe that experience in language (White, 1980). Transforming knowing into telling is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrativity is a communicative process involving the dynamic interaction between two temporal strands - time and sequence (Kreiwirth, 2000). Emplotment is that narrative device which confers order, sequence and meaning on a collection of otherwise isolated events. In the absence of emplotment, narrative episodes and lived experience appear to be little more than a haphazard collection of events (Ricoeur, 1977). By “storyfying a life” (Riesman 1993, p. 114) we bring order to random happenings, make sense by reconstructing and reinterpreting.

Something happened; or better, someone telling someone else that something happened, may be the most minimal and general way to conceive of narrative (Kreiwirth, 2000). The commonness and pervasiveness of narrative makes it “the quintessential form of customary knowledge” (Lyotard, 1997, p. 4). Storytelling is an essential human activity that allows us to negotiate who we are, where we come from and how we envisage our future. It is the most natural mode of verbal representation: “...narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and nowhere is nor has there been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives ....Narrative is intentional, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (Barthes, 1977, p. 79). The massive and unprecedented interest of interest in narrative especially over last three decades has, in recent time, come to include psychology. All of a sudden it seems - we have decided to “trust the tale” (Kreiwirth, 2000).

To continue talking generally about narrative - narrative is considered not so much a reflection of reality as an interpretation of it – a meaning making activity rather than a

chronology (Ricoeur, 1977). As Nietzsche and after him Barthes have shown, facts are representations of the raw material of life; facts are generated through a process of encoding (the dialectic of representation) which has a cyclical structure: that which is noted derives from the notable, but the notable only makes sense with reference to what is noted (Barthes, 1986, p. 138).

Narratives and memories are deeply cultural events. Stories always occur amidst an interlocutor – it takes place within a historical and social context. We always use cultural frameworks to encode and represent experience. Language, participation in a shared universe of signifiers, is the principle medium. Engendering meaning is a collaborative process. Stories are a kind of cultural envelope into which we pour our experience and signify its importance to others. As a mode of discourse, as a mode of social activity it is enmeshed within relationships of power, privilege and authority. Narrative is “a constellation of meanings whose very intelligibility testifies to the irrevocable local conditions within which it assumed form. Narrative by virtue of its sources in the social interchange can be localised, it can be situated within a specific nexus of discursive conditions. The narrative imagination exists and is weighted by “the ‘gravitational pull of the actual’” (Freeman, 1998, p. 21). Narrators speak in “natural” terms, but we can analyse how culturally and historically contingent these terms are.

Memory is not dissimilar from narrative. Like with stories, the very act of memory is an act of representation. Involved in both encoding and retrieval are units of meaning, also mostly linguistic. Memory, too, is socially and historically mediated. That the past is never recorded but always constructed through a process of narration and social mediation is the uncontested position of nearly all currently dominant theories of “cultural memory” (Halbwachs, 1980; White 1980; Young, 1990). The remembering behaviour of a society, otherwise, social memory is understood by some (such as Cappelletto, 2003) as the sphere of relationship between cognitive practices and social practices. Halbwachs (1968) for one, characterises memory as a filter of past events that tends to preserve those images that support the group’s present sense of identity.

Collective memory – consciousness of the past is said to reinterpret it in the light of present interests. Social factors combine to affect the patterning of memory<sup>8</sup>.

There is something else to memory besides that which can be spoken. “A cultural theory which fails to engage with these experiences that defy discursive representation clearly runs the risk of producing a talk-show version of memory, according to which all experiences can be neatly negotiated and mediated in the public domain. The alternative to this over-narrativising of memory is, on the other hand, not a pious silence, which chokes all historical reflection and critical thinking, but a position that derives its impetus from the recognition of an unmasterable alterity” (Fuchs, 2002, p. 238). A psychoanalytic concept of memory seriously questions those theories of cultural memory that all too easily square memories with their linguistic and social representation. Indeed we require more than a narratological/discursive horizon to account for all of experience. Non-narrative forms of representation (which includes forgetting) will be taken up systematically under **4.4.4.4 *The Unconscious aspects of Experience/Remembered Experience.***

#### **2.1.4 Remembered Experience as a Point of Departure**

I believe there are three distinct advantages in using the construct “remembered experience” for present research purposes:

(1) *in conceptual terms* – remembered experience is a “doubled” phenomenon (Squire, 2002); it is an interface between the discursive (narrative) and non-discursive modes. As easy as it is to simply assert the possibility of an experiential, non-discursive register alongside discourse, this is a hard fought battle. Arriving at this conclusion will require something of a circumlocution through disparate theories.

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<sup>8</sup> Discursive psychologists treat remembering as a social and collective activity (Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Potter & Edwards, 1990). They examine in detail the speech acts involved in making claims about remembering and forgetting, and they ask what such claims are accomplishing socially (e.g. Edwards & Middleton, 1986). Consequently, remembering, far from being treated as an unobservable, internal process, becomes a directly observable, social activity based on speech-acts. Outside of psychology this body of work comprises the area of study called “cultural memory”.

(2) in its *phenomenological sense* - experience has a proximity to participants' accounts, (3) in its *feminist sense* in which we must make place for a variety of (women's) experiences rather than a single (e.g. middle class) version.

Over the remainder of this section the distinct benefits of "remembered experience" will be elucidated in the terms stated.

#### **2.1.4.1 Remembered Experience as an Interface - a Site of the Intertwining of Discourse and the Unconscious**

Mapping the relationship between discourses (narrativity), everyday life and the machineries of power is crucial to an understanding of the white man's representation of his experience of being looked after by his black nanny.

Classical Marxist theory enabled one of the first accounts of the role of culture in the construction of experience [c.f. e.g. Williams (1977) on these matters]. Culture, particularly, has been addressed in writings on ideology. For classical Marxism, the subject (both in his person and experience) is mediated by his/her social position, specifically his/her relationship to the means of production. We might say that the subject is an effect of his place in the productive process. Ideology referred specifically only to dominant or state ideologies which served to deceive the proletariat of their real class interest. This, the sociology of knowledge problem<sup>9</sup> (derived from Marx's notion of ideology) posits that there was no vantage point outside of ideology from which the 'truth' can be spoken (c.f. e.g. Habermas, 1978). Accordingly, the narration of experience, otherwise knowledge, is merely an articulation of class interests.

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<sup>9</sup> This debate raged over many decades. Marcuse (1964) offered a solution, albeit an unsatisfactory one, suggesting it was the societal outsider (the tramp) and perhaps student, inasmuch as they had limited societal ties, who could speak truthfully.

If psychology had had a hard time of it with classical Marxism, the challenge of structuralism/post-structuralism was beyond its ken<sup>10</sup>. Crises of representation arose under the influence of Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology, but perhaps more significantly in the zeitgeist of structural linguistics' "exhorbation of language" seeing to the subordination of individual subjectivity to the code (Soper, 1986). The argument goes: everything is already within the language and in order to communicate the individual must yield to this socially instituted set of rules.

For the likes of structuralism, not only are discursive practices all pervasive but there is no vantage point outside; discursive reality can never be transcended. Discursive practices are the constitutive element in all social practices which incorporate subjectivity itself. Culture affords the fields of possibility for the psychological which includes notions like experience. Any sense of autonomy we might have is illusory. In the Lacanian sense it is simply the (foolish) jubilation of the child transfixed by the specular image (the illusion) of himself in the mirror. Experience in these terms is nothing more

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<sup>10</sup> Regarding Psychology's rejoinder to the discursive gauntlet: The arrival of discursive approaches presented a challenge to the human sciences perhaps like no other before or since. Holding fast to its assumptions, Psychology suffered the reprobation of its sibling disciplines Philosophy and Social Theory. Of course Psychology's pariah status within the social sciences is not without foundation. The hegemonic "made in the USA" variant of psychology with its incessant stream of facile empirical studies, or its commoditization as Oprah Winfrey media bites has only itself to blame. Canguilhem (one of Foucault's teacher's) comment is typical "Much of psychology is ethics without obligation, medicine without control and philosophy without rigour" (source unknown). As far as continental philosophy is concerned - aside from psychoanalysis, more especially Lacanian psychoanalysis (perhaps the only one to openly and wholeheartedly embrace the constitutive role of language and sociality) our discipline has nothing intellectually robust to tender.

In the wake of Discourse's challenge Psychology could no longer pretend that there is an unmediated innocence of the self. In the place of the long familiar absolute, transcendent subject was one who was a product of discourse. The world of everyday lived experience had a different pall, for it, too, was said to be constituted in ideology. Culture was more fundamental than a mere background, moderating variable, it now denoted the very field of possibility for the psychological.

Psychology eventually got round to thinking the social and linguistic constitution of its own objects of study. In Europe during the mid 70's we had détente with the journal Ideology and Consciousness debating the many ramifications for Psychology. This crystallised in Henriques et al's (1984) influential book Changing the subject-psychology, social regulation and subjectivity. In America, around the same time, scholars (perhaps most notably John Shotter and Kenneth and Mary Gergen) conducted themselves under the mantle "social constructionist". The two strains converged in the understanding that it is no longer possible to (pretend we can) say where the "individual self" ends and where "society/culture" begins (Henriques et al's, 1984, p. 3). In the subsequent decades a substantial corpus of psychological knowledge accrued within a discursive framework. Despite the fact that discourse analysis has, in recent time, entered mainstream psychology as distinct theory and methodology, it continues to be a nascent body of work.



than the effect of discourse and “remembered experience” is simply an enunciation of this effect.

Structuralism in Marxism was perhaps best exemplified by Louis Althusser (1971). Having dispensed with the economic determinism of Classical Marxism, ideologies have an autonomy, a material existence and material effectivity. Consciousness is no longer free floating, momentarily captivated by dissembling ideas produced by the dominant group, *consciousness is constructed through ideologies*. His central thesis is that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects and it is through the mechanism of recognition that individuals are called into place and conferred with ‘their’ identity. Michel Foucault’s structuralism takes this one step further. Discourse is a cultural totality. Power is inescapable, all encompassing, dispersed, manifest in discourse and apparent only when it is exercised. In other words, it is a process, not a possession; it is unavoidable and present in every relation (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). It ceases to have substantive content; rather than being possessed and centralised, it comes to be seen as a technology. Power is not owned, nor is it rooted in economic exploitation, it enters “... into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault, 1980, p. 39).

For us, as psychologists, suddenly there is no room to move – our position certainly does not seem tenable in the way we knew it before. As much as we may not like it, we must accept - “the very capacity to speak meaningfully, to say something about the world in which one finds oneself, is unthinkable outside of the discursive arena, outside the web of those specific practices, conventions and beliefs without which there could be no world” (Freeman, 1993, p. 47). Notwithstanding that the self is caught up in what Foucault calls “the heavy and fearsome materiality of discourse” (Probyn, 1993, p. 167), there is a case to be made for the *sui generis* significance of ‘psychological facts’<sup>11</sup> in the sense in which Durkheim (1963) spoke of “social facts”.

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<sup>11</sup> Psychological facts are here used in the very narrow and particular sense of psychoanalysis, the discipline dedicated to studying the unconscious.

A variety of authors have sought to make provision for a realm beyond or beneath discourse. It is not that these writers have sought to assert the autonomous individual with the capacity to act in the world unconstrained by ideology. It is certainly not about a wish to reinstate the antediluvian individual-social binarism that the advent of postmodernity so effectively dismantled. It is certainly not about maintaining the awkward position of being subjects in front of the text. We must accept that a crucial portion of experiences, probably the predominant portion, is occupied by words, language and discursive practices. Language and preceding social context anchor, not only meaning, but indeed what we apprehend. As much as discourse provides the conditions of possibility for subjectivity, its occupation of subjectivity is never complete. Experience must always be thought in its conjuncture: we draw on a cultural lexicon and yet self is personally marked, invested with idiosyncratic affective connotations imbued with the unspeakable otherness of the unconscious. There are various possible ways of conceiving of the extra-discursive whilst reserving prize of place for discourse and power.

One way through the limits to a purely discursive subject is to demarcate a zone of “partial interiority”. Where the preponderance of the inside is occupied by language and cultural forms, there is a remainder that is not. The notion of “partial interiority” belongs to Althusserian critics Laclau and Mouffe (1985), albeit that they do not develop it to any great degree. What is being asserted is that there is a space within the subject for something else, something other than narrativity and discourse. This is a far cry from wanting to restore the sovereign subject. As much as we are never fully inhabited by discourse, so psychoanalysis informs us we are never fully inside ourselves. As the Freudian ego is the “slave to three masters” (reality, id and superego) (Van Zyl, 1998), so selfhood is forever in the grip of impulsion from without (discourse being the most potent) and within (intrapsychic imperatives).

Cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1975; 1979; 1986) provides us with the further means to talk about this *remainder* as it exists both as a social phenomenon and a private fact. This is his heuristic concept “structure of feeling”. Following Williams, we must be careful to distinguish what is of the order of hegemonic culture and what is pre-emergent,

not yet culture: “it is necessary to recognise that the group cannot know or articulate itself wholly within the available cultural resource of the social order” (1979, p.61). Williams talks of a “*residual element*” – a leftover, a state of unfinished social relationship that has not yet found the terms for its own reflexive self-comprehension. The residual element is the total of common experience of a historical period and has no “external counterpart” either at the level of sociological or textual analysis. This, as I conceive it, is the realm of the pre-discursive: we may not have come to represent it in thought or spoken language yet. A structure of feelings is “a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognised as social, but taken to be private, idiosyncratic and even isolating” (Williams, 1975, p. 63). Structure of feeling names the simultaneously cultural and discursive dimension of our experience but does not neglect the fact that these experiences are also felt and embodied. As a form of mediation between inside and language it comprises “what is not fully articulated, all that comes through as disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble and recovers the “sense” of the “actual experience” through which the pattern of culture or social character are lived (p. 64-70).

In recent times there has been a return to ‘old school’ Marxism (c.f. e.g. Connel, 2001; Reddy, 2000). For Antonio Gramsci (1988; 1995), although ideology has a material effectivity, bearing on subjectivity, it does not give rise to it. This distinct difference from ‘grand structuralism’ has made for Gramsci’s return to favour among psychologically informed social scientists. Chief among the reasons for Gramsci’s appeal is that he retains a role for human agency and historical change whilst still centrally focussing on power. In this way he makes place for a multiplicity of positions vis-à-vis the dominant ideology. Through his concept of hegemony, Gramsci’s work highlights the role of power – both in terms of its exercise by the powerful and the collusion of the less powerful – in cultural reproduction.

What distinguishes Gramsci’s anti-essentialism is that it gives credence to fluidity and multiplicity. It has appeal for those who want to account for idiographic differences, the indubitable plurality of subjectivities. Australian sociologist Robert Connell (1995) is time and again the point of entry for men’s studies. He reworks Gramscian concepts in

relation to gender regimes which give rise to “masculinities” – the range of possible styles and personae, found in different cultures and historical periods. It is through Gramsci that Connel opens up a space for the psychological. This is “interpersonal work” - the exploitation of available cultural resources such as ideologies prevalent in particular societies. Priority is thereby given to meanings the subject attaches to his actions and locating these in relation to structures or institutionalised practices embodying power relations. For Connel, there are multiple engagements with the hegemonic, from complicity to subversion.

Discursive psychology, too, employing various sources (including Gramsci) comes up with the notion of “positioning” - one that allows a more elaborated version of culture and discourse. Culture provides the general complex of materials out of which subject positions (including the desires and anxieties which underpin them) are created. Positioning is the “process by which our identities and ourselves as persons come to be produced by socially and culturally available discourses” (Burr, 1995, p. 140). Discursive practices form the raw materials and manufacturing processes from which people are produced. They afford us conceptual repertoires as a means by which to represent ourselves, others and our experiences. Subject positions make provision for choice, albeit in a highly constrained fashion - for we are obliged to make something out of what we are given. Subject positions, thus, define the kinds of experiences that are possible. We cannot avoid subject positions. Position in discourse is the content of our subjectivity. According to this view, a person can be described by the sum total of their subject positions (Burr, 1995).

How an individual assembles his/her range of cultural options makes for a multitude of subjectivities. Psychoanalysis has a lot to offer regarding the assemblage process. “While culture makes available the subject positions we can inhabit, the ‘investment’ or ‘enjoyment’ that people have in these subject positions is not necessarily captured by the articulation of the discourses themselves; rather, it may hinge on unspoken and at times unspeakable events, experiences and processes, all of them ‘cultural’, but also deeply embedded in subjectivity” (Frosh et al, 2003, p. 42). As Frosh (1999, p. 387) continues:

“...in their very irreducibility what is apparently social and what is apparently psychological keep entwining with one another. Deeply, passionately, unconsciously people are political – racialised, gendered, and classed to the core of their identities. Equally deeply, erratically and bizarrely, social events are infused with phantasy – eroticised, exaggerated, full of fears and desires”. From a theoretical point of view discourse approaches are “particularly good at describing the accounting procedures whereby the task of positioning is achieved by participants. That one experience is had and in turn one position is adopted rather than another is best answered by psychoanalysis” (Frosh et al, 2003, p. 48). The gap we have prised open within discourse for the unsaid, partly known inside each subject will be taken up in more detail in due course. Briefly to make the point - feelings and unconscious emotional states aroused by this positioning are critically important for subjects themselves. In the context of our research questions, it is the unsaid partly known which give experience its personal weight and significance<sup>12</sup>.

#### 2.1.4.2 “Remembered Experience” as the Preserve of the Personal, the Phenomenological, the Everyday of Way of Life

Before the research even begins, the reader intuitively knows that our participants will have very different stories to tell of what the relationship with their nanny was like for them. Descriptions of the experience of being looked after by the nanny must always be highly personal stories. It is these *prima facie* differences – why a particular actor adopts a particular identity or the reasons why specific individuals have the particular kind of experiences that discursive approaches are not particularly good at explaining (Frosh et

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<sup>12</sup> Psychoanalysis together with discourse allows for richer, more “complex descriptions” (Wetherell, 1996) - the different voices that speak us. There have been various interesting psychoanalytically informed attempts to engage with a notion of identity located between the cultural co-ordinates of power and phantasy, most notably by Billig (2002), Hollway (Hollway, 1989; Hollway & Jefferson 1997, 2000, 2001), Parker (1992; 2001), Walkerdine (1989) and Wetherell. Steven Frosh is without doubt the most systematic worker in the area canvassing the issues and related debates in a series of articles (e.g. 1989, 1995, 1999), who together with Phoenix and Pattman (2002), conducted both highly original and fruitful research. I will again refer to these theorists, more especially their methodological insights, in the relevant chapter which follows.

al, 2003). Likewise in psychological work employing a discourse analytic framework, subjective experience no longer bears the familiarity of everyday life as it "...is made so context-dependent, so fluid and flexible, that there seems to be little beyond a personal psychology which is a moment-to-moment situated experience" (Crossley, 2000b, p. 529).

As much as we dare not forget the crucial importance of the discursive vis-à-vis experience we dare not lose "the personal everyday way of life", "the felt facticity of material being" (Probyn, 1993, p. 16). Indeed it is the relationship as it is lived in its everydayness that is the heart and soul of the present research. It is precisely the differences in the personal experience of their nanny relationships that interests us. This does not imply that the personal is not that which is singular and atemporal outside the practice of theory. In emphasising "experience" I make the phenomenological plea to remain close to our participants' accounts, to retain the personal in the name of reflexivity and understanding. My plea certainly is not for the phenomenology of the likes of Husserl. It is surely not about "an incontestable form of evidence which rests on the notion: what can be truer, after all, than a subject's account of what he has lived through?" (Scott, 1992, p. 24). "Lived experience" does not denote a substratum of experience unmediated by language or the discursive. My point is that our experience or perceptions of reality do not always conform to hegemonic representations of it. I do not want to lose the singularity of the memorised experience of a particular person, albeit that aspects of what is remembered might be shared by the entire group. What is being called for is implicit though essential, to psychoanalytic practice. Here, psychoanalysis shares with discursive approaches the understanding that reflexivity is not simply a theoretical concept, it is a practical activity. For psychoanalysis, the deployment and interpretation of 'the personal' is an invitation to critical self reflection. For reference to personal experience needs to encompass a critical interrogation of its own articulation (Squire, 2002). In the psychoanalyst's case this is the omnipresent vigilance to the counter-transference; for there are different ways in which the analyst and the analysand are implicated in the transference. "In considering analysis as a whole we have to ascertain the part of the transference and the part of the counter-transference in each of the two

people present (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1982, p. 93). According to Kristeva (2003), the analyst's task is to problematise truth, to scrutinise the historically diverse functions of truth without censoring it or confining oneself to its power. The role of the analyst is to interpret desire but in a way that opens it up to an infinite possibility of meaning. In the same way, while the analyst suggests meanings, s/he does not possess the truth about the subject, but is aware of the plurality of possible interpretations. Psychoanalytic discourse is one whose truth is always in question.

The importance of remaining near to a subject's experience, in research terms - stepping into the other man's shoes - occurred to Freud long before the likes of Carl Rogers and Heinz Kohut. As far as Freud was concerned empathy is a prerequisite for effectiveness as an analyst<sup>13</sup>. Most English speaking readers do not realise that empathy was an important concept for Freud. His disparate usage of the concept, "*einfihlung*" is lost in translation. Indeed, the Standard Edition never translates *einfihlung* as "empathy" in the clinical context (Pigman, 1995). It is in Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905/1976), and his account of the comic's putting himself into the other's psychical process where we see it rendered as "empathy" (p. 78). In his technical papers *einfihlung* is given significant importance - translated "identification with the patient", "it is a *sine qua non* of our understanding" (in Pigman, 1995, p. 250).

The appeal to the phenomenological has particular significance when dealing with products of memory as in the present research: there is an inevitable discrepancy between the past as a lived experience and its reconstruction through narrative. Narrative-discursive approaches appreciate the constructed nature of memories. Narrative approaches to memory, however, lend themselves to the making of a museum culture<sup>14</sup>,

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<sup>13</sup>For an interesting historical consideration of empathy in psychoanalysis see Pigman (1995).

<sup>14</sup>Memorialising is not necessarily a good defence against forgetting. Interesting takes on the fetishization of remembering and the proliferation of a museum culture have been produced by the likes of Fuchs (2002) and Young (1990). Talking on the field trip concept of Auschwitz - Fuchs (2002, p. 238) avers - "It is to be feared that word representations (books; interviews) and things representations (films; photographs) of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis bring back the very thing against which they work unceasingly, in the orbit of secondary repression instead of letting it remain forgotten, outside of any status in the "inside". It is to be feared that through representation it runs into ordinary repression. One will say: it was a great massacre, how horrible. Of course, there have been others, 'even' in contemporary Europe (the crimes of



constructing a meta-narrative which has little to do with the experience of the past as a lived reality. As much as that is true we must be wary of turning remembering into a cosy, anti-critical and merely subjective act for which no public domain is needed.

#### 2.1.4.3 *Experience as a Project of Feminism*

There is another agenda for preserving experience, even if it is “remembered experience” – this is feminism’s rallying call – “the personal is political”. Starting from the politics of the personal, in which women’s subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of redefinition, feminists have argued unanimously for the importance and validity of subjective experience and for women’s experience in particular to be taken seriously in social analysis and theory. It is Gallop (1989, p. 177) who posed “the necessary double and .....urgent questions of feminism: not merely who am I? But who is the other woman?”. “...somehow we have to construct ways of thinking that are marked by ‘me’ but that do not efface actively or through omission the ways in which ‘she’ may see things differently” (Probyn, 1993, p. 4). She continues on the same page - “I want to stretch my experience beyond the merely personal, not as a way of transcendence but as a way of reaching her experiences, the experiences and selves of women”.

Speaking from the heart, even if it is spoken with the fervour of a good cause is unsatisfactory, for there are high epistemological and political stakes involved. Arguing that “experience” can simply be evoked as an invocation of an inherent right to speak; as Gayatri Spivak (1988) and other feminists of colour have forcefully argued (e.g. bell hooks, 1992; Mama, 1995) unfortunately is not enough. For we must heed Terry Eagleton’s warning to those who point to “experience” – as though, that were precisely not “ideology’s homeland” (in Probyn, 1993, p. 15). These are complex debates which the likes of Spivak are not shy to enter. Paraphrasing Weedon (1987) - it is unsatisfactory to refer unproblematically to experience....we need a theory of the relationship between

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Stalin). Finally one will appeal to human rights, one will cry out “never again” and that’s it! It is taken care of.” (Lyotard, 1997, p. 26).



experience, social power and resistance...theory must be able to address experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to the material social practices and power relations which structure them. Feminism's battle with these issues has included engaging the theorist's own embodied (and discursively structured) experience in e.g. anorexia (Probyn, 1991) and bulimia (Squire, 2002).

For the remainder of the chapter, having looked at a more complex way of conceiving of "remembered experience", I will tease out the specific articulations of culture and the non-discursive as they might pertain to our white men in their erstwhile engagements with their nannies.

## ***2.2 Culture as Constitutive of Remembered Experience***

We now turn to "remembered experience's" articulations with different cultural configurations. Being a white boy child under apartheid or better "doing white boy" under apartheid is, *inter alia*, constructed out of a broad network of cultural resources. The cultural resources amount to overlapping and distinct discursive formations which narrow the range of choices available to the individual subject in his various engagements with his nanny. Taking three 'deep' cultural resources available to our participants – they have been hailed as white, as privileged and as male. Here we are certainly not referring to essential or indeed demographic differences. Quite simply, white men being interpellated in these ways puts a constraint on the range of thoughts, feelings and actions available to a particular group of subjects. Social, political and economic realities mandate and sustain narrative conventions and these determine not only narratives but, through these, what the members of a group are capable of thinking and communicating. Subjects can never absolutely free themselves from these realities, even in thought, such that they might move beyond them (Kreiwirth, 2000). Particular for our participants, not only were specific racialised, classed and genderised constructions of themselves produced in their engagement with the hegemonic, but so too were disparate versions of nanny. Hegemonic conceptions of nanny will be dealt with in Chapter 3. In the following

section we will unpack the calls to be white (and middle class) and man separately. This heuristic division amounts to a gross simplification. For the categories of gender, sexuality, class and race can neither speak for the totality nor for one another but are implicated in one another relationally such that we talk of a relational articulation between them.

### **2.2.1 Race/Class – the Call to be White and Privileged**

For present purposes apartheid has been defined as the cultural and historical setting in which the white man's experience of being cared for by his nanny occurs. To the outsider, apartheid conjures up images of violent racism and exploitation, a political system extending colonialist discourses. Under apartheid, the workings of power and the protection of sectarian interests were manifest for all to see. I am not going to rehearse the conventional literature on domination (state policies) and resistance in South Africa, simply to say, the direct hand of the state enshrined racist discrimination in statutory legislation. One of the effects of apartheid was the elision of class and race. In general terms, black people constituted the working class whereas white people comprised the bourgeoisie. The early 1970's saw Liberal and Marxist scholars debating this issue - the apparent structural incompatibility of capitalism and racism. As current wisdom will have it (Bundy, 1979; Wolpe, 1974) - capitalism destroyed subsistence production and any autonomous pre-capitalist modes of production and in so doing produced a racialised working class.

Apartheid bore on and structured people's lives in manifold and profound ways. There was outright violence and oppression in the apparatuses of state. There was the direct economic and psychological exploitation of the vast majority. There was also the direct and insidious colonisation of its subjects' most private and personal selves (c.f. e.g. Potgieter, 1997; Ratele, 2002). Apartheid interpellated people in highly specific ways, depending on their social position. Race was a discursive contraction with material consequences. For the person in the street there was no vocabulary of class: class

relations hid behind ethnic labels. Civil institutions in South Africa were organised on the basis of “race” and “ethnicity”. Racist science – eugenics - informed the state’s conceptions of race and the thinking about race amongst a great many white citizens (Dubow, 1989). To maintain political and economic domination the apartheid state had to deploy ‘race’ in multiple and contradictory ways, which allowed for the maintenance and consolidation of white power and control. Race was used to unite “coalitions of disparate groups of people” (Dolby, 2001, p. 19) for political ends. There were categorical forms through which so-called black people came to be homogenised and denigrated. In South Africa, the construction of whiteness was particularly salient at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as poor whites were allowed into the circle of privilege to prevent them from affiliating with blacks who shared their class interests (Dolby, 2001). Later whiteness was amended in accord with the economic needs of apartheid – it is well known that businessmen from the Orient visiting South Africa were designated ‘honorary whites’ so that they could enter “whites only” hotels, restaurants and meeting places. Similar status was accorded visiting African heads of state and their children who, by the 1970’s, were allowed to attend select white schools. A cobbled together, rickety whiteness also united a disparate group of South Africans including Afrikaners, English, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews and Portuguese<sup>15</sup>.

In daily life under apartheid, the notion of race was associated with a complex range of practices, institutions and rules that people took for granted in their workaday interactions with each other. It was “common sense” that whites be in positions of power and authority, to know and expect “the president” to be a white man, for a maid to know how her “madam” should be treated with respect; to take for granted that there were white schools and black schools etc. Whiteness was propped up by legal designation and state power. Almost every aspect of life was specified and regulated from where you might

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<sup>15</sup> Whiteness is a fairly new category of identification, only making sense as allied to the European colonial projects of the past 500 years (Dolby, 2000a). In recent years “White Studies” has emerged as an influential and effective tool for analysing the workings of power and privilege in various societies. A number of anthologies have appeared; Hill (1997) and Delgado and Stefanic (1997) being the most well known. “Today it is not a fact that patiently awaits to be encountered, but an ensemble that must be actively created and reinvigorated anew with changing circumstances” (2). Because of this constant need to re-invent itself as a way of maintaining privilege, whiteness also shifts e.g. in the US both Jews and the Irish have relatively recently ‘become’ white (Bodkin Sacks in Dolby, 2000b, p. 17).

live and work, whom you might relate to and how and so forth. Enormous economic benefits have historically been attached to whiteness. For those designated of the dominant, white group there was a culture of entitlement. Apartheid produced particular conceptual repertoires, making for specific expectations and codes of behaviour stipulated on the basis of race. Racism seeped into every aspect of life. These unquestioned perceptions, languages and practices constituted an overt but also a hidden imperialism of daily life. Of course there was no specific, uniform response to the call to whiteness. Even within those defined as white there were always discordant voices and counter discourses. There were those, though, who were the trusty foot-soldiers of racist abuse, bigotry, and exploitativeness.

### **2.2.2 Gender – the Call to be a Man**

As much as subject positions are racialised, so they are gendered. For reasons previously considered, so too with gender regimes: the dominance of men in the public record obscured the fact that little is known about masculinity (Morrel, 1998). Over the last 25 odd years, researchers begun to devote themselves to the study of masculinity with men's studies emerging as a distinct field. Prevailing thinking on gender positioning is a far cry from the early biological and sociological (sex-role theory) models. This body of work is no longer given to reified, ahistorical and categorical accounts which appeal to a single set of facts for explanation. If there is a starting point, most scholarship begins with the assumption that any adequate theory of men and masculinity needs to begin with the unequal relationship between men and women. Male bodies are not conceived as biologically given or pre-discursive entities, but rather as objects and sites of power. As whiteness turns to blackness to define itself, so masculinity looks to femininity (gender difference) to say what it is not.

Robert Connell's (1995) notion of masculinity as "a collective gender identity and not a natural attribute" is where most analyses of this genre begin. Masculinities are plural – they are relational identities which men construct and inhabit. These are "not fixed

character types but configurations of practice or cultural resources generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationship” (Connell, 2001. p. 7). The experiences of gender of particular boys or men are complex and change with context.

The “performance” of masculinity (Butler, 1990; 1994) is always constructed in relation to a dominant image. The “hegemonic” or dominant form of masculinity has a crucial role to play in defining how boys and men are supposed to act in order to be acceptably male. The “approved” mode of being male is associated with heterosexuality, toughness, power and authority, competitiveness and the subordination of gay men. Most boys and men cannot hope to fit into this ideal. Hegemonic masculinity is a matter of domination, in addition to oppressing women, it silences or subordinates other masculinities – denying these forms any currency. Hegemonic masculinity is, according to Donaldson (in Morrel 1998, p. 3), “exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent”. Misogyny, homophobia, racism and compulsory heterosexuality are among its defining features. As much as the dominant form has a coercive aspect to it, it also relies, á la Gramsci, upon developing consensus. There are benefits, costs and tensions involved in taking up gender polarised positions. There is the “patriarchal dividend” or reward for conformity; but there is also a sense of exclusion that many men will feel in their failure to live up to expectations. Underpinning the dominant conception is the omnipresent threat of violence. On occasion this becomes brutally evident.

Gender is socially constructed, in part, through the interpersonal/identity work we do that marks us as members of the categories “men”/“women” (Scwalbe & Welkomir, 2001). The process of constructing men’s performative identities, in loose terms, occurs somewhere between social structures and individual anxieties. As adults our bodies do much of this identity work for us, though, we also use speech, dress and movement to corroborate the body’s silent claims. It is not merely category membership that we must signify - gendered selves are virtual realities created collaboratively in interaction. Such selves are thus fictions in one sense, yet nonetheless, enormously consequential because of the responses they evoke in actors and audiences.

**2.2.2.1** *Some South African White, Male Ethnographies*

In South Africa most scholarly gender work has focussed on women. Exceptional is the rich tradition of anthropological work which has charted the way boys became men, how the sexual division of labour was organised, how people related to one another in specifically gendered ways (c.f. review works like Hammond-Tooke, 1993). In recent time two works have pioneered South African Men's Studies: Gevisser and Cameron's (1994) edited collection of essays on gay issues and Morrell (2001)'s edited text: Changing Men in Southern Africa. Morrell's work is a ground-breaking examination of the different ways in which masculinity has been historically defined in our society across racial and cultural lines, as well as the stresses that inspire change. It brings together a series of ethnographies of men, examining how gender intersects with class, race and sexuality in the formation of masculinities. This body of work explores how identities of particular men have been produced collectively as ways of dealing with and negotiating their particular regional environments.

Preceding Morrell (1998, 2001), Bozzoli (1983) extended an invitation to local scholars by suggesting versions of South African masculinities, what she called a "patchwork of patriarchies". She argued that it was not that South Africa was under the aegis of one system of male regulation, but that many patriarchies coexisted. She identified an "English speaking variety", "Afrikaner patriarchy" and "black culture" she characterised by "sexist assumptions and ideologies". Bozzoli's sort of work enjoins us to avail ourselves of historical accounts if we are to adequately make sense of local men and their experiences. Morrell (1998) delineates a first, tentative periodisation of local masculinity. Within the historiographic tradition there is a now growing body of work on black masculinity. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of white masculinity.

Notwithstanding, Morrell (1998, p. 609) suggests that "masculinities have changed along with capitalism and capitalism has reflected these changes, not just caused them". In their relationship with one another black and white men were not just divided by history and geography; they were related to one another in particular and hierarchical ways. Morrell (2001) argues that where the history of white supremacy would suggest that white, ruling

class masculinity was hegemonic this is not completely accurate, failing to capture “the stubborn reality of African life” (p. 18). Inter alia, white and black masculinity did not only meet to struggle, for one to assert its dominance over the other. Sometimes they met with the common interest of suppressing women.

Notwithstanding the import of race and class in structuring experience, these resources are insufficient (and thus only a start), to account for the multiplicity of white, male experiences - for, of course, these are not the only ways that any given man could be interpellated. There are many cultural and sub-cultural aspects which are crucial in the “practical accomplishment” (Connel, 1995) of masculinity. These include language, age, and geographic locale. Under apartheid many, different white masculinities were possible. There were different cultural resources available to different subjects inevitably giving rise to very different experiences. Beyond race and class, masculinity was segmented further by language, educational level, age, religious affiliations, sub-cultural attachments, geographic locale, political beliefs, sub cultural ties, religious or language affiliations etc. If these stood as coherent discourses these particulars may have had a significant role to play in the production of identities. Concerning white masculinity we now have works on “gay men” (Gevisser & Cameron, 1994), “ducktails” (Mooney, 2000), “Durban beach bums” (Thompson, 2001), “English settler men” (Hyslop, 2001), “Afrikaans men” (du Pisani, 2001), amongst a few others.

### ***2.3 The Unconscious aspects of Experience/Remembered Experience***

#### **2.3.1 Why Psychoanalysis? – Making a Space for the Non-Discursive**

Discourse can account for much (even most) of what comprises ‘the stuff’ of experience, certainly those aspects located discursively in social institutions and practices. There are moments, however, when discourse fails. It cannot explicate everything in experience and it certainly cannot explicate everything in the specific experience of being cared for by a nanny. The non-discursive - that space below and beneath discourse - what Neo-

Gramscians like Bob Connel call “identity” or “interpersonal work” is most fruitfully conceived by psychoanalysis.

Amongst Freud’s most revolutionary contributions was his opening the way to consider the discursive and non-discursive and their relationship with one another. It is this appreciation that has taken psychoanalysis beyond matters therapeutic into the realms of literary theory, feminism and film, amongst other disciplines. As both a neurologist and an ethnographer Freud elaborates a space between nature (the body) and culture (language and discourse). This frontier zone is the psyche. Quite simply Freud’s early appreciation is that the hysteric’s lame arm was the “arm” as represented in language (say in the shape of a perfect glove) and not the arm found in nature - a biological entity arm with its distinct nerve pathways, tendons and the like.

Freud’s project sees to a radical decentering of the subject. It is not the rational subject that has primacy but rather one constituted in a cleft. It is this fissure (as the repository of the drive and affect) that is the seat of the non-discursive. For Freud consciousness is discontinuous, forever experienced as incomplete - containing gaps. The unconscious, it is said, is a fact whose correct understanding entails the demise of an entire tradition of philosophical thought about the human subject, language and social relations (Archard, 1984). Freud is not merely defining an unconscious mind in addition to a conscious mind. Human beings possesses an unconscious, not as a second mind, but as the unthinking, desirous core, formative of all that the person is consciously aware of saying and doing. The unconscious is not merely that which is outside the limits of consciousness at a given moment, but that which has been radically separated from consciousness by repression and thus cannot enter the conscious-preconscious system without distortion.

Psychoanalysis challenges the positivism which suggests that we always know what we are about to speak and that what we speak is always what we mean (Rutherford, 1992). It affirms the social constructionist understanding that subjectivity is not all of a piece.

There are seams and ruptures and these seams and ruptures have crucial bearing on the nature of the subject and his/her experiences. It is no longer merely a rational subject; in fact, irrationality (unconscious imperative) has greater force in structuring the person and



his/her experience. “The Freudian subject is defined from the outset as a series of places which are functionally specialised: this specialisation is seen in the first topography (differentiating the three systems of unconscious, preconscious and consciousness) as a succession with the energy following a certain temporal path. In the second topography it is seen as an interlocking (the ego is differentiated from the id, the superego embedded in the id is differentiated from the ego etc.). The models of reference are quite different: they make you change from one mode to the other, like so many metaphors. But they have one thing in common: ‘the fiction’ (the term is Freud’s) of a psychic apparatus”. (Pontalis, 1981, p. 132).

To simply posit a ‘pure’ unconscious which is completely separate from sociality, driving the subject, is not the intention. Where the unconscious is the ordnance of the non-discursive, this is not all it comprises. In the same way, the individual subject is not pure interiority. Rutherford (1992, p. 93) makes the point that “it would be impossible to conceive of instinctual impulses except through language”. But they do imply a mental space quite different from the mental space involved in language. It is a space which is not defined by rational naming of objects but through primary process (the pleasure principle) wherein the organism finds value and meaning in activities and objects. It is in fact in the act of naming the non-discursive that it becomes tamed as discourse.

Clinicians, positively, again and again tell us that to subsume everything within discourse is impossible. For some it is a matter of expedience. Pontalis (1981, p. 133) connotes “self” as “a clinical necessity but theoretically unreceivable”. For others this sphere has crucial psychological import. Bollas (1987), for one has defined the failure of linguistic representation to speak for the subject as the “unthought known” - “while we do know something of the character of the object that affects us, we may not have thought it yet”. Laplanche (1989) is another who refers to an unknowable, pre-linguistic dawn and its productive significance to subjectivity<sup>16</sup>. Frosh (1999) tackles the question as to whether

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<sup>16</sup> Laplanche’s theory of originary seduction to illustrate how mother’s desire is constitutive of the child. The mother-child relationship, in this context, does not give rise to an ethical subject but rather a sexual one. The originary seduction is the situation in which a helpless and needy child is confronted with verbal and non-verbal unconscious messages from an adult (Laplanche, 1989, p. 123). Not simply are the

there is anything outside of discourse directly. Whilst his response first appears tongue in cheek, we soon recognise his deadly earnest: “If I let go of myself who will hold me?”. He continues – “...the utopian endpoint, the disappearance of the self in the other, I am not convinced that I want it. Give me my paranoias and anxieties any day; at least I know that I am here”. Turning to clinical evidence he observes that people are much more likely to “struggle to the end of their lives to stay with some experience of selfhood or ‘identity’ than to welcome the doing away with it. *Identities are rather important protective devices against something worse*” (p. 382). Of course, in referring to the extra-discursive we cannot simply make *ad hominem* appeals. The non-discursive as it appears in everyday life is “a point where discourse fails, where language in all its guises is characterised by insufficiency rather than its expressive capacity, where what is ‘known’ and expressed in the subject is an uncertainty, an impulse or dread. Another way of talking about this is the breakthrough of the (Lacanian) Real<sup>17</sup> – something extra – discursive and unnameable, a threat, an abjection, a piece of life. Retrospectively we can make discursive sense of it. At the moment of its enactment it cannot be a discourse. At the time of its experience we stared at it and blinked. Psychoanalysis can be said to offer a specific way into theorising the anomalies of the social world, in particular the ways in which events exceed the accounts which can be given of them. It is that which is present

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primordial needs of the child being attended to. Through these acts of caring, the adult also exchanges messages that relate to the body as sexual. The breast is a fundamental site of this communication. Even if at first sight the breast is the natural organ for feeding, says Laplanche, it cannot be ignored that for the woman it is invested with conscious and unconscious sexual meanings. Nursing indeed implies a double erotogenic excitation: at the level of the mouth for the child and at the level of the breast for the mother. For the mother this excitation is rooted in her personal history and her bodily experience. It is quite improbable that the child won't be aware of the desires and significations that this erotogenic excitation provokes at the unconscious level in the mother. In Laplanche's view (1989), encoded in this transaction is an enigmatic message. Amidst this scene of seduction, the child has to contend with the incomprehensible sexuality of the adult. This is assumed within the child as “the other in the self” and serves to haunt him/her and attack his/her integrity. “The other in the self” is a traumatic remainder that is constitutive of the unconscious.

<sup>17</sup> Lacan's three registers or orders - Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real are a fundamental classification system around which all of Lacan's theorising turns. They are profoundly heterogeneous categories, each referring to quite distinct aspects of psychoanalytic experience, each concerning mental functioning. The Imaginary and the Symbolic will be laid out in some detail in the substantive text of the thesis. The Real is that which is opposed to the realm of image. It is not reality although it has the connotation of matter – brute physicality. Essentially it comprises that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolisation. The Real is linked to the concept of impossibility: it is “the impossible” because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order and impossible to attain in any way (Evans, 1996).

in many situations, but especially in extreme ones, the excessive fact which reverberates subjectively for people” (p. 384).

Julia Kristeva (1980; 1982; 1987; 1996; 2000; 2003) enables a further detailing of the non-discursive sphere. She is now famous for the distinction between what she calls the “symbolic” and the “semiotic”. The symbolic element of signification is structural linguistics’ submission associated with grammar and structure of signification. The symbolic element is what makes reference possible. For example, words have referential meaning because of the symbolic structure of language. The semiotic element is the bodily drive as it is discharged in signification. It is a way of designating a heterogeneous process of pre-symbolic psychic and somatic functioning that operates prior to (Lacan’s) mirror stage and the formation of identity. The semiotic is associated with the rhythms, tones and movement of signifying practices. As the discharge of drives it is also associated with the maternal body. Kristeva designates the pre-symbolic space “maternal” in the logical and chronological (developmental) sense, as before birth and during infancy. At this time “identification” and “differentiations” are regulated by the primary caretaker. This maternal regulation is “the law before the (paternal) Law” (Kristeva 1980, p. 76) - that which Freudian psychoanalysts have maintained is necessary for signification. According to Kristeva, it is in aesthetic pursuits that there is the possibility of recapturing some remnant of the continuous relation with the mother.

Kristeva’s (1987) insights permit a reincorporation of non-discursive functioning into the symbolic realm in order to reveal the contradictory, unstable and discordant in both psychic and social structures. To comprehend what it is to be human requires attention to feeling (the semiotic) and the word (the symbolic). Speaking in the Lacanian argot, she emphasises the dialectical relation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in order to grasp the Real, namely the existence of the dynamic unconscious and its manifestations in the objective world of interpersonal discourse. Where language and Logos is fundamental to the experience, we dare not miss the Imaginary aspect. The point is to “go beyond the theatre of linguistic representations to make room for pre- or translinguistic modalities of psychic inscription” (p. 4). For her “the lived” cannot be understood in

terms of a linguistic model that divides the spoken word (verbal signs) into signifier and signified. As she (1987, p. 4) informs us, “Analytic language works with signs that encompass representations of at least three types: representations of words (close to the linguistic signifier), representations of things (close to the linguistic signified)<sup>18</sup> and representations of affects (labile psychic traces subject to the primary processes of displacement and condensation, which I have called *semiotic* as opposed to the *symbolic* representations inherent in, or derivative of, the system of language)”.

### 2.3.2 The Place of “Remembered Experience” in Psychoanalysis

Kristeva establishes for us that experience *per se* is intersected by the non-discursive. There is a body of work that proposes that certain types of experiences, specifically those experiences defined “at the limit”, cannot be represented in common discursive modes but are inscribed at the level of the body (c.f. Crossley, 2000b; Culbertson, 1995; Fuchs, 2002). Intuitively we know this from the converse phenomenon - narrative incoherence in the face of “angst”. Ample descriptions of this can be found in the likes of the existentialist novels of Kafka and Sartre. Psychological work on trauma specifically, suggests that certain kinds of experience “fail to speak the language of representation, ... an unrepresentable affective imprint haunts the self’s conscious fabrications, known as memories. Housed by the body these affective imprints stage a frightening play of gestures, which are phantoms of a past whose absence is however felt...provoking an elsewhere, a different site than this one. Bodily phantoms are excessive because it punctuates the flow of language and elusive insofar as it thwarts signification” (Fuchs, 2002, p. 240).

Underneath the public rites of memory rumble alternative sub-currents that transmit the individuals’ private, often unsanctioned and highly emotionally charged and traumatic experiences of history. This is a language of gesturing that defies representation. “Instead of writing itself on history, this highly elusive but persistent memory writes itself on the

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<sup>18</sup> This is “word presentation” and “thing presentation” of Freud’s metapsychology.

body, thus evoking the physicality of historical experience and a sense of unmasterable alterity” (p. 235). This other code upsets the rules of discourse by turning the body into a stage for performance that offers ghosts and phantoms of the past.

Psychoanalysis enables a study of memory as a rupture of the present - a destabilising and disturbing past that often defies representation. These are highly emotionally charged situations in which the valence or affective loading is high. Psychoanalysis established that the familial caretaking situation has such a valence. In these terms there are aspects of this experience which for the child are unrepresentable through words. Arguably the nanny-child caretaking situation is also such an emotional visceral experience comprised of the same evocative ‘stuff’ as those involving parental caretakers. As much as crucial elements of white men’s remembered experiences of their nannies can be and must be accounted for in discursive practices, there is a remainder beyond a narratological horizon. To add to this, exclusive emphasis on narrativity achieves closure. But closure and memory are diametrically opposed. This is in line with Lyotard’s (1997, p. xiii) demand “for forms of thinking and writing that do not forget ‘the fact’ of the forgotten and the unrepresentable”.

### **2.3.2.1 *Freud and Memory***

It is with the symptomatic body that Freud’s first considerations of memory begin. Somatic reality is the writing pad which marks memory but confounds representation and assimilation through consciousness. Freud’s theorising moved from an early understanding of memory as a simple recovery of events through narrative to a far more complex model that emphasises the affective and non-linguistic dimensions of the memory process. In the early stages of their work, Freud (and Breuer) believed that trauma originates in real sexual experiences during early childhood. Because the child cannot process these experiences, they are at first repressed but resurface during puberty as hysterical symptoms. The link between reality and memory was established in talking of these hysterical symptoms as mnemic symbols. The Freud of the 1890’s suggested that

the simple recall of such incidents could cure patients. These positivist preoccupations have in recent time resurfaced in the highly polemical False or Recovered Memory Debate (c.f. Masson, 1992; Spence, 1982; Prager, 1998). However, as early as 1899, Freud discarded this empiricist model when in his essay Screen Memories (in Freud, 1975/1899), he proposed that childhood memories are not simply a description (a record or mirror) of the past, but construct it in a tendentious manner that responds to their later needs. The point is that the stuff of memory is not fact but an admixture of something represented and internal imperatives, specifically a compromise formation between the crisscrossing of wish (desire) and its repudiation (defence). According to this new view, instead of accessing an authentic past, the memory process is extremely conflict-driven in that it involves repression, substitution and the production of reconciliation between opposing forces.

Freud's realisation that childhood memories are often unconsciously formed with a view to fulfilling current needs, albeit in a disguised manner, as well as his growing *in situ* experience with patients, led him to re-examine the role of narrative in the memory process. After the essay on screen memories it was already clear that the stories we tell about our past could no longer be trusted at face value. In addition, Freud the practitioner, began to observe that his patients, while talking about their experiences, often displayed another completely unconscious type of remembering, namely the compulsion to repeat in the transference relationship. A crucial paper on Remembering, Repeating and Working Through (1914/1973) explores the analytic situation in which the patient does not remember any previously repressed event but instead acts out an unresolved conflict through his relationship with the psychoanalyst. For Freud repetition in the transference is thus an indication of repressed affect. Insofar as the latter only shows up as a set of non-verbal completely unconscious gestures in the here and now, the transference relationship points to the affective flipside of experience which seeks a concrete behavioural-somatic manifestation rather than a narrative representation. *Pari passu*, the patient's recall in the psychoanalytic situation comprises a narrative that has travelled over the abyss, as an index of the unsaid.

What Freud indubitably confirms is that emphasis on narrativity is not enough. Such modes fail to take account of alternative means of cultural transmission that communicate through the unsaid, innuendo and silence. Behind the manifest content of memories of experience we find the play of discourse as well the non-discursive. Narrative undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the creation of our conscious memories; this easy equation does not do justice to the latent underside of language: an original affect which is pre-representational and pre-imagistic. Affect does not signify, instead it shows up, or as Kristeva (1982, p. 49) puts it, it is at the boundary of language “that affect makes an imprint”.

### **2.3.3 Which Psychoanalysis? – Giving Content and Form to the Non-Discursive**

There is certainly not one psychoanalysis. If there is something that classical theory, ego psychology, object-relations theory, self psychology and Lacanian psychoanalysis all have in common it is an acceptance of the unconscious as the key object of psychoanalytic science. It is probably fair to say that all privilege childhood, giving fundamental credence to development, albeit that they have different foci. Indeed the matrix of immediate caretakers is that relational domain within the wider community that is decisive for psychoanalysis. For the psychoanalytic perspective, it is not so much the practices and interactions of the wider social contexts but specific relationships with carers and with others, particularly with the way these are experienced emotionally by the infant, that are crucial. Given that the nanny is such a specific carer of our white children, amongst other things, psychoanalysis is the obvious interpretative framework to make sense of our participant’s accounts of their caretaking experiences. Which psychoanalysis we are talking about, though, remains a critical issue.

Amongst psychoanalytic discourse practitioners there is recognition that the work of Jacques Lacan (e.g. 1977), as recondite and aristocratic as it is, is a “natural” choice (Frosh et al, 2003; Parker, 2001). What makes Lacan such a natural choice is his emphasis of the constitutive significance of language and culture. For our purposes the



primary advantage of Lacan is not simply this, but that it is able to begin to offer useful terms of engagement between the “the unknowable, prelingual dawn, outside history” (Benjamin 1998, p.236) (pre-Oedipus) and the creation of a historical, gendered subject (Oedipus). Indeed the psychoanalytic school we select in our analysis of the little white boy and his nanny must be one that is able to give credence to the dyadic situation of earliest times (child and primary caretaker), but also one that takes credence of the little boy’s entry into sociality. Whilst Lacan’s primary concern is with the father’s intercession at Oedipus, he retains a commitment to the caretaking pair in his concept of “mirroring”. My interest and fidelity to Oedipus is in the vein of Juliet Mitchell (1990, p. 59): “It seems to me that in Freud’s psychoanalytic scheme....we have at least the beginnings of an analysis of the way in which patriarchal society bequeaths its structures to each of us....gives us, that is, the cultural air we breath, the ideas of the world in which we are born and which, unless patriarchy is demolished, we will pass onto our children and our children’s children”.



## CHAPTER 3

### LOCATING THE NANNY'S EXPERIENCE

#### *3.1 Chapter Outline*

In this chapter we look to what it might have been to be a black nanny working and living in a white, apartheid household. To do so, childcare per se will be located within its historical conditions of emergence. Indeed childcare as waged work is a highly specific form of domestic labour. The first strand of paid childcare we consider is the wet nurse. The second is the Victorian nanny of the British Empire. The Victorian nanny co-existent with her colonial counterpart is the progenitor to her apartheid heir. Having located nanny in her international context we move to the subcontinent. First we take heed of the broad socio-political context in which this form of labour occurs. We then spend some time with her inside the home; this is the contradiction of being an insider but also an interloper.

#### *3.2 An Adumbrated History of Childcare*

In modern times, conventional wisdom defines the household as the most private and personal of realms. Accordingly, the maintenance activities of the home have been veiled behind a shroud of inscrutability. Housework, thus, is believed to be a constant feature of all societies (Simonton, 1998). Likewise, childcare is deemed to have always been the exclusive preserve of the biological family, and more specifically, the biological mother. Following this kind of reasoning, “history of childcare” is an empty pursuit, a discipline without substance or interest. The truth of the matter is that while the likes of childcare and the maintenance activities of the household are timeless, their context and meaning are not (Coltrane, 1998).

It was probably feminism of the 1970's that made a history of childcare a viable field (Sanjek & Colen, 1990). At this time feminist scholarship first turned its attention to household reproductive labour. Ann Oakley (1972) is probably the most well known. Along this course it also gave consideration to non-household members' paid reproductive labour; this after all was a primary source of women's employment for over two centuries. Interestingly it was at around the same time that Racial and Ethnic Studies and Culturalist historians first placed the domestic worker on the academic map. Race and Ethnicity Studies in the U.S., with its civil rights agenda, more particularly its aim of reclaiming episodes of African American and ethnic history, appreciated that race and ethnicity were long-time primary factors determining recruitment of the domestic worker. Culturalist history, for its part, with its interest in "hidden history" of the working classes and communities, afforded a matrix in which the lives of domestic workers could be studied (Colen, 1990; Williams, 1975; 1979).

What the prying eyes of these three disciplines served to facilitate, and indeed, indubitably establish, was that extrafamilial childcare (care of children by other than the biological parents) has a very long and chequered history. This was at odds with conventional wisdom's notions of childcare: looking after and caring for children have certainly not always been the exclusive preserve of the biological parents, or indeed biological mothers. In previous times, it was not the case that mothers provided all the care, or even most of it (Coltrane, 1998). In hunter gatherer societies, the period that constitutes most of human history, women were generally valued for much more than childbearing or childrearing (Blumberg, 1991; Coontz & Henderson, 1986). In the earliest times, caring for children was a more collective social enterprise and children spent less than half their waking hours in the presence of their biological mothers. (Coltrane, 1998). Although societies differed greatly from one another, the boundary between public and private, family and outside world, was less distinct than it is today. In most societies, the entire community participated in virtually every aspect of an individual's life, including childcare. In this older and more communal pattern, parent-child relationship were constantly regulated and monitored by relatives and community members, and what happened inside the home was relatively public (Shorter, 1975;

Stone, 1977). In effect there was a microcommunity of close-by adults and older children who acted as surrogate parents and plenty of people were always around to give advice on what to do in specific situations. This meant that mothers and fathers had less control over child-rearing practices, but they also had substantial help from others (Skolnick, 1987).

It is not for nothing that it is said: “childhood wasn’t invented until the 18<sup>th</sup> century” (Simonton, 1998). Childhood certainly was not always viewed with the sentimentality or nostalgia of today. Childhood was neither a special time of life nor a separate state, but rather a period of “defective adulthood” out of which children had to be trained (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). Certainly, it is not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that children were dressed as children; before they were simply dressed as tiny adults (Shorter, 1975). With the family as primarily an economic and defensive/offensive constellation (like the village, the manor, the castle), children were not seen to have the same functional value as peer groups or servant units (Burck & Speed, 1995). The aim of childrearing, in these terms, was to harness children’s productive, economic potential as soon as possible (Stone, 1977). Later, religious teachings - particularly that of Puritanism – took up these cudgels, emphasizing the corrupt nature and evil dispositions of children. Indeed it was the father who had the primary moral responsibility for children at this time. He was admonished to demand strict obedience and use swift punishment to cleanse children of their sinful ways (Blumberg, 1991). The culture of severity transcended class barriers: “a boy should have his ‘seat’ slapped until he screams for mercy and make him promise to never do the same again” (Coltrane, 1998, p. 83). Gathorne Hardy (1972) makes a pointed observation: the images are always of forcing, restraining, disciplining, cutting back, pruning - it is highly significant that English is the only language which has the same word, “nursery”, for the place where children are brought up and where plants are grown.

In Europe, with the burgeoning of industrialisation under capitalism, there was a gradual shift from home-based production to wage labour. Concurrent with the economic and technological revolution were profound ideological changes: the ideals of gender, of

marriage and home life would thenceforward never be the same. This, the separation of work and home, public and private - the doctrine of dual spheres – was the constituting moment of the sexual division of labour (Simonton, 1998). Not simply did we have the creation of distinct social locales, but who was to occupy those separate spaces was specified. The public arena was now to be the vigorous male's domain with the female sheltered in the private home. "Man's vocation was to be a good citizen; Woman's to be a good wife and good mother" (Simonton, 1998, p. 88). Fatherhood and motherhood, consequently, came to be distinct. For childcare, defining the territory of the home as mother's domain (Coontz & Henderson, 1986; Lasch, 1977; Skolnick, 1987) was the turning point. Henceforth childcare had become almost exclusively a matter for the nuclear family, a personal matter. Not simply that, it was a matter for women, women who were now embedded in femininity, domesticity and the private world of home. Childhood, in turn, assumed profoundly new significance.

Before the modern era, father-child relationships were dominated primarily by duty and, although father's associations with children were not devoid of emotion, they were exemplified by obligation. Men were a visible presence in their children's lives because their work – whether farming, artisanship or trade – occurred within the household context. With industrialisation and the advent of the wage economy, men were called increasingly to seek employment outside the home. Inevitably they spent less time with their families and their direct authority with family members declined (Colen, 1990). A new moral imperative attached itself to the male role – men came to fulfil their family and civic duty not by teaching and interacting with their children, but by being "good providers". Masculinity became even more clearly defined by the ideas of male breadwinner and family wage. Man's destiny was to work and participate in public affairs; woman's was to organise the household and raise children. The ideal father qua good provider "set a good table, provided a decent home, paid the mortgage, bought the shoes and kept his children warmly clothed" (Bernard, 1981, p. 10). For men this was the moment of exclusion from the home. If he was to participate in domestic life and family this was merely compensation for his activity in the outside world. "Central to the conception of social order was the institution of the family, headed by the paterfamilias,

husband, father and representative of patriarchal authority, upon whom wife and children alike depended” (Simonton, 1998, p. 88).

As men increasingly left home to go to work for wages, it was not simply that the moral responsibility of children shifted from fathers to mothers. Motherhood came to assume revered status, bearing and rearing children became the most sacred of acts. As a corollary, mothering was a “deified obligation” to foetus, infant and young child. (Franzblau, 1999). We had the invention of housework and the creation of the housewife. In Germany, between 1780 and 1840 we had the birth of *Hausmütterliterature*, a change from *Hausmutter*, who worked in partnership with her husband presiding over the operations of agricultural estates, to the *Hausfrau*, or housewife who was guardian of the private sphere (Simonton, 1998). In England there was a similar chronology with the family hearth given centrality. Women were to be perpetually active satisfying household needs. With motherhood now “compulsory” for women (Pianta, 1992), the ideal was for biological mothers to be the sole caretakers of their children. Material reward and emotional fulfilment was said to follow the raising of two and one third children. The “cult of domesticity” bestowed on domestic tasks an almost spiritual importance, affirming the middle class ideal – women’s natural place was in the home. The rise of scientific homemaking and the home economics movement further promoted the idea that homemaking was a moral calling and a worthy profession, that the home was a private haven under women’s control (Bernard, 1981; Podmore, 1994; Skolnick, 1987). These new sciences were used to promote full time motherhood as the acceptable goal for all women (Marchbank, 2000). In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century we had middle class women isolated in their suburban houses assuming almost sole responsibility for raising their children, aided by occasional reference to Dr. Spock or the latest technique developed by paediatricians or child psychologists (Klein, 1992).

Motherhood ideals, like other cultural myths, of course did not mean the same thing to everyone and did not influence all people in the same way. Although the romantic ideal held that women should be sensitive and pure keepers of the home on a full-time basis, the reality was that women in less advantaged households had no choice but to be

workers and mothers at the same time (Coltrane, 1998). Middle class women were encouraged to stay at home and bear children to support “racial betterment”, while working class women were required to work no matter what their reproductive situation (Franzblau, 1999).

The home, previously the normal site of production, consumption and virtually everything else in life, was slowly transformed into a nurturant child-centred haven set apart from the impersonal world of work, politics and other public pursuits. Not until the idea of family as intimate retreat was established - a father, a mother and children set apart from the world - could you get the concentration on children which lead, ultimately to the position they hold in our lives today. Enlightenment about children meant they were no longer considered sinful creatures whose will had to be broken by their fathers in order that they become productive workers. A psychologically informed, humane discourse promoted the view that these were precious, “little angels” who needed nurturing and support from their mothers. Insurance company records and court cases of the time show how the economically useful child was transformed into the economically worthless yet emotionally priceless child as we moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zelizer in Coltrane, 1998). Traditional forms of child labour came to be seen as harmful and inappropriate for those of “tender years” (although working class children and immigrant children like their mothers still had to work to survive). The middle class family came to be idealised as the only place where “innocent” and “pure” children could be protected. The ideal of childhood innocence, however, was attainable by only a minority of the population. Turn of the century working class, black and immigrant children were not granted the opportunity to be seen as innocent as their wealthier contemporaries. Under conditions of war and economic depression this becomes more manifest - these children were potential soldiers or breadwinners (Sanjek & Colen, 1990).

### ***3.3 Emergence of the Nanny as an Institution***

Hired childminding goes back to pre-recorded antiquity. There are various Biblical references to another person, usually a woman of lower social standing, looking after a child or children that was not her own<sup>19</sup>. These solitary early instances of paid extra-familial care hold little interest for present purposes. Rather it is the large-scale emergence as nannydom as a social form, an institution that is significant. The Nanny evolved out of, and held her sway in the context of a particular society including specific economic, political and social forces, with very definite views about the nature and upbringing of children.<sup>20</sup>.

#### ***3.3.1 The Wet Nurse***

Preceding the advent of the nanny was the wet nurse. “From very early times (at what point precisely, or even vaguely, no one seems to know) until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was extremely common all over Europe for the affluent to have their children suckled by poor women to whom they paid money” (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972, p. 117). Evidence for this is plentiful. For example in 1235, Henry II of England passed a law against Christian wet nurses suckling Jews (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). The basis for the custom of wet nursing is not clear. The most parsimonious explanation is that employing someone to do the suckling saved the middle mother a tiring activity, one that causes the breasts to lose their shape (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972).

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<sup>19</sup> Biblical references to “maidservants” are plentiful. It was usually a younger woman, whose duty it was to tend the ‘mistress of the home’ including her children. A concordance search revealed at least 76 references to a “maidservant” beginning at Genesis 12: 16 (with Sarah giving Abraham her Egyptian maidservant Hagar as a concubine), running through into the New Testament.

<sup>20</sup> The willingness, indeed “the ability to allow strangers to look after their young” (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972, p. 36) has another strand: the British practice of fostering – farming out little babies, more or less from birth, for almost any length of time when they are weaned until they are properly ‘trained’ at five or six. This custom beginning in medieval times continued until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Purportedly this practice had its foundation in the medieval idea (of Tudor and Stuart times) that you had to learn to serve others before you could be expected to lead them. In these terms, if possible, children were always sent to grander homes than their own. ‘Farming out’ was a universal custom particularly among rich families in Scotland and subsequently, for those leaving for the colonies (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972).



Texts of the period, give a sense of the mystique with which the wet nurse was imbued (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). This was the aura of magic that subsequently was attached to Motherhood. The wet nurse's breasts were seen to be the source of the primitive supernatural. With the baby's imbibing this milk, both the physical appearance and character of the nurse was deemed to be taken in. It is for this reason that the qualities of the wet nurse were worked out in enormous detail and carefully set down in books of instruction. Not only was the size and shape of her breast stipulated, but amongst other things, an aversion to her employer's husband was also specified.

According to Gathorne-Hardy (1972), some historians contended that it was these wet nurses, once their feeding had been done, who stayed on and became the "dry nurse" or nanny for the rest of the child's infancy. This thought is uncertain. Apparently while it was true that some dry nurses were at first wet nurses, it was also true that a great many were not. Inevitably, with doctors and theologians urging mothers to feed their own children, this social practice fell out of favour.

### **3.3.2** *The Victorian Nanny*

In a distinctive development of the later 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, domestic service became a predominant route for girls in search of a livelihood and a dowry. Contemporaries and historians are in agreement that relatively good wages were one of the attractions of domestic service. In spite of adverse working conditions and hard work they were certainly better compensated than other wage earners e.g., textile workers (c.f. Gathorne-Hardy, 1972; Katzman, 1978; Simonton, 1998). In this period the domestic servant became established in popular and legal terminology and began to be identified as a separate category across Europe (Simonton, 1998). Where there are disparate histories of paid reproductive labour (c.f. e.g. Sanjek & Colen, 1990) – it is the British tradition that informed the South African colonial and subsequent apartheid conditions. It is to this British tradition that the present investigation will give greatest attention.



It was in the Victorian era in England that the Nanny as institution formally arrived on the childcare scene. Perhaps the most important reason for her appearance was the growth in populations (and by implication the increase in the number of young in the population) and the increase in wealth and its concentration in the upper and upper-middle classes (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). Servants were to look after the rich and they were to look after everything: clothes, food, horses, garden and children. To put it another way, “if the rich had anything that needed looking after, whether it was a coat or a child – there was a servant to do it”. (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972, p. 65). Like her forbear the wet nurse, she was the prerogative of the wealthy few, those that had the means to pay for her services.

Childcare by a nanny was not, however, only confined to the gentry. For the shopkeeper, artisan and tradesman, there was what the Germans of the time called the *Alleinmädchen*, or maids-of-all-work, doing whatever the household required (Simonton, 1998). Indeed from 1850 onward it was quite common for “a thorough nurse in a genteel tradesman’s house” to be asked for (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972, p. 67). Indeed it became such that you could barely be called middle class if you didn’t have at least a nursemaid for the children. It was accepted that “no self-respecting middle or upper-middle class household could afford not to keep at least one female servant” (McClintock 1995, p. 85). Of note, families with a number of daughters were less likely to hire, as were households headed by women and single people (Coonz & Henderson, 1986).

Nursemaids, nannies, nurses and governesses multiplied with prodigious speed. From 1822-1882 the ads from *The Times* show a steep rise in the demand for Nurses and those offering themselves for service in this regard. By 1851, 40% of wage earning women worked as domestic servants. Between 1851 and 1871 the number of female servants rose by over 56%, twice as fast as the population itself increased (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972).

Interestingly, the nanny’s arrival was tied into the evolution of household architecture. In the middle ages the geography of the home was crude and unprivate. People mixed indiscriminately in draughty castles, living mostly in great halls. Only subsequently we had the development of separate rooms. Where the nursery emerged in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it

would seem likely that it was during the first thirty or forty year of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Victorian nursery as it is often pictured, finally crystallised, equipped with furniture not needed anywhere else in the house. The nursery was remote and austere, “situated at the top or in the far flung parts of the house *among the servants*” (own emphasis) (Gathorne-Hardy 1972, p. 58).

The nanny emerged into a society and a class where there was a definite tradition of mothers allowing other people to look after their children. She came when children were still widely regarded as little defective adults, sodden with original sin. The Protestant/Puritan notion that moral rectitude led to social and economic success was adopted wholesale by nannies. They enforced a vast repertoire of pointless little prohibitions and laws. These nanny maxims comprised an endless list of do’s and don’ts including the likes of - little children must not speak until they are spoken to, they must not chatter, stare about, mustn’t talk with their mouth full and so forth. As bearers of propriety, Gathorne-Hardy (1972) goes so far as to suggest a “collective Nanny unconscious”.

The genesis of the word “nanny” is unclear. Plainly “nurse”, “nanna”, “nanny” is like “mummy”, “mama”, “ma”, just typical childish utterances that could well have various roots (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). There is suggestion that “nanny” may well be an abbreviated form of granny, a commonplace childminder in many families (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). Importantly, implicit in its etymology, her function comes to be equated with mothering.

Despite the Victorian nanny being relatively well compensated, her subordination was patent. As a means of defining the employer-employee relationship, most households imposed a rigid system of rules, hierarchies, uniforms, functions, promotions and so on; a code of discipline which was almost military in its strictness and multifarious division. Between 1850 and 1880 her place in the household, her power, her duties, her clothes, her training were all defined. These workers were almost always recruited from households that were less powerful, poorer and disenfranchised to some degree in

relation to the household of employers. In fact, imposing differences of class, race or ethnicity, or more subtle differences of social or geographic positioning, which usually mark off the employers' households from those of workers, tends to be universal to the institution. Not infrequently, several axes of social differentiation were compounded (Sanjek & Colen, 1990). Along these lines, domestic service was highly gendered, women being consistently most highly represented. The typical live-in domestic servant was a young woman of rural origin, aged between mid-teens and mid twenties. The term servant was synonymous with "lad" or "maid" and was virtually by definition unmarried and dependent (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972). Notwithstanding, the large numbers of unmarried female servants over fifty suggests that domestic service could easily become a permanent career. The preference for rural servants, too, was an issue of power - her lack of social ties made her highly reliant on her new household. At the time this preference was framed in a mistrust of urban girls, who were not 'innocent' enough to bring into the idealised bourgeoisie home (Simonton, 1998). The Victorian nanny worked long hours like her later counterparts: employers reputedly felt a sixteen hour day was not unreasonable, because housework includes so many "natural breaks" (Simonton, 1998). Regular reports of bedwetting give a sense of the psychological damage they suffered (Katzman, 1978). Employers' control extended to the most private and personal realms: few employers would hesitate to fire a servant they suspected of pregnancy or even being sexually active (Simonton, 1998). The immorality of the domestic servant was proverbial. They were commonly called "prostitutes" - prostitute having no clear category of meaning, but was constructed out of discourse of the period, with authorities quick to label woman as prostitutes if their behaviour did not coincide with bourgeois norms (Simonton, 1998).

It would be fair to say that from the first, beginning with the Victorian nanny, paid domestic work was an institution which both expressed and facilitated the reproduction of class as a set of social relations. This occurred when people could afford to pay for the transfer of household work tasks - they no longer did it themselves, but assigned it to those who accepted payment and subordination, often having little choice. Fairly universally, it was those who were the most socially vulnerable who were selected for

this form of employment. Typically women and immigrants were not only cheaper to employ, they were willing to work hard, were more deferential and generally more docile (Bujra, 2000). Sanjek and Colen (1990) document how the American household went through fads of seeking Vietnamese, then Cambodian, then Haitian, then Cuban household workers<sup>21</sup>. In each instance a particular racial type was sought because of their exploitability and the cheapness of their labour. Significantly, the household reproduced the emergent structures of material inequality engendering rationalising discourses which specified the subjectivities of “nanny”, “master”, “child” (Bujra, 2000).

Childcare practices in the erstwhile colonies followed in the footsteps of the motherland. Here most clearly did we see the distinction between “haves” and “have nots”. In the colonies, whether in the U.S. or Africa, the growth of the middle class meant that many more mistresses demanded the help of maids and nannies to sustain the home. She would perform the work required in cooking, cleaning and general household maintenance. She would also raise the children (Haskins, 2001). Childcare was central and relentless and unlike housework, not relieved by any technology. As the hiring classes expanded, middle class homemakers came to think of themselves as supervisors, whose superior knowledge allowed them to manage and oversee the manual labour of the servants they employed (Skolnick, 1987). Such was the preponderance of African American women in domestic service roles over long periods of U.S. history, that were considered “a service caste” by white society (Sanjek & Colen, 1990).

### ***3.4 Childcare - The Contemporary International Scene***

There has been a world wide demise of the Victorian era nanny. This has largely been a function of revolutionary social and economic changes following the World Wars. Today the full-time nanny remains the privilege of a wealthy few. For the upper crust in England

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<sup>21</sup> In different geographic areas in the US we have different disenfranchised, “outgroups” performing domestic work e.g. in the Southwest, Chicanos were disproportionately concentrated in domestic services and in the Far West, Asian men were most often the household servants (Coltrane, 1998). Likewise an anti Irish prejudice was to a large degree informed by the early employment of Irish women to do domestic work (Haskins, 2001; Sanjek & Colen, 1990).

there is the Norland nanny, a graduate of the Norland Nursery Training College – an institution in operation since 1892 (Marchbank, 2000). The international trend seems to be that it is only for those in the affluent middle classes that there is a nanny, an au pair, or baby sitter. In the main, she only helps on a part-time basis with childcare. As in the past, these caregivers tend to be immigrant or younger working class women. The U.S. remains in the company of only South Africa in the western industrialised world in being without a national parental leave policy (Belsky, 1992).

In the modern era thinking around childbearing and childrearing has undergone some revision. Younger women are avoiding or postponing marriage in order to attend tertiary education or continue in the labour force. Most people wait longer to get married and also wait longer to have babies, if they have babies at all. But more significantly most women keep working after they get pregnant and return to work soon after having babies. About one in five American women never becomes a mother and the average U.S. woman now spends only about one seventh of her adult life either pregnant, nursing or caring for preschool children (NICD, 1997b). Economic factors, likewise, have played their part. For one, mothers are increasingly able to earn as much as their male counterparts. For another the good provider role is getting harder to fill and men are realising that they cannot be sole breadwinner and paternalistic protector. Whilst the New Masculinity has loosened mothers' grip on the children, this has not been significant (Coonz & Henderson, 1986). If they are around, most fathers participate in some aspects of everyday parenting, but their wives typically play gate-keeping roles - initiating and regulating the amount and type of contact children have with them (Bernard, 1981). Needless to say, even in the modern home, having a baby often precipitates a shift toward a much more conventional gender-based division of domestic labour (Coltrane, 1998). Decades of research show that women are the ones who take over domestic work and become experts at love and care once their children arrive. They spend significantly more time than fathers do feeding, dressing, cleaning and keeping infants and toddlers safe. Studies have consistently found that mothers spend double or triple the time fathers do in these activities. Vestiges of the old Victorian motherhood ideal remain in popular culture,

in political rhetoric and in public policies. Amongst other things, educated women are bombarded with pro-pregnancy propaganda labelled “maternity chic” (Simonton, 1998).

Feminism brought the childcare issue out in the open for public scrutiny, prompting the domestic labour debate of the 1970’s. Indeed, the terms and conditions under which labour power is created and the way in which specialised personnel are designated to perform these tasks ultimately is a matter for governments and societies. Internationally, increased maternal labour force participation has potentially placed reproduction of the labour force in jeopardy. This obliged governments to think seriously about the matter of childcare. Countries as far afield as Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Ireland, Netherlands, Russia, Slovakia etc. all recognise that extrafamilial childcare is an issue of national responsibility and legislative action which in certain instances has resulted in a national childcare system (c.f. Gottesman, 1994). Virtually all northern European nations have made a much larger commitment to helping new parents (Hofferth, 1992; Klein, 1992; Marchbank, 2000) than other countries. This has included not only legislated coverage that allows a mother maternity leave, financial recompense for lost earnings and job security, but attention to the quality of national childcare facilities (Marchbank, 2000).

Attention to the issue of childcare has seen to the creation of various models of out-of-home care for part of the day. In the U.S. where there is no national system, there has probably been the most activity in this regard. There, there is a history of diverse programs, offered under different auspices to different populations for different reasons. Day-care (the crèche), the kindergarten, the nursery school and compensatory early education are the most noteworthy systems. Day nurseries, modelled on earliest French crèches, were nurseries that were established near factories to help working women. Associated with organised philanthropy, their prime purpose was to provide a safe and healthy environment out of the care of their mothers. Proper nutrition and above all hygiene were central concerns. In the early period, in addition to all-day care (early morning to early evening), many nurseries also stood ready to provide weekend or emergency night care. The incorporation of professionals limited the flexibility of these

services. The idea of the kindergarten, originally founded in Germany, was to create a uniquely creative, orderly environment where the young child could overcome his/her self-centredness and join in a society of peers. Initially a privately run institution for the children of the wealthy, it soon spread to other sectors of the population. The Nursery School's primary focus was on educationally defined services for preschool children. It occurred with the development of the speciality "early childhood education" and the work of Freud and Dewey. As a movement it was closely tied to social reform - working with "slum children". Related to nursery school was the parent co-operative – a nursery, founded and partially staffed by parents themselves. The final model - compensatory education - formed part of what was called the 1965 "War on Poverty". Head Start is the most well known of these social reformist efforts aimed at redressing the deficiencies of culturally deprived children and preparing them for entrance into primary school. These programs sought to achieve their goals through a combination of medical, psychological, nutritional and educational services (Joffe, 1977).

In the U.S. a variety of national surveys (c.f. Hofferth, 1992) were conducted: (1) to obtain a comprehensive picture of how families take care of the children (2) to examine how families make their childcare choices and (3) to describe the characteristics of non-regulated and informal care arrangements for children. In 1990 the largest international survey was conducted in the U.S.: the National Child Care Survey (NICD, 1997a; 1997b). The modern American trend as to who watches the children depends on whether the mothers are married, whether father or other relatives live in the home or are working, how much money is available for paid childcare, the availability of care facilities and many other factors. It would seem, notwithstanding, that extra-familial care is now increasingly the norm internationally. Taking the American case example, the following is apparent. Grandmothers frequently assume an important childminding role. This is particularly common in African American homes. In many larger households and especially in Mexican American families, other children play a major role in caring for younger siblings and cousins. Many children are cared for in day-care homes, usually run by a working class mother who watches several children in addition to her own. Almost a third of preschoolers of working mothers are cared for in organised licensed childcare



facilities, including day-care centres, child development centres and preschools (NICD, 1997a).

### ***3.5 The Unique Position of the Domestic Worker in South Africa***

Inasmuch as the present research is concerned with white men living under apartheid (pre 1994), primary consideration will be given to the domestic worker's circumstances during this period. Arguably, while the political context in which nannydom occurs has changed significantly, overall, the post-apartheid domestic worker's lot has not changed much. It is probably fair to say that even in the post-apartheid-era, the oppressive nature of domestic work continues to be hidden from public scrutiny and perhaps is more subtle. Analogously this institution has survived the post-colonial phase everywhere in Africa, continuing as amongst the most reviled and exploited form of work. In the post-colonial period the domestic worker continues as an economic underclass of employees in the labour market, which allows disadvantage to be perpetuated through generations of families (Bujra, 2000).

Up until very recently the domestic worker existed in a "legal vacuum". Probably the most significant legislation to improve her situation was instituted in May 2003 which saw to the introduction of a minimum wage and unemployment benefits. Prior to 1995, minimum wages, basic conditions of employment and collective bargaining rights were not regulated. In 1985 the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) was formed, an organisation aimed at serving domestic workers' manifold employment related problems (c.f. de Villiers, 1995). After 11 years with a membership that never exceeded 7000, the union was beset with administration problems (Grant, 1997), and dissolved. Because of an inability to organise substantial numbers in the sector, domestic workers' economic bargaining position has always been very weak. Well-understood in the literature (e.g. de Villiers, 1995; Preston-Whyte, 1976) is that the isolated nature of their work (fragmented by different conditions of employment, personal relationships with employers and geography) is seen to breed passivity and inhibit organised forms of

proletarian class consciousness and also subjectivity. Even within the union movement domestic workers are deemed pariahs, having a “third class status” (Grant, 1997).

It was in fact during the latter two decades of apartheid that she first became the subject of scholarly scrutiny. The local literature on the domestic worker is nevertheless, surprisingly small, given how widespread a phenomenon it is. In the colonial and subsequently the apartheid era, the employment of domestic service was a matter of public discourse and official concern. This was the period when whatever was being written was concerned with defining the conditions of her oppression. Where there were other articulations, most notably novelists, and later, the occasional South African Institute of Race Relations publication, paid reproductive labour was nevertheless not given the sustained attention it deserved. Marxist sociologist Jacklyn Cock’s (1984; 1989) seminal sociological work Maids and madams – A study in the politics of exploitation, an empirical investigation of domestic workers and their employers in the, then, Eastern Cape, is probably the most important contribution to the field. This study certainly put the local domestic worker firmly on the academic map. Many of the political and personal issues she addresses are as germane now as they were then. Whilst Cock’s (1981; 1984) contributions to an emerging field were significant, the ensuing academic work has nevertheless, remained surprisingly small and undeveloped. These have been almost exclusively sociological in nature (c.f. e.g. Kedijang, 1990; Van Onselen, 1982). In the wake of the domestic worker’s new-found legal protection in the early 1990’s there was a proliferation of a whole body of literature, more aptly called “instruction manuals”, advising employers how to deal with these new conditions (e.g. Basson, 1993; Huber, 1993; Grosset, 1997; Smit & Grobber, 1998). In these texts apartheid discourses reverberate. Thinly veiled behind notions of ethical employment practice, employer self-interest is writ large. In recent times public awareness of the maid-madam relationship has altered. The widespread popularity of the cartoon strip, now sitcom, “Madam and Eve” bears testimony to a changed zeitgeist (c.f. Smith, 1996). In “Madam and Eve” we find a newfound self-consciousness about our assumptions of who this woman is and who her employer is supposed to be.

### 3.5.1 The Socio-political context of Domestic Work

That the domestic worker comprises 11% of the formal economy (Grant, 1997; Momberg, 2003) tells a story itself. The statistics alone tell a story: in South Africa under apartheid, a great many, if not most, bourgeois households employed these servants. The idiosyncrasy of South Africa, certainly during the apartheid years, is that it was not just the affluent middle classes who employed domestic workers, but that it was a widespread phenomenon among the white working classes (Cock, Emdon & Klugman, 1990). This is the longstanding colonial nature of the society where there are servants to administer the ruling class's needs. Domestic servants released their employers not only for a more leisurely life style, but for high wages, and were a reflection of the high standard of living enjoyed by most white citizens.

Domestic work in South Africa is predominantly a black female institution. Domestic service seemed to provide an ideal solution to problems of unemployment and lack of accommodation for many, many rural black woman. During the apartheid years, she was commonly the illiterate migrant (hailing from the Bantustans or homeland) with little or no schooling making her way in the big city. Hailing from an impoverished rural background, she lacked skills and was, for the most part, unemployable in the modern market economy. Her predicament was further compounded by draconian legislation restricting the movement of black workers. Her choice of domestic service arose from necessity - she must earn money to support her family back at home, even if it entailed being separated from them. Such was the domestic worker's economic immobility that scholars (Cock, 1981; 1984; Van Onselen, 1982; Cock et al, 1990) variously talk about her as without options or "trapped", obliged to submit to "particularly humiliating forms of subordination". In the Cock (1984) sample, which certainly seems to be typical, of 175 Eastern Cape workers, all had dependents. The number of dependents ranged from 11 to 3 people with an average of 5,5 dependents per domestic worker. Clearly then, it was the imperative to survive that was the primary force impelling these women into this form of labour. Bujra (2000, p. 109) spells out the brutal facts: "if you face hardship you do

anything – you would be ready to clean shit from lavatories so long as your children are fed”.

There was something distinct about the contractual aspects of the domestic worker’s employment relationship. Domestic service was characterised as a relationship of “patron-clientage” rather than wage labour. The comparison to slave or indentured servants was frequently made. As a class phenomenon it is anomalous – various scholars (e.g. Cock, 1984; Katzman, 1978) denote domestic service an institution which is feudal “reminiscent of serfdom” or pre-capitalist. Domestic work was deemed distinct from other forms of employ (where other workers sell their labour as a commodity for a definite allotment of time). “Domestic service is ... predicated on the premise that it is the person of the servant, not primarily her skills, that is hired” (Tellis-Nayak in Bujra, 2000, p. 39). In tasks of reproduction, there are socially necessary household maintenance activities, which unlike production, do not directly produce capital, even though it is waged (Sanjek & Colen, 1990). Such logic relegates nanny’s work to the domain of ‘unproductive’ domesticity: she is not an employee – she is a servant.

In South Africa “ultra exploitation” (Cock, 1984) of the domestic worker was decreed in law. Legally, the South African domestic worker was originally bound by the Master-Servant Act (Delpont, 1992; 1996). This anachronism contained specific and detailed provisions regarding domestic workers. Unashamedly these acts gave absolute primacy to interests of employers over the interests of employees. Exclusive emphasis was placed on the duties of servants and rights of masters. It was the master’s right of comment and the servant’s duty to obey. In effect a servant could step into a working relationship without having any say. Sanction for non-performance or contractual breach under the Master-Servant Act included whipping and imprisonment.

As late as 1996, Delpont, conducting a historical review on the legal position of the South African domestic worker, concluded that the law and society had not yet been able to see its way clear to treating domestic workers as employees: they are servants. Domestic service ultimately was a microcosm of the exploitation and inequality on which the entire

social order was based. What distinguished the nanny was her “triple oppression” (Cock, 1984) – she existed at the intersection of racial, gender and class exploitation. First and foremost it was a class relationship. The workers’ labour was utilised to maintain and advance the position of members of the employer household. The domestic worker was the poorest of the poor, the “ultra-exploited”, the pariah of the working class. Domestic service, as in other colonial societies, had a racial character. It was not that race was the determining factor but that whosoever performed this menial labour was rendered socially inferior. The hiring of domestic workers, moreover, supported gender subordination inasmuch as the most oppressive aspects of the woman’s role are left intact. Domestic work was normally cast as the ultimate experience of the colonised: women who performed what was perceived by many as the most degrading work of all (Sanjek & Colen, 1990). Tronto (2002, p. 34) takes the strong view on these issues, arguing that simply employing a nanny is iniquitous, “posing a moral problem for any feminist commitment to social justice”. Seeing what occurred in the white household was a moment of illumination for some. Indeed her experience was politicising for the likes of Steven Bantu Biko.

### **3.5.2 The Domestic Worker’s Life and Duties in the White Household**

We now turn our attention to the domestic worker’s relationship with the employing white household. It is this relationship that bears on and is constitutive of the psychological aspects of which we are most concerned. This relationship, as we shall see, is founded in a series of contradictions. The first anomaly is that although clearly a contract between unequals, it is situated in a mutual dependency between the (mistress of the home) “madam”, and the “maid”. Indeed it is the madam who typically, is the nanny’s first line of contact, stipulating her responsibilities and her deportment. The white madam herself is in an ambiguous position; she exists as a “parasite” (Cock, 1989) enjoying racial material privilege in her ability to divest herself of a considerable part of domestic work and responsibilities, and yet is at the behest of male patronage. Bujra (2000, p. 27), reflecting on the contradiction of the mistress’s position in an African

context talks of her as “both colonised patriarchal object and colonising race-privileged subject”.

As we might expect there was a great deal of variation in the relationship from one household to another. The affiliation within worker-employer dyads varied dramatically with the diverse personalities and circumstances involved. On the one hand, the meeting of maid and madam could have been a meeting of virtual strangers, meeting on footing of employer and employed, with nothing between them but work and wages. On the other hand, it could have comprised genuine concern on both sides.

As much as the two primary participants encountered each as master and servant, as politically defined subjects, they also encountered one another as flesh and blood people. Over many, many hours within the confined space of the home, a highly personalised relationship developed. Unlike other forms of employment, the domestic worker might have received sympathy, money, gifts whereas an office cleaner is mostly unseen and ignored. As much as they meet as subjects, there was the authoritarian foundation – the domestic worker existed as an object for her employer – her labour and not her person was engaged. In a broader socio-political sense, the household was that rare social space wherein black and white subjects came across each other directly. For our purposes, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the relationship was its anomalous foundation. As much as Marxist sociology deems the family’s primary function as one of reproduction - reproducing wider socio-political relations, they will talk about domestic service having “ideological functions *which operate in two opposing directions*” (Cock, 1984, p. 68) (own emphasis). For the domestic worker herself, her position contained a terrible incongruity: At one she was an *intimate*, a member of the family. At another she was an *interloper*, a despised stranger, a member of the denigrated ‘other’ group. A slogan of the mid 1980’s amply captures this terrible contradiction: “We grow your children; your children kill ours”.

**3.5.2.1** *An Intimate in the Employer's Home: Domestic Work as a Labour of Love*

Nannies were expected to be more than an employee but less than a family member. Working in the most private and personal sphere - the home, the domestic worker was immediately presumed an insider. In almost no time at all, the domestic worker found herself to be an integral part of the white household. Implicit in the invitation into the home was the notion of trust. They were entrusted as custodians of their employer's most valued human relations and financial possessions. Within the moral economy of the household they were expected to act in accord with their feudal heritage. As a servant, they were not only required to identify with and reflect the values of the household, but they were mandated to be retainers of unquestioning loyalty and trustworthiness. In effect, they were supposed to unite their interests with those of the family (Simonton, 1998). The presumption was that their bond to the employer was founded in ideas of duty, obligation and respectability. Where word of mouth was the most common form of recruitment, this was not serendipitous from the employer's point of view. The reference - testimony of the employee's character from a reliable source - was all-important. They confirmed the employee's capacity to serve – that she was courteous and honest. The majority of domestic workers in Cock's (1984) sample had worked for the same employer for considerable periods, between five and twenty five years. Fidelity was the very underpinning of the contract; for not only would she have seen the employer in her private, natural environment, but she would also have seen her when she was at her most indisposed<sup>22</sup>.

The nanny's job performance required intimate involvement in the employing household members' lives. During the course of a day of work she ventured into most personal aspects of her employer's life becoming exposed to "stained underwear and family quarrels" (Cock, 1981, p. 68). As in other forms of service work, part of the job entailed pleasing the employer beyond the performance of physical and material tasks. The emotional and psychological elements in housework involved maintaining a pleasant

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<sup>22</sup> The feminine personal pronoun is used in referring to the employer inasmuch as it is usually the woman of the home who usually formally seeks out the domestic worker and stipulates the contract.



demeanour and assessing the employer's mood in order to avoid unpleasantness, reprimand or dismissal.

The first aspect of her job description was general household maintenance manager. In this she most resembles the *alleinmädchen*, or maids-of-all-work, doing whatever the household required: cleaning, washing, cooking, caring for the pets and the like. The second aspect, and for our purposes the more significant aspect, involved childcare. From the first few weeks of the white child's life right up until his early adulthood, she was to be the surrogate parent, a second mother. There were all the physical tasks of childcare: feeding, changing nappies, bathing, amusing the child and the like. And then there was the emotional work of childcare that went far beyond these instrumental activities. For many white people this was the first, and possibly the most meaningful, inter-racial encounter of their lives. "*Many white South African children are socialised into the dominant ideological order and learn the attitudes and styles of racial domination from relationships with servants especially nannies*" (Cock, 1989, p. 3) (own emphasis).

From anecdotal evidence - the job description very soon required very special capacities - most particularly, a willingness to care. In the parents' absence she would tend the child's emotional wounds. For many white children, she was not just an important early source of succour; she might well have been the primary caretaker<sup>23</sup>. Where we might talk of hers as a labour of loves, scholars in the area tend to be somewhat more cynical about the authenticity of employers' feelings. Rollins (1990), for one, coins the term "maternalism" suggesting that the employer's affectionate feelings merely serve to mystify the contractual relationship. As it were, an ideology of family membership ("she is one of the family") is used to soften the edges of exploitative capitalist wage relations. Sanjek and Colen (1990, p.3), similarly talk of employers "creating a kind of fictive kinship" (they are never in any real sense members of the household they serve) that serves as a buttress

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<sup>23</sup> Coercion into wage labour entailed a neglect of her own family. If her children were very young it was the grandmother or a female family member back at home who usually assumed a parental role. Commonly nanny would get to see her own children over holiday periods, and, if she is lucky enough to have her children within reasonable geographic proximity, over weekend "off" time. This form of labour also had an impact on personal relationships - "while we are at work other women can play with our husbands" (Kedijang, 1990).

to her maltreatment. Poignantly, one of Cock's (1989, p. 44) research participants explained "why white people's children don't grow up criminals" - "It is not from having everything they need .....but having nannies to watch them every minute of the day".

### *3.5.2.2 An Interloper: a Despised, yet Necessary Stranger*

In various senses the domestic worker was a foreigner in this 'white' world. Like her 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European counterpart, she was frequently of rural origin, an alien in an urban context, with few friends or supporters and therefore dependent on the goodwill and protection of her employers. In a similar way the elaborate cooking, eating and household arrangements of white employers were quite outside her own social experience. We have already alluded to the feudal aspect of her function, her ultra exploitation. Indeed it was her ill treatment at the hands of her employer that left little doubt that she was an outsider. The particulars of these abuses remain to be detailed. To begin to iterate these, a distinction will be made between the material and psychological bases of her exploitation.

#### 3.5.2.2.1 Material Exploitation

The material circumstances of her exploitation concerned the employer's lack of adequate provision for her conditions of service: things like wages, regulated hours, working conditions, accommodation and the like. Many of these formal aspects of the job have since been legally redressed, albeit only very recently (in 2002). This is a sectoral determination wherein the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (minimum wages, work hours etc.) are deemed relevant to domestic work.

For the domestic worker during the years of apartheid, a negotiated wage was almost unheard of – the traditional relationship comprised the fixing of wages without consultation. Few were paid a living wage, let alone a just wage, and certainly there was

no guarantee that wages would be subject to an annual increase (Cock, 1989). Often the domestic worker received part of her payment in kind (accommodation, food, old clothes etc.). With the terms and conditions of employment rarely recorded (simply observed verbally), she was at risk in cases of later dispute. Not only was she vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal, but deductions from wages for breakages or lost property, evictions from backyard rooms or the withholding of wages by the employer and many other unfair labour practises were commonplace. Hers was a very tenuous position - she lacked job security and was totally dependent on her employer, not just for wages, but also for basic necessities such as food and accommodation. It was highly unlikely that she would have been afforded benefits such as paid holidays, pension rights, unemployment or maternity insurance or compensation in the instance of injury. Unusually long working hours tended to be the industry norm. In the Cock (1984) study the average was a 61-hour working week with some who worked as much as an 85 hour week. Live-in domestic workers in Eastern Cape, like their counterparts in the rest of the country (c.f. Kedijang, 1990) were frequently considered generally available in the evenings to cook, wash up, baby-sit, serve snacks to guests and the like. As one domestic worker stated (Kedijang, 1990, p. 8): "I knocked off at around six in the evening but they could call me two or three times in an evening to wash dishes, polish the kids' shoes, to iron a dress that the madam wants to wear the next day or correct something that they think that I have not done properly". Compared to other sectors, domestic workers, generally received less paid leave (Cock, 1984; Grant, 1997; Kedijang, 1990), with a considerable number of employees not even granted an annual holiday. Domestic work in itself is recognised to be amongst the most monotonous (doing same tasks day in and day out) and is often very physically demanding. Inasmuch as it often extended beyond the 8-hour stipulation, this form of work was often arduous and tiring.

Unlike industrial forms of production, in domestic work the home is workplace. This invoked the employer's presumption that being masters of their private castles, they could do as they pleased. Indeed, given the site of the workplace and the nature of the work, her employer had an extraordinary capacity for surveillance and control.

Associated with the geographies of work, domestic service obscured the line between

work and private life. The private territories of the domestic worker's self were violated; privacy was non-existent. For the live-in domestic worker, the place of employment was at the same time a sphere of sleep and recreation. Day-in and day-out she lived a life in which sleep, work and play were done in the same circumstances and under the same authority.

For the live-in domestic worker her place of residence was the “servant's quarters” separated from the main abode, typically at the back of the property frequently with a separate entrance. Accommodation provided was squalid, bare and cramped, furnished with the most rudimentary essentials – usually a bed and mattress. Mostly, the substandard living quarters were neither provided with electricity nor hot running water. Nonetheless, using the employer's facilities (such as the same plates, toilets and bathrooms) was prohibited. There was a distinct range of food and household utensils said to be “the servants”. “Servant's rations”, the “servant's blankets”, the “servant's crockery” were synonymous with second hand or cheap products of low-grade quality. Typically, for food “she was given bread, tea, jam and mielie-meal and occasionally managed to steal a piece of meat out of the cooking pot when she was cooking stew” (Cock, 1984, p. 34). Alternatively “servants rations consisted of inferior food and often include stale, rotten or simply ‘left-over food’ which the employer considered unsuitable for her own family's consumption” (p. 27).

Frequently, we found the domestic worker denied contact with the outside world, suffering extreme isolation. Residential arrangements and long working hours left little opportunity for social or recreational life. High walls, guard dogs, alarm systems and locked gates restricted entry into the workplace, thereby limiting other people's easy access to her. Living in backyard rooms she was separated from friends. Visitors were forbidden or only allowed on certain days or hours. Her own husband and children were positively not allowed to stay over with her. After work, the “live-in” domestic worker retired to the seclusion of her room. Very often during her leisure time she was not free to do as she pleased, as she may have been called in at any time to do some extra work such as serving tea to the “madam” and her visitors in the evenings (p. 34). She was denied the

possibility of belonging to any voluntary associations. If they were tolerated they were largely confined to church organisations. Her social life in the main consisted of conversations with persons similarly employed in the same neighbourhood.

#### **3.5.2.2.2 Psychological Exploitation**

As much as there was manifest exploitation, she also suffered more subtle, yet nevertheless pernicious humiliations. Both the political discourses and the discourses surrounding domestic work were constitutive of the nanny's emotional experiences.

Domestic work was generally seen as lowly, devalued work, associated with dirt and disorder. The domestic worker was paid to do this reproductive work for others, work that others can do themselves without being paid (Bujra, 2000). Repeatedly denied acknowledgement of the dignity of her labour was tantamount to an attack on her identity, ultimately disparaging of her personhood and her feelings. In the privatised location of the employer's home she had no recourse. The uniquely paternalistic employer-employee relationship upheld a sense of power and superiority in the employer and consigned the worker to a dependent and powerless condition. Whatever the form of the indignities the domestic worker suffered, she had to engage in activities whose implications were derisory - at odds with her conceptions of self. In the face of her economic dependence on the employer she had "no alternatives but to live an infinite series of daily frustrations, indignities and denials" (Cock, 1989, p. 4). Psychological exploitation took many forms. Some were obvious, such as a lack of appreciation or basic cordiality, demands for deference and the treatment of workers as nonpersons. Others were more subtle, like gift giving.

In order to describe the narcissistic degradation suffered by domestic workers at the hand of her employer, Cock (1984) used Goffman's (1968) notion of "mortifications of the self". For Goffman - deference behaviours derive from interpersonal positioning – they are "something a subordinate owes his superordinate" (p. 68). The customary gestures of

defence included holding the arm in gratitude, doffing the cap and other generally obsequious behaviours. It informs not only the content, but also the structure of communication. At its simplest, a subordinate is not expected to initiate communication. Likewise the nanny was required to maintain spatial deference – she was not to initiate touching her employer and expected to maintain appropriate distance, thereby demonstrating respect for the private space around the employer's body. Cock (1984) makes the point that distancing confirmed to the employer that the domestic worker recognised that the employer's mental and physical privacy were more valuable than her own. Acting subservient served to affirm that this was a relationship among unequals.

There was a specific language of control or subordination. For one thing, the domestic worker was required to punctuate her social interaction with verbal acts of deference e.g. "sir", "madam". The employer's child was to be submitted to in a similar fashion and commonly would have been addressed as e.g. as "little boss" or "little master". There was also the necessity to beg, importune or humbly ask for little things, such as permission to use the telephone, a drink of water etc. The domestic worker was usually called by the appellation "girl", in contradistinction to the manservant or gardener's "boy" The use of the appellation "girl" was more than simply a name. It carried with it the implication that the domestic worker was a "perpetual child" who was in need of constant guidance and supervision (Kedijang, 1990). In the Cock research (1984), depersonalisation through language was taken further: mostly, the domestic worker's African names were unknown to employers, and in some cases, English names were given for the convenience of the employer. Within the employer sample, only 10% knew their domestic worker's full Xhosa names. There were other "indignities of speech" (Goffman, 1982). There were the extreme forms, verbal or gestural, that are simply derogatory or racist. These took the form of ridicule, jokes about mistakes, use of derogatory labels such as "kaffir" and the emphasis on the "stupid behaviour" of the worker. Other typical, but, nevertheless, derisory forms of communication, included talking in front of her as if she was not present.

There were also indignities of treatment. These ranged from the likes of sulking, deducting wages, to physical violence in the form of beating. There was the ignominy of being made to enter/exit by a side or back door, or sitting in the backseat behind the employer in an empty car. There was the invasion of the domestic worker's personal environment. This often took the form of room searches that the domestic was forced to endure, either routinely, or when "trouble" arose. At the extreme of flagrant abuse there was direct violence and sexual harassment. Physical punishment for wrongdoing and misdemeanours such as "cheekiness" continued up until very recently. Sexual harassment or 'love abuse' (unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature) whilst common, certainly was "the best kept secret" (Kedijang, 1990)<sup>24</sup>.

Because the giving of gifts was so prevalent in this occupation, a number of authors (e.g. Cock, 1984; Rollins, 1990; Whisson & Weil, 1971) have drawn attention to its function. They variously take recourse to anthropologist Marcel Mauss' (1970) elucidation of the "gift relationship" - "to give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher... To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordinations, to become a client and subservient" (in Cock, 1989, p. 82). The gift ultimately aims to maintain loyalty and gratitude and reinforce the hierarchical nature of the relationship. In the South African context, the chauvinism was often more explicit. Frequently what was given was not for the master's consumption, it was something that ought to be dispensed with. Offering old clothes, old furniture and leftover food with no expectation of return "places the recipient in the position of a child or a beggar, being too poor, too young or too low in social status to be able to participate in the system of exchanges which mark the social boundaries of the donor's group" (Whisson & Weil, 1971, p. 43). Quite simply employers bestowed a gift in order to assert their dominance and their possession of the servant.

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<sup>24</sup> SADWU (South African Domestic Workers' Union) quoted in Kedijang (1990) note that the incidence of employers assaulting domestic workers is particularly high. Likewise the Union received innumerable reports of rapes and attempted rapes, employers parading around naked in the house when their spouses were not present, as well as instances where the employers used tactics such as increased wages to persuade domestic workers to have sex with them.



It is clear that the nanny-madam relationship was no ordinary employer-employee relationship. Authors describing nanny's "ultra exploitation", though, were referring to something more. The domestic servant and her madam were not just servant and master; they were actors in a larger political drama. If you will, the daily exchanges between domestic worker and members of household were steeped in apartheid. The relationship was one that essentially reproduced the racial capitalist inequalities of the society.

The human-to-human contact, as personal as it was, took place in a situation where race was the primary designator of social standing. Skin was the marker of not simply position in the economy, but supposedly also of superiority-inferiority. Historically this relationship was one of master and slave. It was in this larger context that both participants entered the relationship with a series of presumptions: for the master (and later his children) there was the supposition of dominance, where the servant had (been socialised and) come to accept her subordination. Inevitably the domestic worker as a black person came to be a receptacle of revulsion (the prevailing cultural mores), "an opportunity for white children to discover and experiment with attitudes and styles of racial domination" (Cock, 1989, p. 57). Certainly domestic workers were subject to numerous practises and rituals of inferiority. These rituals of inferiority afforded the employer ego enhancements that emanated from having an 'inferior' present; validating her lifestyle, her class and her racial privilege, her entire social world. The relationship thus provided the employer with ideological justifications for the economic and racially stratified system in which she lived and from which she derived benefit.

The sad fact was that as much as the employer's children received the domestic workers' labours of love, they were also taught various oppressive lessons. Children learned that it was appropriate that they be served, that such 'dirty work' was appropriate for the lower classes and darker skinned people, that housework and childcare were women's work. In that sense, as much as contact was encouraged with their nanny – she was to look after them, so too was distance, a purposive restriction of contact that served to maintain antagonistic stereotypes.

### ***3.6 The Domestic Worker's Response to her Oppression***

There were manifold frustrations and humiliations that the nanny was obliged to endure on a daily basis. Aside from instances of flagrant or subtle abuse, there was the envy-provoking daily experience of difference between her own standard of living and the standard of living of her employers” (Cock, 1989, p. 57). In the face of this were a variety of “interpersonal contestations” (Bujra, 2000) or “strategies of adaptation”. There was the loyal and compliant servant whose voice was never heard. This may be an expression of her powerlessness. The obsequious, deferential worker with few overt signs of dissatisfaction may also simply have been an instrumental attitude vis-à-vis her employer. This “pragmatic acceptance”, with its mask of deference, may have been “deliberately cultivated to conform to employers expectations and shield the worker’s true feelings” (Cock, 1989, p. 86). On the other side, there may have been a variety of counter discourses ranging from open resistance, with a desire for aggressive compensation, to surreptitious forms of situational rebellion, e.g. petty pilfering to variously withdrawing her labour power.

## CHAPTER 4

### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE NANNY IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE - THE DOMESTIC WORKER'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR HER YOUNG CHARGE**

#### *4.1 Chapter Outline*

This chapter comprises a review of the psychological literature on the nanny. What follows is a loose periodisation of the scholarship in the area. Inasmuch as the focus is on key milestones it is not strictly speaking a historical account. What is immediately apparent is that the substance of the theorisation is psychoanalytic in nature. The reason for this is that the only psychological theorisation on children and nannies to be had is psychoanalytic. Psychoanalysis' interest in nannies, albeit superficial, derives from developmental conceptions of the psyche.

Freud's first engagement with "the nanny" was an unwilling one. The sense is that she appeared unbidden in Freud's personal life and spoke in spite of what Freud himself might have (not) wanted to say about her. Nanny's first appearance as Sigmund Freud's symptom sets the tenor for the nanny investigations that follow. War provided British preoedipal thinkers (most notably traditions coming out of Hampstead Clinic and John Bowlby) with a ready-to-hand sample of children looked after by substitute caretakers. Notwithstanding, the conceptual focus was very narrow – to pare down the argument to its simplest form – "was mother's leaving children with third party childminders an inevitable fact of modern life or did it detract from child's best psychological interest in unacceptable ways". Empiricists cottoned onto the issues whence began many decades of to-ing and fro-ing on this question. Case material from the psychoanalyst's consulting room has provided another rich source of material. Over the years there have been a number of documented accounts, starting with Freud's Little Hans, Rat Man and the Leonardo cases; but nanny's appearance in these have been epigrammatic, save for perhaps the work of Harry Hardin. His point of departure is clinical, focussing on the first

year and a half of life. We conclude this chapter casting our eyes further afield with a cursory look at what laymen have said of their nannies, be it from the vantage point of the psychoanalyst's couch or the writer's table. Finally we turn our attention to the nanny in local psychological work.

#### ***4.2 A Veritable Silence***

As we saw in the preceding chapter, there were large-scale socio-political forces which rendered invisible the social space in which domestic work occurred. Professional psychology has been one such tacit supporter eliding the domestic worker's contribution within the familial context. Psychology has, for the most part, persistently refused to grant any theoretical status to her other than as a temporary intruder into the family romance. As a corollary, they decline to contemplate the psychological significance she has for her charge. This is indeed curious, for in the absence of the biological parents she is so often de facto, surrogate and even, psychological parent, and yet this is not seen.

Such omissions by developmental psychological research are glaringly apparent as serious conceptual and methodological failures. Take for example Kochanska's (1998) parent-child study. While acknowledges that research subjects were recruited from a local day-care centre, he stubbornly fails to factor in the potential effect that child-care by someone other than the biological parents might have had on these relationships. This is not a single instance. As much as childcare by people other than the parents (what is dubbed extra-parental care) is almost never deemed a variable to take seriously in infant and childcare research, so no consideration is given to outcomes of care in a setting not involving a parent or relative. This is baffling given that internationally such a high proportion of middle class families avail themselves of childminding services.

These omissions have a long history. Theoretically, with Freud's emphasis on the father's intervention in Oedipus, the mother-infant relationship is concealed. Bowlby (1969, p. 361) observes "in reading Freud's work we are at once struck by the fact that it was not

until comparatively late that he appreciated the reality of the infant's close tie to his mother, and that it was only in his last ten years that he gave it the significance we should all give it today." For our purposes it is Bowlby's explanation of this omission that is most interesting. According to Bowlby, "Freud's failure stemmed from having *so many patients that were raised by nannies*" (Bowlby, 1969) (own emphasis).

How was it that she could loom so large on the child's psychological landscape and yet was never seen by the adults? In spite of various appeals to give this matter greater academic attention, little has been done. Margaret Mahler (in Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975, p. 334) is a case in point. Reflecting on the nanny she commented "...this *crucial phenomenon* is rarely mentioned in the literature and to my knowledge has never been investigated in a systematic study" (own emphasis). As we shall come to see - the nanny was conspicuously visible in the Freudian discourse, but was somehow not apprehended. One is left to wonder, was there more at stake? In a conspiratorial voice we might ask - were there perhaps certain vested interests in her exclusion? Or maybe this was some form of parapraxis?

#### **4.2.1 The Nanny's Unbidden Appearance in Freud's Personal Life**

Monika Zajic was Freud's *kinderfrau*, his surrogate mother, his Czechoslovakian, Roman Catholic nursemaid of his first two and a half years. The access we have to her is forty years after the fact - in Freud's self-analysis – the product of dreams, memories and associations of her. Amongst the facts we know - Freud lost his nursemaid suddenly, when she was apprehended and jailed for "stealing from the family". Amongst her possessions were found Kreuzers and Zehners (money) with some of Freud's toys (Freud, 1954, p. 222).

It was on the issue of his own nanny, that somehow Freud's uncompromising capacity for reflexivity faltered and became a blind spot. His resistance to see or speak his *kinderfrau*'s critical presence was a defining moment: Monica Zajic's fate is the fate of

all nannies that followed her – she was simply dispensed with. Given the importance of this event for our problematic it will be considered in some detail.

#### 4.2.1.1 *The Evidence - Freud's Written Descriptions of this Woman*

In three letters written to Fliess in October 1897, Freud, making reference to his nanny, reported that important material had come to light in his self-analysis. On October 3, he stated that: “my ‘*prime originator*’ ... was an ugly, elderly, but clever woman who told me a great deal about God and hell, and gave me high opinion about my own capacities; that later libido towards *matrem* was aroused; the occasion must have been the journey with her from Leipzig to Vienna, during which we spent a night together and I must have had the opportunity of seeing her *nudam*”. He continues the letter “...if I succeed in resolving my hysteria, I shall have to thank the memory of the old woman who provided me at such an early age with *the means for living and surviving*” (Freud, 1954, p. 219-220) (own emphasis).

The following day he continues these reflections in another letter (p. 221): “Last night’s material produced the following under the most remarkable disguises.” Referring to his nanny, he continues: “She was *my instructress in sexual matters*, and chided me for being clumsy and not being able to do anything .... The whole dream was full of the most wounding references to my present uselessness as a therapist.” Freud goes on to draw a link between the dream and his charging his patients a fee: “Just as the old woman got money from me (the ‘stolen’ Zehners) for her bad treatment of me, so do I now get money for the bad treatment of my patients”.

Still preoccupied with his analysis of the significance of the “old woman” Freud asked his mother whether she remembered his nanny. Her reply: “Of course...She was always taking you to church. When you came home you used to preach and tell us all how God conducted His affairs. At the time I was in bed when Anna was being born (Anna was two and a half years younger than Sigmund) .... she turned out to be a thief, and all the

shiny Kreuzers and Zehners and toys that had been given to you were found among her things. Your brother Philipp went himself to fetch the policeman and she got ten months!” (Freud, 1954, p. 221-222).

Further on in the same letter: “If the woman disappeared so suddenly, I said to myself, some impression of the event must have been left inside me. Where was it now? Then a scene occurred to me which for the last 29 years has been turning up from time to time in my conscious memory without me understanding it. I was crying my heart out, because my mother was nowhere to be found. My brother Philipp opened a cupboard for me and when I found that my mother was not there I cried still more, until she came through the cupboard looking slim and beautiful. What can that mean? .... Now I suddenly understand. ... When I could not find my mother, I feared she must have vanished, like my nanny not long before. I must have heard that the old woman had been locked, or rather ‘boxed’ ... I was well aware of my nanny’s disappearance” (p. 222-223). We shall return to the cupboard dream image next. What Freud made of it, we shall see, was all important to the theoretical fate of *kinderfrauen* the world over.

#### **4.2.1.2** *What are We to Make of Freud’s Recollections: Who is a Screen for Whom?*

Like all symptomatic data, what Freud’s offered us was rich in interpretative possibilities. What is particularly striking in the material is the repeated slippage between his mother and his nanny. For our purposes this is critical. We want to know who it is in the last instance that is being referred to, to provoke such an enormous outpouring of feelings – “crying my heart out”. On this paradox Grigg (1973) draws attention to the condensation between the German “Amme” (nanny) and his young mother “Amalie”. When Freud says “my nanny”, that can mean either that it was the nanny who really mothered him, and who was indeed his true mother, or that the nanny was simply a symbolic substitute for his “true” mother.



Freud's various interpretations of the cupboard screen memory over the next 27 years may take us further. Freud achieved a remarkable insight when he associated the jail and the sudden loss of the nursemaid. With his customary brilliance, Freud made the connection between cupboard (*Kasten*) – which in our vernacular would be “the tchoekie” or the more British “klink” - his *kinderfraü*'s prison – and boxed up (*eingekestelt*) - his mother's empty womb (Hardin, 1988b). Having offered us this important clue – Freud appeared to vacillate as to who was a screen for whom. What we can discern is that there was an intractable ambiguity. In this case, Freud referred to two things simultaneously – his nanny's jail and his mother's womb.

From the reported material it was clear that inevitably Freud does take a position, looking to the literal dream image for an explanation - mother's return. He concluded that the memory represented an absence of his mother and her return following his sister's birth, in a slim, unpregnant state. Unable to reconcile the empty womb with the affect of disappointment, he wrote, “On the one hand his great satisfaction over his mother's slimness on her return can only be fully understood in the light of this deepest layer” (Freud, 1975/1901, p. 51-52). He interpreted the scene as one in which his mother was temporarily absent and then returned, the lost nurse serving as a screen for her. “His upset about the loss of the nurse became upset about the loss of his mother” (Hardin, 1987, p. 213). The nanny, “his prime originator”, the person who “provided him with the means for living and surviving”, obscured by the image of his mother, had thus been consigned to oblivion.<sup>25</sup>

Later psychoanalytic interpreters of this material amount to nothing more than a chorus of nanny detractors<sup>26</sup>. This, though, has not been the end of it. Various authors re-

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<sup>25</sup> His analysis of screen memory seemed valid insofar as it pertains to 1. some degree of loss of his mother e.g. during pregnancies and other separations 2. his early experience of his mother and his nursemaid as complementary and interchangeable and 3. his mother as idealised available figure. Screen memory facilitated a condensation for his mother as herself and as a cover for the lost nursemaid.

<sup>26</sup> These analysts will not consider the *kinderfraü* as a significant figure in her own right (as Freud's primary caretaker during much of the time she worked in the household), bestowing all psychological importance on his natural mother. They will consider the nursemaid as screen for mother. Harrison (1979, p. 406) had this to say on these matters: “the cupboard scene described to Fliess... which kept recurring from Freud's childhood related to maternal abandonment and to his mother's pregnancies. Probably

examining the data come up with very different conclusions (c.f. e.g. Gallop, 1982; Grigg, 1973; Hardin, 1987; 1988a, McClintock, 1995; Swan, 1974). Hardin (1988b, p. 214) believes that in his self-analysis, Freud was “unable to comprehend the full impact of the tragic infantile experience latent in his screen memory”. He looked to the dream mother image and only saw her. He refused the clues that she was in fact a screen for his nursemaid. Instead the intense affect associated with this loss was shifted to a lesser fear – that of the temporary loss of his mother. The latter’s manifest return represented his urgent turning to her long ago with the hope of regaining the exclusiveness he enjoyed with the lost nursemaid. Unable in self-analysis to relive the latent tie with his nursemaid and the anguish following her loss, Freud again turned to his mother and consequently to Oedipal issues. The cupboard memory condenses all the elements of a series of catastrophic occurrences in Freud’s infancy: the disappearance of his beloved nurse, his desperate search for her, and, finally, his mother’s entering the scene, in effect replacing the lost figure. In simple terms, Freud’s mother became the projective screen for feelings more appropriately vested in his ‘real’ caretaker.

There was another foundation for Freud’s election of mother above nanny. The confirmation by his mother that the employee had indeed been a thief, only served to strengthen Freud’s apparent defence against coming close to the real object of his emotional turbulence. Hardin (1987, p. 640), employing the developmental framework of Margaret Mahler, made a most fascinating observation: her presumed theft of the Kreuzers and Zehners and toys, “may have been in part the result of activity typical of the rapprochement developmental phase” (ironically making Freud an accomplice). Such activity, according to Mahler (Mahler et al, 1975, p.98) involves “the toddler’s continual

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also...it dealt with the wished-for non-pregnancies... i.e. empty womb” Writers commenting on Freud’s nursemaid perceive her primarily as a displacement, a screen for his mother. Gedo (1968, p. 100) attributes Freud’s attachment to his nursemaid to “some temporary disruption of Freud’s unusually close relationship to his doting mother. The intensity of Amalie Freud’s preference for Sigmund is vividly described in Martin Freud’s memoirs”. In the same vein, Blum (1977, p. 768) commented, “Doubtless the most important relationship ... which is not delineated in his 1897 comments or in the analytic literature or in his letters or dreams is the (rapprochement) relationship with his mother”.

bringing things to the mother...objects that he has found in his expanding world.... the main emotional investment lies in the child's need to share them with her"<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4.2.1.3 *Kinderfrau* is Not So Easily Dispensed With

Examining other elements of Freud's personal life, nanny somehow seems to have refused mere spectral significance. Freud, the little boy, continued to be troubled by her (unconscious) presence. Ultimately she would coalesce into a material symptom – Freud's travel phobia (what is dubbed his "Rome neurosis"). Before we consider this malady, we would do well to consider less pernicious references like Freud's return to Freiburg, his birthplace and home during the first 3 years of his life. His first recollection is of a Czech nursery rhyme taught to him by his *kinderfrau* long-since forgotten. The suggestion is that the nursery rhyme expresses his *kinderfrau*'s love for him (Hardin, 1988b). There are numerous other benign nanny appearances. On the occasion of a visit to Dresden Museum, Freud (Freud, 1960, p. 82) upon seeing Raphael's Madonna commented "she suggested to me a charming, sympathetic nursemaid". There is also the dream of the "Dandelion scene" (Freud, 1899/1975) wherein a peasant woman offered Freud preferential treatment over his two cousins. There is a suggestion that this scene may have represented a time in Freud's life, before the cupboard memory, where everything was idyllic. This was the period when he was being watched over by his nanny - a benevolent caretaker who tolerated his naughtiness (referred to in the dream) with unconditional acceptance (Hardin, 1988b).

Freud directly evinced ambivalent feelings towards his nanny. For one, his opening his practice on Easter Sunday – April 25, 1886, may have been an act of defiance towards

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<sup>27</sup> McClintock (1995, p. 91) is much less forgiving. She underscores that at first Freud admits that it was he who stole the money. It was only subsequently, after verifying the event with his mother that he revised his view: "I wrote to you that she induced me to steal Zehners and give them to her. In truth, the dream meant that she stole them herself. Freud then adds a remarkable sentence. '*The correct interpretation is: I=She.*' In the first version, the money belongs by rights to the nurse in exchange for her "bad treatment", her sexual instruction to Freud. In the second version, the nurse is the thief and the boy is exonerated: imprisoning the *kinderfrau* for ten months".

this maternal imago and/or an attempt at reunion with her (Grigg, 1973). Monica Zajik has already been referred to as “my instructress in sexual matters”, and she was of course, his instructress in Latin religious matters. The clearest sense that she would not easily be dispensed with was Freud’s “Rome neurosis”. Various subsequent authors (e.g. Grigg, 1973; Hardin, 1987; 1988a; McClintock, 1995; Swan, 1974) are in agreement - the specific choice of the city was an unconscious representation of his feelings towards the Roman Catholic domestic worker of his first two and a half years of life. Journeying often to Italy and yearning for Rome, Freud could never bring himself to enter the dreamed of city; on one trip coming within a few miles of his longed-for destination only to turn back. In a sense, then, Freud’s incapacity to merge with his nurse displaced onto an incapacity to enter Rome. Freud’s avoidance of entering Rome was a manifestation of a true case of anxiety hysteria: as in his earliest years he was caught between two religions, as between two mothers and two classes. In Freud’s recurrent dreams, the Catholic city of Rome was a symbol of the mother that was not his mother – it was “the promised land seen from afar” (McClintock, 1995, p. 89).

#### 4.2.1.4 Concluding Freud and the *Kinderfrau*

Across these analyses, what is apparent is that Freud was unable in his self-analysis to comprehend the full impact of the indelible childhood experience. In spite of his courage to explore his own mind, Freud has a lapse: “his separation in infancy from his mother, due to his involvement with and catastrophic loss of the *kinderfrau*, was the deeper layer that his self-analysis could not reach” (Hardin, 1988a, p. 82)<sup>28</sup>. Monika Zajic thus

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<sup>28</sup> Some suggest that the Oedipus complex itself is founded in the nanny’s presence. “Freud’s discovery of the Oedipus complex emerges not only from memories of a small boy’s guilty, aggressive lust for his mother, but from memories of dependence on her, too - a dependence remembered, however, as a seduction of a small bourgeois, Austrian boy by a Czech working-class woman” (Swan, 1974, p. 64). Hardin (1987, p. 642) asks whether the Oedipus complex itself was an elaborate rationalisation perhaps “conceived after a grief-stricken little boy hurled into an Oedipus complex after having turned in desperation to his natural mother following the loss of his nursemaid”. In Freud’s earliest realisations of the existence of the Oedipus complex, he connected his wishes to the mother surrogate, the nurse; to incest and perversions; to orality, reincarnations and shame; to triangularity and inhibition (Grigg, 1973; McClintock, 1995) concludes that Freud’s own knowledge of the formative power of the working class nurse was overridden and disavowed in his “invention of an invariant, inherited ‘precipitate from the history of civilisation’”. “It is thanks in

became not only a victim of Freud's childish transgressions but she later becomes a victim of his unconscious process (Hardin, 2000; McClintock, 1995; Swan, 1974). The net effect of Freud's treatment of his nanny is to seal her theoretical fate.

### ***4.3 First Investigations – Attachment as a Starting Point***

#### **4.3.1 Considering the “Substitute Mother” – World War II at the Hampstead Nurseries**

Freud's omission began a trend in the psychological sciences, setting the tenor for Psychology's attitude on the subject of nannies. It was not until some 40 odd years later that psychoanalysis again commenced thinking about Nanny. World War II in England brought with it not just the tragic loss of life and the devastation of family, but also the opportunity for substitute mothering to be placed under the psychoanalytic microscope. In London we had fairly large-scale evacuation of children from the site of German air raids. A whole body of British psychoanalytic research emerged in the context of children being removed from primary caretakers and put in these places of safety. This was arguably, also the heyday of psychoanalytic theorising on children and child psychotherapy. Wartime provided psychoanalysts with scores of child research subjects and patients. The two primary centres of theorising child psychology were the Tavistock Clinic (under the auspices of Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott and their respective followers) and the Hampstead Clinic (home of the Anna Freudians). Coming out of this work was first time use of concepts like “separation-anxiety”, “childhood mourning” and the like. Well known are the Robertsons' (c.f. Robertson & Robertson, 1989) hand-held cinematic documentaries of children in the throws of separation from primary caregivers.

With the outbreak of war The American Foster Parents Plan for War Children financed various nursery facilities in London and in the country in Essex. The Hampstead

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large part to the success of this theory (Freud's Oedipal theory) that the massive intrusion of desire for servants in the lives of the servant-keeping classes in this period has not attracted more attention” (Robbins in McClintock, 1995, p. 94).

residential war nurseries organised by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, provided foster care for over 80 children of single-parent families. Their explicit intention was to provide comparative safety for young children whose mothers, out of necessity, had decided against being evacuated<sup>29</sup>. The Nurseries were planned to reduce, as far as possible, the ill effects of separation, particularly by helping the children form attachments by providing continuity of relationships with the helpers. Parents had free access to their children both day and night and were encouraged to visit as often as possible<sup>30</sup>. The Nursery was so organised that each child belonged to a small ‘family’ of children under the care of a substitute mother. Regarding the provision of substitute mother – “most of the children spontaneously turned to a staff member, asking to be held, fed and played with, always by the same person” (Hellman, 1990, p. 25). It seems that although the children were in constant touch with the other children and staff in the house, they turned to the substitute mother whenever they needed special attention (Hellman, 1990). The complement of nannies in the nurseries comprised a large number of young girls “untrained but eager to learn and ready to devote themselves to the multiple tasks required” (p. 60).

Anna Freud’s and Dorothy Burlingham’s psychological aims were formulated in their first publication Young Children in Wartime (1965). As much as their primary intention was clinical - to repair and prevent psychological damage caused by war conditions (specifically by the provision of nannies), they also sought to develop a research and advisory arm (instructing interested parties in forms of education based on psychological knowledge of the child). In her book Normality and Pathology in Childhood (1965) Anna Freud summarized material from work at the Hampstead Clinic as well as observations at the Well Baby Clinic, the Nursery School and Nursery School for Blind Children, the Mother and Toddler Group and the War Nurseries. In this text, she, unfortunately, offered very little additional theoretical understanding on substitute mothers.

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<sup>29</sup> Hellman (1990) indicates that a large number of the children were fatherless

<sup>30</sup> It is important to remember that at the beginning of the war, there were no residential homes and certainly no residential homes that privileged the attachment relationship between parents and child. It is in these terms that provision were made for frequent contact between parent/s and child (Hellman, 1990). It seems that such was the Nurseries’ investment in this principle that, where possible, they sought to employ mothers to work in the kitchen, or other household departments.

There was another strand to Anna Freud's interest in extraparental caretakers. She, like her father, was reared, over significant periods of her early life, by a nanny. Giessman and Geissman (1998, p. 80) observe that "she became very attached to Josefine (her nursemaid) in particular, who stayed with her until the end of her first year at school. Anna got the impression that she was 'special' for her, that she was Josefine's favourite. They go further: "In this maternal substitute one can perhaps see the origins of her interest in what she was to call the 'psychological mother' figure". Indeed it is the notion of "psychological parent" that forms the main truss to psychological considerations in the forensic custody evaluation context (cf. Goldstein, Freud and Solnit's various books on this subject e.g. 1980).

In her book From War Babies to Grandmothers (1990), Ilse Hellman, a psychoanalyst and erstwhile substitute mother, offers us a wonderful insight into the workings of the Hampstead Clinic. We see Anna Freud's personal commitment to the Hampstead war babies, not only as an educationalist and clinician, but also as a seamstress. Hellman's work is exemplary – whilst anecdotal, it stands out as one of the few written sources on substitute mothering. As much as separation and the disruption of life circumstances was the major focus of investigative and reparative efforts, there was cognisance of the fact that providing a substitute made for its own developmental and related psychological effects. Along these lines, Hellman (1990, p. 26) remarks: "what they saw, heard and experienced of the war were not the main factors to influence their development". Unfortunately substantive content on the psychological effects of being cared for by a nanny is, for the most part, lacking in Hellman's reflections.

She offers some interesting thoughts on the relationship between mother and substitute mother and the child's triangulation between them. This consideration, whilst informative, is rather abbreviated. Hellman's starting point is that for the mother, assistance with childcare, provoked mixed feelings. She reflects: "The effect of the mother's ambivalence towards the substitute mother, her admiration, her jealousy and rivalry, the marked differences in her handling of the child in the substitute mother's presence or absence, the secrets kept from her, all had their repercussions on the child's



character formation” (Hellman, 1990, p. 24-25). It seems that the child frequently exploited his/her mother’s ambivalence, playing mother’s and substitute mother’s authority up against each other. Related to this – the substitute mother’s inevitable abandonment of the child may have seen to her becoming the person on whom all hate (felt towards both caretaking figures) was concentrated.

In the text, Hellman (1990) reflects on three of her cases. It is the case of Jane to which I will refer to attest to the fact that the surrogate mother has psychological import for the child and that this persists. Things began rather inauspiciously: “initially I had emerged from the number of nurses in the Hampstead Nursery to whom Jane held on indiscriminately as the one she wanted in her mother’s absence. Gradually she became closely attached to me. She first used me entirely as a substitute for her mother, to fulfil her needs as they made themselves felt. But I came to mean more than the person who provided her with what she really wanted from her mother. Later Jane was able to have a relationship with me as a person who was separate from her mother and to take and enjoy the new and different things she could get from me” (Hellman, 1990, p. 70). Jane’s contact with her nanny continued into latency and adolescence, albeit not as frequently as before. From all accounts, it appears that Mrs. Hellman remained an important figure for Jane into her adult life. Such was the bond that Hellman is able to describe Jane as identified with her as an adult in her choice of occupation (a child’s nursery caretaker, later a teacher) and the girl’s interest in foreign countries and languages (Mrs. Hellman hailed from the Continent).

Wartime and the Hampstead Nursery afforded a unique opportunity to collect longitudinal observations of, inter alia, what it was for the children to be cared for by a surrogate parent. A systematic follow-up study was unfortunately not conducted. There are, however, anecdotal accounts like Jane’s; for a good few children remained in touch with their substitute mothers well into their adulthood. Whilst this population of youngsters and nannies is clearly distinct from our own, there nevertheless are many similarities. Indeed the nanny’s motivation to look after these children arose from different imperatives to our local nannies compulsion to this kind of labour. Like our

nannies, they deemed themselves to play a background, secondary role to mother, despite their importance as primary nurturers over significant periods.

#### **4.3.2 Getting Waylaid - John Bowlby, Attachment Theory and ‘Disruption of Parental Attachment’ as an Idea Fixé**

John Bowlby entered the ‘nanny debate’ amidst the zeitgeist of the rapid psychoanalytic developments in World War II England. Initially, Bowlby stood aloof from the controversy of the day (“the Controversial Discussions” between the Kleinians and the Anna Freudians [c.f. King & Steiner, 1991]). Later he went into voluntary exile, drifting away from the Psychoanalytic Society. It was his discovery of ethology in the 1950’s that provided the opportunity he was looking for to put psychoanalysis onto a sound scientific footing (Holmes, 1993). Konrad Lorenz’s work on imprinting and Harlow’s observations of (and interventions with) the behaviour of infant monkeys had a particularly profound influence on his thinking. Attachment Theory came to stand as a discipline in its own right, owing much to psychoanalysis, but with links also to, ethology, systems theory, evolutionary theory and cognitive psychology (Holmes, 1993).

Inasmuch as his ideas were widely distributed and discussed through the popular press and cheap publishing houses, Bowlby had wide popular appeal, certainly more than any other psychoanalytic thinker of his day. Bowlby’s theories are complex, themselves having gone through a series of revisions. It is not possible to give a full account of his work. The intention here is to outline his views as they bear on the question of nonparental care. Psychoanalysis had brought the plight of World War II child evacuees under the spotlight. Bowlby took this further, taking a strident, clearly articulated, view on the effects of separation of children from their primary caretakers. He presented these in highly accessible form to the lay public e.g. Can I leave my baby? (1958). Bowlby’s early work showed that separated or bereaved children experience, no less than adults, intense feelings of mental pain and anguish: yearning, misery, angry protests, despair, apathy and withdrawal.

In the late 1940's the World Health Organisation requested that Bowlby address himself to the plight of war orphans, specifically to compile information on the causes and cures for the emotional difficulties of infants who were languishing in huge orphanages after separation from their mothers<sup>31</sup>. Around the same time in the U.S., work on juvenile delinquents suggested that among this group of youngsters, most had experienced early parental separation (Goldfarb in Bowlby, 1951). Bowlby's famous monograph on maternal deprivation was published in 1951. It was a most compelling document, 'a wake-up call' that resulted in massive changes in policy concerning the out-of-home care of orphaned and neglected children (Birns, 1999, p. 12). He soon realised the material he was gathering cried out for a theory that could explain the profound effects of separation and deprivation experiences in young children.

Attachment is Bowlby's core concept. It is the relational glue that binds people one to another. Attachment is not an instinct derived from feeding or infant sexuality - it has *sui generis* psychological significance. "Attachment is a 'primary motivational system' with its own workings and interfaces with other motivational systems" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 38). Distinct from his object-relations colleagues, the precedence Bowlby gave relationship was founded on neo-Darwinism. In these terms, attachment was a necessity in early evolutionary time: it was the primary means of protecting the infant from external contingencies. Children and infants need to stay close to their mothers at all times if they are to remain safe from predation. Attachment is our innate need for companionship. It is proximity seeking to a preferred figure. It is deemed the physiological substratum of relationships (Holmes, 1993).

In the manner of preoedipal theories, Attachment Theory is a two-person psychology – having little to say about the different roles of mother and father and sexuality in psychological life. The fact that attachment was in Bowlby's word "monotropic", meant it occurred with a single figure, the primary caretaker, who was the fundament of psychological development and psychopathology through the life-cycle (Holmes, 1993).

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<sup>31</sup> Bowlby's early work constituted significant thinking on the aetiology of antisocial personality disorder. In his paper Forty-four juvenile thieves, their characters and their home lives (referred to in Holmes, 1993) Bowlby linked these "affectless characters" to their histories of maternal deprivation and separation.

Literally interpreted, the Greek word “monotropy” means “being fed or raised by only one person, that is, the mother” (van Ijzendoorn, Sagi & Lambermon, 1992). In these terms, Attachment Theory accepts the customary primacy of the mother as the main caregiver. Monotropy has with it the implication that only one figure – mostly the mother – is crucial; with the influence of other caretakers being marginal, at least in terms of attachment (van Ijzendoorn et al, 1992).

For the likes of Bowlby, the propensity to form attachment would be considered largely “hard-wired” in human neurobiology (Vondra & Barnett, 1999). Correspondingly, interference in these processes is destruction at our physiological foundation. “The evidence is now such that it leaves no room for doubt... that the prolonged deprivation of a young child of maternal care may have grave and far reaching effects on his character and so on the whole of his future life. It is a proposition exactly similar in form to those regarding the evil after-effects of German measles before birth or the deprivation of vitamin D in infancy” (Bowlby, 1951, p. 67). Readers of Bowlby have understood this to mean that not simply is maternal care superior in every instance, but that depriving the child of maternal care has highly deleterious and far reaching psychological consequences. The rupture of this relationship not only explains the suffering of war orphans, but it gives rise to permanent damage e.g. Marchbank (2000, p. 61) “..... maternal deprivation could lead to cognitive retardation”.

A central effort of Bowlby’s work sought to substantiate what has come to be dubbed “the maternal deprivation hypothesis”. Volumes have been written by Bowlby and others on the effect of the loss of attachment figures. Attachment theory, in these terms, offers an “inoculation model” (Vondra & Barnett, 1999) of parenting: love (i.e. early attachment) like inoculations against measles, provides lasting future protection for the human organism - secure or insecure attachment becomes the essential basis for all future development. In Bowlby’s (1958, p. 1) own words: “By all means let a mother take a half-day off, or even an occasional whole day, but anything longer than that needs careful management”.

Bowlby's work not only had wide appeal, it had a significant influence. He argued much to benefit the institutionalised child. His pronouncements prompted governments to, momentarily at least, begin to take responsibility for the reproduction of the labour force. Specifically, his expertise was used in the formulation of childcare policies and the view that there was a need for professionalisation of child care. Many, though, took a more polemical stance on his ideas. There were those who urged women to stay at home, advocating exclusive mothering as the sole means of ensuring the healthy growth of a child. Working mothers came to be hailed as "absent mothers". The quality of the care mothers offered their children was seen to be the source of all their children's problems.

As much as Bowlby had his adherents, he also had his detractors. Feminists rank amongst his most strident critics. They take issue with the battle cry "mother's love is best" contending that this is simply a refusal to contemplate the realities of the modern world<sup>32</sup>. Feminists (e.g. Birns, 1999; Cleary, 1999; Franzblau, 1999) have been severely critical of what they deem the theory's embeddedness in a misogynist discourse, whence it imbues motherhood with a naturality and ahistoricity. It is their argument, that Attachment theories not only *describe* but actively *prescribe* the nature of our psychological lives and ills (Cleary, 1999). Attachment thus, pretends to explain social development as an evolutionary and biologically determined phenomenon, and as such, it represents the tradition of predetermining and controlling women's reproductive tasks and children's child rearing needs. Some will make the point that it is simply naïve, to believe that being a loving, sensitive mother can protect the child for life against the adversity of poverty, abuse, poor schools, uncaring neighbourhoods, etc. (Franzblau, 1999).

A more accommodating reading of Bowlby will recognise that he said many, even contradictory, things. While it is true that he criticised cavalier attitudes towards elective

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<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that even in empiricist terms his claim exceeded his mandate. He makes sweeping conclusions on the basis of a relatively small number of cases, in his case fourteen (Holmes, 1993). By present day standards these studies would also not be acceptable in that they often included no control groups. Donna Haraway (1989) offers a devastating critique of Harry Harlow's studies of "mother love". The implications also hold true for Bowlby. Woman as mother was represented in this rhesus monkey research as a caricature of herself, one who was available 24 hours a day, within the boundaries of nuclear, heterosexual family structures. Haraway's revealing analysis shows the value of embedding theory, research and practice in a historical context.

separations of mothers from their children under the age of three, he could also have been seen as arguing for a much greater valuation by society of the childrearing function. Whatever his views on housewives, he put forward a strong case for the professionalisation of all child-care workers, including workers in day nurseries and children's homes, foster mothers and nannies: in essence, child minders of all descriptions. Although Bowlby always resisted identifying the "mother figure" with the child's biological mother and emphasised the possibility of other caregivers – he believed that mothers in Western societies tended to serve as principal attachment figures. Bowlby's permissiveness when referring to "mother" is often not perceived. In Attachment and Loss, Vol. III, his opening caveat (Bowlby, 1980, p 9) reads as follows: "Although throughout this work the text refers usually to "mother" and not to "mother-figure", it is to be understood that in every case, reference is to the person who mothers the child and to whom he becomes attached. For most children of course, that person is the natural mother." Karen (1994) elucidates Bowlby's permissiveness: "He was not in the least opposed to a live-in nanny ... as long as it was recognised that she may become the true mother figure in the child's eyes, and – this he emphasised – as long as she stayed... (p. 109). Later, at pages 325-326: "Even many of his own followers would part company with Bowlby over the contention that the full-time nanny becomes the primary attachment figure, supplanting the parent in the child's affections".

#### **4.3.3 The Empiricists Keep Things Simple: Non-parental Care as Good/Bad for the Infant**

In the wake of Bowlby, concepts like "attachment" and "separation" have become cardinal diagnostic and nosological categories within child psychopathology. This was not all. Attachment Theory proved to be very appealing to the empirically-minded psychologists. By the time the technicians get hold of Bowlby - not simply was mother's love best, it was the only nurturing care to be had. Where before we simply had "childcare", now we have a distinct name for the care the child received from people other than his/her biological mother. This is the concept "nonmaternal care". The title of

Joffe's (1977) book amply captures the nanny's position: Friendly Intruders – Childcare Professionals and Family Life. The domestic worker now existed in the negative. She reminded the child who she was not, namely mother. She was a trespasser, albeit a benign one. In the empiricists' hands, the nanny's omission/elision almost became complete. She was a second order contributor to the child, a surrogate, a substitute for the real McCoy. Flowing from such assumptions - until the 1970's there was almost *no* empirical work in area of nonparental care. The only nonmaternal caregiver who has been studied with any degree of commitment has been the biological father, (c.f. Fox, Kimmerly & Schafer, 1991 for a meta-analysis on mother-father studies). Since then, there have been a good few studies on attachment between infants and professional caregivers. These though were neither consistent nor reliable, but perhaps even more significantly for our purposes they have been of a specific type. Specifically on the nanny who works from her employer's home, what the research calls "home day-care", *there is almost nothing*. What follows is a review of the empirical nanny research as it concerns the day-care setting.

Mary Salter Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978) is perhaps the foremost researcher to have operationalised Bowlby's ideas. Her Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) is a laboratory method of identifying different "patterns of attachment" in infants between the ages of 11 and 24 months<sup>33</sup>. Many of her graduate students at John Hopkins went on to advance the empiricist attachment cause. Important names include the likes of Mary Blehar, Michael Lamb, Sylvia Bell, Mary Main etc. Beginning in the 1960's a number of researchers devoted their careers to the study of attachment and the SSP. There are innumerable studies concerning the reliability and the predictive ability of this measure that support the findings of attachment theory. Again and again, there was

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<sup>33</sup> This 21-minute procedure measures the child's security of attachment to the mother taking account of his/her response to each of seven episodes, including the departure and return of the mother and also the entrance and departure of a stranger. For Ainsworth, individual differences are categorical, differences in kind, rather than amount. She offered a tripartite classification: secure-insecure, avoidant and resistant/ambivalent, with a rubbish bin category - disorganised. She contributed a procedure and a theory for describing and explaining individual differences in infant attachment to caregivers. She offered experimentally oriented developmental psychologists a purportedly reliable and valid instrument to conduct scientific studies of attachment. Armed with this standardised measure they went forth testing many hundreds of thousands (even millions) of infants. In the vein of Ainsworth, there have been those who have sought to develop psychometric tests to assess children's attachment beyond infancy (c.f. e.g. The Parent-Child Reunion Inventory – Marcus, 1990).



research to support the conclusion that in stable middle-class families children retained their predominantly secure attachment to their mothers. Ainsworth started a research trend: “In research involving other-than-biological mother care, investigators appear to direct their attention almost exclusively to how day-care affects infants’ and children’s attachment security to the biological mother” (Hardin & Hardin, 2000, p. 1232). The core question raised by childcare research of the day was whether disrupting parental attachment had any adverse psychological effects on the child. As we shall see shortly, the debate concerning the effects of non-parental care continued to rage without much consideration of specific effects of this significant childcare experience on other aspects of child development.

Once policy makers realised that more than half of women in the developed world returned to work within the first year of an infant’s life, usually for economic reasons, the effect of non-maternal care on infants became a major issue for parents and policy makers. If secure attachment formed the basis for future relationships and the mental health of children, the question became: would infants who spend many hours a day in non-maternal care be permanently harmed? Looking beyond infancy these sorts of observations are more pertinent. In the U.S., the majority of children from infancy through age five, and virtually all children from age five through eighteen, spend significant amounts of time under supervision of adults who are not their parents (NICD, 1997b).

The first SSP studies repeatedly found that secure attachment, as assessed on the Ainsworth instrument, was more common among infants in exclusive maternal care than among those who experienced regular nonmaternal care for more than 5 hours a week. Ratings of avoidance were higher among infants receiving regular nonmaternal care (e.g. Lamb, Sternberg & Prodromidis, 1992). Coming out of longitudinal studies was the contention that extensive nonmaternal care was associated with heightened risk of insecure mother-infant attachment.

With political interests at stake, the deliberations on the effects of nonmaternal care became increasingly polemical. The scholarly journal Child Development devoted a great many articles to the debate over the next number of decades. A cursory examination of Child Development reveals that starting from the 1960's there are probably at least 15 such studies each year. On both sides we find advocates and detractors. In the 1980's attention increasingly focussed on the consequences of maternal employment and types of nonparental childcare for children and for society. This culminated in a series of debates over whether nonparental care was helpful or harmful to children, first during their older preschool years and then during the first year of life (Frankel, 1994; Hofferth, 1992).

For a period, the work of the SSP researchers remained the popular, albeit, the only view. The prevailing wisdom was that children must have one full-time mother to “turn out right”. Probably the most well known and certainly most vocal on the “deleterious outcome view” is Jay Belsky (e.g. 1988a, 1988b, 1996). His work described a putative association of day-care (even high quality nonmaternal childcare) and maladjustment. More time in nonmaternal care was said to predict a variety of problems for the child. Belsky (1988a, p. 406) did not equivocate: “More than 20 hours per week of nonmaternal care during the first year of life” is a risk factor in the development of “trouble” in the second year. Trouble, in his terms, was effect on later socio-emotional development – specifically insecure attachment during infancy and heightened aggressiveness and non-compliance during preschool and early school going years. Given the ubiquity of nonparental care, rather than concede, Belsky (1992, p. 91) declared: “on the basis of this developmental and social ecology of day-care in America, I conclude that we have a nation at risk”.

On the advice of experts, the US federal government undertook the largest single study of the effects of day-care in over 1100 children who were recruited at birth and studied for the first three years of their lives (NICD, 1997a; 1997b; 1998) “Child care by itself constitutes neither a risk not a benefit for the development of the infant-mother attachment relationship as measured on the Strange Situation” (1997b, p. 877). In their

next study (1998) the researchers proclaimed: “The general hypothesis that the effects of family predictors would be attenuated in the case of children experiencing full-time nonparental care beginning in the first year compared to those cared for virtually exclusively by their mothers, was not supported” (1997b, p. 1125). They stated further that “a favourable view of the benefits of maternal employment for child functioning positively predicted child development for children in full time child-care” (p. 1123-1124). Theirs was effectively the last word on the matter – for the most part, it brought to a halt the internecine debates. Perhaps their major finding was that “infants with extensive child-care experience did not differ from infants without care in the distress they exhibited during separations from the mother during the SSP” (p. 860)<sup>34</sup>.

Proponents of attachment theory have been obliged to admit that many factors, other than the early mother-child relationship, have profound influence on child development. The largest percentage of variance in attachment security is still unaccounted for by the dimensions examined in developmental research (Vondra & Barnett, 1999). Certainly there are substantial numbers of children who do not fit into Ainsworth’s tripartite system (Goosens & van Ijzendoorn, 1990). Schaffer and Emerson (1964) studied the development of attachment longitudinally, including the child’s responses to different members of the family under a variety of conditions. As we might expect, some children were equally attached to their father and some even were more attached to the father, siblings or grandmother than to the mother. These “other than mother” persons were the people who the mother claimed “spoilt the baby” by picking him up when he cried, or who played with him a great deal.

Probably most well known of those arguing against any effects is Alison Clarke-Stewart (Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Clarke-Stewart, 1992; Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983). Clarke-Stewart took the 1970’s debate further by asking whether day-care, in any shape or form, was good for children’s development. There is a substantial body of research that

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<sup>34</sup> There were other interesting, albeit intuitive, findings made by NICD (1997a; 1997b; 1998). For one thing income level is a good predictor of attachment – more secure infants had more affluent parents. For another, mothers who scored high on sensitivity and psychological adjustment had more secure infants than those who scored poorly on these measures.

suggests that day-care is not harmful to children and may be helpful to development in certain respects<sup>35</sup>. With infants we had something of a different picture: infants in full-time day-care, compared with infants in part-time or not at all, were indeed more likely to be classified as having an insecure relationship with their mothers. The contention was, however, that results tend to be skewed with SSP: “when other methods of assessing infants’ relationships with their mothers are used, it turns out the differences are not as marked” (Clarke-Stewart, 1989, p. 268) Summarising 1200 children in 16 studies, Clarke-Stewart (1989) observed that 36% of those in full-time day-care would be classified as insecure as contrasted with 29% of children who were not in full time day-care. The question, of course, is whether the difference between 36% and 29% was large enough to be of concern. Clarke-Stewart (1989) concluded that the difference does not demonstrate day-care as harmful to the infant, but alerts us to possible problems day-care may create.

Ijzendoorn, Sagi and Lambermon’s (1992) study directly addressed the nanny phenomenon similar to how we know it. Theirs was a longitudinal investigation over two years assessed in the context of Dutch dual earner families or Israeli kibbutz children. Amongst these children, at least three caregivers were involved: mother, father and professional caregiver. Insofar as there is a scarcity of expressly home-based “nanny”

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<sup>35</sup> On intellectual development (school related knowledge and abilities) children in day-care programs did as least as well, and sometimes better, on tests of mental or intellectual development (Clarke Stewart, 1992) To be more specific, children in day-care scored higher on IQ tests, were more advanced in eye-hand co-ordination, were more creative in the ways in which they explored and played with materials, knew more about the physical world, had more of the beginning arithmetic skills (like counting and measuring) before they went to school, could remember and recite back information – including their names and addresses more accurately and were able to use and understand more advanced language (p. 64-65). Their advanced development, the research suggests reflects a temporary gain or speeding up in the rate of early acquisitions rather than a permanent enhancement of their intellectual abilities.

On the emotional front – preschool children who attend day-care programs are, according to the research, likely to be more self-confident, outgoing, assertive and self-sufficient, more comfortable in new situations, less timid and fearful, more helpful and co-operative and more verbally expressive (p. 65) – concluding that day-care is basically good for children - it promotes or at least does not hinder their cognitive and social development” (p. 66). From her point of view the crucial fact, as we might intuitively expect is the “global quality” of the child care. She illuminates four factors which she connotes as critical – the physical environment (the organisation of the space and the quality of the materials), the caregivers’ behaviour, the curriculum and the number of children. For those in home care, we would exclude the issue of curricula. As to which is better, centre or home day-care, anecdotal evidence suggests that most people think that either can offer excellent care (Clark Stewart, 1989). Children’s development and observed experiences with a sitter or in a day-care home were not different from those of children at home with their own mothers.

empirical work, this study will be given more thoroughgoing attention. Ijzendoorn et al (1992) ask the intriguing question whether relationships with nonmaternal caretakers can have the same significance as maternal ones. They observe that the prevailing line has been to doubt the validity of nonmaternal attachment, specifically, to have misgivings about whether a real attachment relationship can exist between an infant and a nonmaternal caretaker. Using an Ainsworth SSP methodology, as well as derivative measures such as the Attachment Q-sort, they developed criteria to evaluate whether such a relationship was correctly identified as an attachment relationship. On the basis of both of their studies, Ijzendoorn et al (1992) conclude that infants may indeed be considered attached to professional caregivers. The infant's attachment to his/her first –nonparental caregiver appeared to have had special significance as a predictor of later socio-emotional development. This was especially true in the Israeli case. In a multiple caretaker environment, it appears to make a difference whether the child has developed none, one, two or three secure attachments. Children appear to profit most from three secure attachments. If their attachments to their mothers were insecure, and their attachments to their fathers and professional caregivers secure, however, they were better off compared to the situation in which the insecure infant-mother relationship was not compensated by secure attachment to other caregivers. Both interesting and relevant to the local context: the social prejudices against day-care may cause stresses on all caregivers involved (not only the parents), and may override the influence of attachment relationship on children's development. In the kibbutz context, nonparental care is, of course, integrated and accepted, and in the social context, is favourable to this arrangement of an extended network of caretakers<sup>36</sup>.

Coming out of the empirical research, the prevailing wisdom is that there was no evidence that children must have only one full-time mother to flourish. It would seem that as long as the caregivers were affectionate and consistent and met the children's needs, children seem to "turn out all right" (Coltrane, 1998). The prevailing wisdom, thus has come a long way from talking of gross pathology á la early Belsky. Now they suggest

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<sup>36</sup> Like much of the work that has gone before them, Ijzendoorn et al (1992) raise the concern as to how children digest the loss of their professional caregivers. In their opinion losing a surrogate is equivalent for the child of losing a parent.

that nonmaternal care predicted more negative adjustment on a composite lab-based measure of affective-cognitive functioning at age 5 (Belsky, 1999). There are those who conclude with operationally defined *non-sequiturs* e.g. “females exhibiting nonmaternal care exhibited more maternal-proximity-attaining behaviours than did home-reared females, whereas males experiencing nonmaternal care exhibited fewer maternal-proximity-attaining behaviours than home-reared males” (Hock & Clinger, 1980, p. 61). Perhaps the last word on these matters is the meta-analyses of the published research in the area. Erel, Oberman and Yimiya’s (2000) work on the findings from 59 studies examining the linkage between maternal versus nonmaternal care with 7 indices of child behaviour and 10 potential moderators is typical. Results indicate that children receiving nonmaternal care do not differ from children receiving maternal care on any of the 7 indices. Most of the analyses suggest that in and of itself, or in interaction with one factor at a time, nonmaternal care does not affect child development. These sorts of studies seem to put some of this debate to rest. Following these, there have been calls from various quarters (e.g. Franzblau, 1999) to abandon this line of investigation. Inevitably psychologists have come to recognise that repeating these sorts of studies *ad nauseam* is a disservice to both the parents and children they were investigating. Perhaps more significantly for most first world children today, nonparental care is a fact of life. Psychology, it seems, has finally come to accept that nonmaternal care is here to stay. As Clarke-Stewart (1992, p. 75) tells us – “from their earliest months until they are old enough to be on their own after school, more and more children are spending more and more time in the care of some adult other than their parents”<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> From quite different quarters - a whole body of work looked at characteristics of people who chose to be care workers (e.g. Lee, 1994, Moses, 2000, Mullis, Ellet & Mullis, 1986). Work on what is called “the other mommy” distinguishes “desirables” from “undesirables” in terms of personality, motives, job satisfaction and related psychological features. Technicians in the area have gone so far as to develop psychometric instruments to select childcare staff (Ross & Hoeltke, 1985), develop training programmes that teach communication skills to child care workers (Collins, Garbor Peter & Ing, 1987) or behaviour management (Demchak & Kontos, 1992). Within the affluent first world, there is some concern with training child-care workers whence there are “schools for nannies (Readdick, 1987). The high turnover of such employees has also been cause for concern. Much of the psychological work on this fails to appreciate that psychological analyses are deeply limited. In fact even in the first world those who stay in these jobs are mostly compelled to do so for economic reasons. Kontos & Stremmel (1988) are perhaps exceptional. They distinguish a unique group who have personal and ideological reason for seeking and maintaining childcare work. These nannies enjoy their jobs and stay in childcare work, despite low pay, few fringe benefits and long hours. In psychology-speak, they talk about these workers’ enjoyment of the intrinsic

#### **4.4 *The Nanny's Appearance in the Consulting Room***

Bowlby alerted us to the fact that nanny can and does have a very important part to play in her charge's psychology. For him it is the person who is the child's principle caretaker who comes to be imbued with primary attachment significance. Commonly this is the mother or a biological parent, but it can also be a nanny. The chosen figure's significance derives from his/her steady proximity and ongoing labour of love. Bowlby, though, stopped short. He was unable to consider nanny's specific significance more than that of a surrogate or shadowy form of mother. From the vantage-point of "attachment" he could not appreciate that the nanny is never *simply* that of stand in parent – there is always something distinct and particular that defines her position vis-à-vis the child. The empiricists' explorations unfortunately take our investigation no further, for Bowlby's dilemma defined their terms of reference. Insofar as they remain spellbound, adjudicating the merits and demerits of substitute mothering, the nanny's specific connotation for the child is barred from consideration.

Let's hear what the children themselves say of their nannies.

##### **4.4.1 Sundry Reflections from the Professional Psychology Establishment**

The psychotherapeutic consulting room has proved to be one of the best locations to collect information on the nanny. There have been repeated instances where the astute clinician is able to discern the presence of the nanny in their patient's reminiscences. Canadian psychoanalyst Harry T. Hardin, one of the few to have given sustained

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aspect of the job (working with children) in spite of extrinsic aspects (e.g. working conditions, compensation).

Another related line of enquiry has been the investigative work done with foster parents. Prior research on foster care has largely neglected the relationship that develops between foster parent and child. This body of work has been obliged to admit that whilst there may not be "primary identification" founded in biological ties, there nevertheless was attachment (c.f. e.g. Stovall & Dozier, 2000). Those working in this area assume a kind of biological paternalism, talking of "a special kind of love" (Hirschberg, 1973) which is perceived as somehow distinct from biological parents' love.



attention to the nanny in the consulting room, observes somewhat quizzically: “For some reason psychoanalysts have little interest in their patients’ experience of substitute caretakers. This contrasts with the frequency of surrogate mothering found in my own practice, one which I believe differs very little from my North American colleagues” (1985, p. 609). Hardin goes further and observes that of 102 new patients he consulted over a five-year period, approximately one third “had primary caretakers other than their mothers” (p. 610). Anecdotal evidence derived from my discussions with professional colleagues suggests that local statistics for middle class, white South Africans are well in excess of 33%.

In the founder of psychoanalysis’ case histories, the female servant recurred unbidden. In the case of Little Hans (1901/1977), the elision of identification with nurses and mothers (as privileged bearers of children) led the case deeper and deeper into contradiction. In the narrative of the Rat Man (1909/1979) too, the topography of gendered desire is mapped onto the body of a female servant. The Rat Man recalled Fräulein Peter, who looked after him when he was four or five: “I was lying besides her and begged her to let me creep under her skirt .... She had very little on and I fingered her genitals and the lower part of her body” (p. 42). The “Wolf Man recalled his nursery maid, Grusha, kneeling on the floor with a short broom made of a bundle of twigs next to her. Later the Wolf Man (1914/1979) fell irresistibly and violently in love with the peasant woman he saw kneeling and washing clothes. As Freud (1914/1979, p. 249) notes it was “the posture of the maid, in which she is physically debased” on which he was fixated. She is firstly seen to be the source of all his trouble, later the lure of his desires. In theoretical terms she provoked recollections of the primal scene. For psychoanalytic theory, it was Grusha who in fact permits the concept of the primal scene. True to form, Freud shifts emphasis from her highly provocative presence to the parents’ intercourse. Speculating on the Leonardo Case (1910) specifically on his painting St. Anne with Madonna and Child, Freud (1910, p. 113) writes, “Leonardo’s childhood was remarkable in precisely the same way as this picture. He had two mothers: first, his true mother Cateraina, from whom he was torn away when he was between three and five, and then a young and tender step-mother, his father’s wife Donna Albiera”.

Helene Deutsch's (1965) "A two-year-old's first love comes to grief" is a thought-provoking classic in the nanny direction. As a psychoanalyst and mother, writing the case history of her son, there are inevitably dire consequences of her failure to discern his nanny's importance. Her sightlessness led her to a commonplace, through tragic, mistake - she simply replaced his beloved nanny (his primary caretaker) with that of a new stranger.

There are other big names in the psychoanalytic canon who have referred to domestic workers in their analyses and psychological productions. Hardin (1985) is of assistance in drawing my attention to some of these.

Back in the 1930's, Fenichel (1954) described a patient who in his first 18-months was cared for by his grandmother and a wet-nurse. Following his mother's recovery from a post-partum illness he was whisked away from his *de facto* mothers and (effectively) "adopted" by his natural mother. Later in life, as Fenichel's patient, he comes to recognise that his frequent travels and association with people with different backgrounds from his own, was an effective flight away from his mother. In this vein, his intimate relationship with an older woman represented a quest to return to the idyllic union with his grandmother and wet-nurse.

Marmor (1953, p. 664) discussing a patient who had a highly fraught relationship with her parents observes "... the only source of affection in her childhood that the patient could recall was a Negro maid whom the mother dismissed when the patient was three because she felt the patient was getting too attached to her". As much as the patient was obliged to forgo her love for her nanny in childhood, in her adult years she sought out substitute caretakers (extramarital relationships) as "love insurance".

There are Winnicott's cursory, albeit uncomplimentary references to the domestic worker in his patients' material. In The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment (1966, p. 143) he notes a patient whose "...actual nanny gave much colour to the False Self Organisation". In The Child, the Family and the Outside World (1973) Winnicott

harks back to an antediluvian idea of the uneducated nanny who stimulates the child's genitals in order to comfort him.

Then there is Bollas' (1982) patient Marianne, whose mother indiscriminately dismissed a succession of seven domestic workers in the child's first five years of life. The aftermath of these successive traumas was evident in Marianne's adult life. Bollas (1982, p. 353) writes - "parts of herself were contained in different holding environments, much as when, as a baby, she was held by a dispersed colony of nannies".

As much as these famous analysts had the acumen and insight to recognise the maid's presence, albeit a shadowy one in their patients' therapy room diatribes, they stopped short of offering sustained consideration of this subject. Sachs' (1971) contribution, whilst epigrammatic, was in these terms, a first. Expressly she attends to questions as to "... the role which the maid may take in shaping the character structure or neurotic symptomatology of children" (p. 470). Like other nanny-informed clinicians, Sachs opening her paper, queries how it is that the maid with whom the child spends many hours each day, certainly more than the likes of grandparents, aunts and uncles, has been so readily dismissed by psychological professionals. She then goes on to document six clinical cases evincing "the many different ways a child makes emotional use of the maid" (p. 482). "Use" for Sachs denotes the useful purpose or significance the domestic worker has in the child's emotional development. As much as she emphasises how fundamental nanny might have been for the child, we get but the faintest whiff of what the specifics of this might mean when she talks of examples of the child's allegiance with maid vs. mother, as a "double Oedipal conflict".

#### **4.4.3 Harry T. Hardin – The Nanny in the First Year and a Half of Life of the Child's Life**

Canadian psychoanalyst, Harry T. Hardin is singular in his sustained attention to the nanny phenomenon. Over a series of five clinically informed papers (Hardin, 1985;

Hardin, 1987; Hardin, 1988a; Hardin, 1988b; Hardin & Hardin, 2000) he details consulting room psychological products - remnants of the child's relationship with nanny dating back to the first 18 months of life<sup>38</sup>. Hardin repeatedly affirms that to leave a young child in the care of a nanny over any substantial period is no spurious matter, certainly as regards the child's emotional life. Such is his conviction that he refers to her as "primary surrogate mother". "Primary" in his terms does not simply refer to the length of time (in hours per day and months of duration) she would have spent with the child but also the.... "consistency of care, quality of nurturance, intensity of involvement (in terms of exclusiveness, mutual cueing etc.)" (Hardin & Hardin, 2000, p. 1229), all of which foster attachment.

The clinical examples he offers in his 1985 paper offer a useful entrée into his ideas. The case of Mr. A. is typical. Mr. A's presenting problem was an inability to form satisfactory relationships with women. His mother was described in vague, remote terms save for one recurrent memory dating back to age three or four. In the scene he was: "sitting on the kitchen counter in their family home, beside the radio which is playing. His mother was there; her back was turned to him, doing the housework. The puzzling fact is the overwhelming sense of sadness and yearning he feels. Over many a therapeutic hour Hardin is able shed some light on this scenario. Manifest in the situation is Mr. A.'s feeling of estrangement from his mother. Hardin's insight is that this is a screen memory – latently encoded, Mr. A's sadness, the radio playing and his mother's back, were all related to losing Helga, his nanny. As Mr. A. subsequently recalled, it was Helga who looked after him for his first three years of life, and in fact, he would sleep in a crib in her room enjoying music on the radio in her company. In his adult relationships, the quest for women resembling Helga was deemed to be further evidence of his searching for his "lost surrogate mother".

Previously, we broached Freud's forgetting his nanny for his mother. Screening - the hiding of the image of the nanny behind that of the mother - was in fact Hardin's chief

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<sup>38</sup> Both Hardin's developmental time framework and the nature of his interest in separation, confirm an allegiance to psychoanalysis as conceived by Margaret Mahler (Mahler et al, 1975).

finding amongst his patients with backgrounds of early primary surrogate mothering. Screen memories, according to Hardin, are commonplace for children who have been cared for and developed attachments to their nanny. Screening phenomena are said to include what he calls “eclipsing”, and “mother” and “surrogate mother transferences” which are peculiar to the childhood situation. In memories, in the transference, dreams and the like, the nanny is “discovered in the subject’s infancy”, “seen to emerge from obscurity” (1985, p. 628) and become a figure imbued with primordial importance.

Given the importance of screening phenomena to our concerns, they warrant some elaboration. Margaret Mahler (Mahler et al, 1975, p. 610) offers a succinct, working description of screening: “The primitive ego seems to possess an amazing ability to absorb and synthesize complex object images without adverse effect, and on occasion even with benefit. Thus, the Gestalt of the nurse, who may be relegated to the function of providing immediate need satisfaction, is synthesized with the Gestalt of the mother, who may be available only as an additional or transient external ego. However, *it is truly impressive that although the mother may be less involved in the actual care of the infant, her image seems to attract so much cathexis that it often, though not always, becomes the cardinal object representation*” (own emphasis).

As we might expect, a significant proportion of Hardin’s clinical examples evince the image of the surrogate mother as screened by the mother. We see the nanny as either having been totally lost (subsumed in the image of mother), or she emerges in an amalgam, a merged image of the gestalts of nanny and mother. In most instances, there are, at best, some traces of her presence. Hardin’s explanation for the unconscious screening of the primary surrogate mother is twofold: first, there is the child’s immaturity (18 months at most) when he was separated from his nanny, and, secondly, biological mothers commonly return to serve (in some capacity) as primary caretakers, following the nanny’s early departure. Interestingly, he observes that in a child whose mother was absent for the first two years, the nanny’s caring image was clearly recalled, without any dint of screening. In eclipse, a dilute form of screening, the nanny is perceived to have been obscured, not totally hidden, by the mother. In what he calls the “surrogate mother

transference” problems with intimacy are primary, a “yearning to re-experience the past closeness with his primary caretaker”. This experience obliged the patient to “confront the anguish inherent in reliving the profound loss he suffered when the surrogate left” (1985, p. 627). This is often complicated because this is often layered on top of the first loss of the mother to the surrogate.

Hardin writes at some length on the psychological implication for the child of his/her loss of the nanny. In his estimation the loss of nanny is not simply a significant trauma for the child – it is a “catastrophe”. Among the consequences of the loss of the surrogate, is the child’s development of interpersonal difficulties, particularly a fear of close involvement with other people. Hardin (1985, p. 627) makes the powerful argument that there is an inevitability to the child’s loss (“surrogate mothering is synonymous with loss”) insofar as the childcare is waged work. In his 2000 paper, he states and restates this: “... with rare exception, the care-giving of the early primary surrogate mother will ultimately come to an end” (Hardin & Hardin, 2000, p. 1230) and that “...termination of the employment of the primary surrogate mothers must represent one of the most frequently occurring significant losses experienced by infants and children in the western world” (p. 1229). What this seems to imply, is that the domestic worker’s dispensability is at the child’s psychological peril.

Hardin (Hardin & Hardin, 2000) refers to added “complications” for children who lose their beloved nannies. These concern the inability to mourn the loss of this caregiver. Parents’ “nonvalidation” of the loss are reckoned to be the primary contributors to this. He concludes that this may be their profound lack of awareness or active denial of the full significance of the infant’s relationship with the nanny. Clearly “the reality of the early primary surrogate mother as a psychological or de facto mother” is a bitter pill for most mothers and fathers to swallow: “Parents generally feel guilty about leaving their child in the care of another, tending to compete for the child’s affection and to deny the significance of the child’s attachment to the early primary surrogate mother” (p. 1253). It is in the face of their own difficult feelings that biological parents are disinclined to protect the child’s attachment, and encourage him to forget who the nanny ever was.

#### 4.5 Lay Offerings on the Subject

The nanny, the domestic worker, the nursemaid and the household servant, crops up again and again in Literature. She is Mary Poppins, she is the governess of Sound of Music, the nursemaid of Bed knobs and Broomsticks. Author and playwrights have been more willing to acknowledge the part played by these women in their lives. In this section I take cursory samplings of this body of work. We will consider those who idolise their nanny, we will consider those who denigrate her offerings.

There are a whole host of cryptic, *en passant* references to the nanny. These include the likes of George Bernard Shaw, who was brought up almost entirely by nursemaids, saying of his mother: “her almost complete neglect of me had the advantage that I could idolise her to the utmost pitch of my imagination and had no sordid or disillusioning contacts with her” (in McClintock, 1995, p. 87). This echoes Freud’s maternal sentiments: “to me she was a perfect mother. I would have not liked her to dose me, bathe me, comfort me or hold my head when I was sick. These intimate functions were performed by Nanny or by Annie our nursemaid” (in Hardin, 1988a, p. 74). Nannies could also inspire the devotion and dependence of a lifetime. This is Winston Churchill’s Mrs. Everest, connoted the “dearest and most intimate friend during the whole of the twenty years that I had lived”, “the principal confidante of my joys, my troubles” (Gathorne-Hardy, 1972, p. 41).

At first we are astonished that it is in Victorian times, more especially in the colonial context, that we see the domestic worker repeatedly seeming to sneak into her charge’s narrative. From a psychological, or more aptly a psychoanalytic point of view, this surely cannot simply be a coincidence. McClintock (1995, p. 85) concurs: “Hardly surprising that male Victorian writings, pornography and memoirs abound with references to nursemaids and governesses, bearing vivid witness to the profound sway these working class women held over their young charges. More often than not, nurses and maids slept in the same rooms as their charges: they washed and clothed them; smacked their bottoms; washed their vaginas and penises; wiped up vomit; tended them when they were



sick; cuddled them; disciplined and punished them; taught them how to speak; read and write; told them stories and instructed them in their class ‘manners’”.

An obscure but fascinating work In Search of a Past: The Rearing of an English Gentleman 1933-1945 is Fraser’s (1984) autobiographical account. The foundation for his research is his own psychoanalysis and interview with childhood “house servants”. In her stern yet loving presence, she is crucial to the making of his English gentlemanly masculinity. “Immemorial bonds to his nanny forever starchily uniformed and loving” (Fraser, 1984, p. 5); “she gave me comfort and security I have never forgotten. When I went to interview her, I fell into a sort of hypnotic trance, like a child finding comfort in a mother’s voice...” (p. 94). Where he talks of two mothers we soon recognise his natural mother to be remote. Consequently when his other mother leaves it is felt like “a laceration that’s been with me since childhood, a loss, abandonment...the pain just exists in me, I can’t give it another expression. It’s yet one more reason why I find it so difficult to write about my childhood” (p. 122)

Henry Ryder Haggard’s relationship with his nanny begins on a different tack. In many respects he represents a more conventional view. Ryder Haggard has a particular interest for us as South Africans, serving as he did as a member of the colonial administration in Pietermaritzburg. His first-hand experience of the power she embodies in his childhood is a paranoia-suffused memory. His literary depiction of female generative authority, in these terms, was less than complimentary. King Solomon’s Mines, one of the most widely read novels of the time, is a journey along the lines of the later epic Indiana Jones movies. It reveals that there is a contest at stake, one which will see to the regeneration of the authority of the white father in the historical form of the English upper-middle class gentleman “playing out his anachronistic phantasms of paterfamilial class power in the arena of empire” (McClintock, 1995, p. 235). Gagool, the witch-mother, is the arch-villain(ess). She is the nadir of degeneration. Everything about her is simian. “Didn’t she wait for me in dreams every night in the passage by the linen cupboard, near the nursery door”. Gilbert asks the question – why did thousands upon thousands of Englishmen respond to his dreamlike story of Her with as much fervour as if he had been narrating

their own dreams? When we hear that Haggard was reared by a nanny who put the fear of God into him through the use of “a rag doll” called “She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed” we cannot but be amused at his panic and incomprehension of female authority. King Solomon’s Mines might be said to be an elaborate, persecution-induced effort to ward off the frightening melding of mother, working class domestic servant and black woman through a narrative of disciplining female productive power (McClintock, 1995, p. 246). In this poetic of possession and control the novel concludes with an extraordinary narrative that legitimises the reordering of generative authority of black polity and the diversion of the surplus riches into the pockets of white gentlemen. In a sense he ends with the Freudian myth of autochthony – male birthing annuls the mother<sup>39</sup>.

Zakes Mda’s The Madonna of Excelsior (2002) is a veritable trip down apartheid’s memory lane. It takes us to the hinterland of the relationship between the little white boy and his nanny. The novel, a fictionalised retelling of events in 1971, when Excelsior, one of those dusty, platteland towns, the heartland of Afrikanerdom and an N.G. Kerk stronghold, was rocked by scandal: 19 townspeople were charged with transgressing the notorious Immorality Act. The case was a sensation, making world headlines. Lurid details leaked out of a police-run sex ring, including partner-swapping and drunken orgies. When the accused were arrested and brought to trial, twelve of the African women were carrying in their arms the evidence - a multitude of brown children fathered by the white elite of Excelsior.

The story is told in two parts, then and now. The then is 1971; the now is Excelsior's more recent history, the town’s grappling with a post-1994 political landscape in which lines are redrawn and unlikely alliances formed, and a place where reconciliation can start to take place. Mda has written a real rainbow nation tale. Sexual politics are at the heart of this lively novel, as Mda explores a context in which black women are, in many

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<sup>39</sup> Recently Moya (2003, p. 8) echoes the strains of Haggard’s ‘meeting of cultures’. “...Tarzan-like fascination with white children being raised by families of another race”. “In the South African case, apartheid made it inconceivable that a white boy could be raised by black people. They ask themselves what kinds of morals will he have”.

ways, rendered powerless by men, and where their bodies become the only weapons with which to fight back.

Niki, the principal protagonist, the eponymous Madonna and fallen woman, is a domestic worker. She is the ‘mother’ of three children: Viliki, her son by her husband Pule, a gold miner and migrant labourer, Popi the daughter of a white man, living proof of her mother’s transgression and Tjaart, unrelated to her by blood, but bound by affection - the son of her employer, who as a child refused all other nannies but her. Mda conjures up a very even-handed Madonna, much to the disgust of her flesh and blood children. Mda’s work interests us for a variety of reason: principally, it directly engages the relationship between nanny and little white boy. Indeed Tjaart Cronje’s “.....crush on Niki had persisted. .... that continued to loom large upon the floor scale of his imagination” (p. 59) over a protracted period. For Mda, this relationship is not singular but transgenerational, deeply imbricated within the South African psyche. It is not just that Tjaart, the white Afrikaans boy who had “grown addicted to her back” (p. 26), who would “insist on being carried on her back, even though he was ridiculously big for that mode of transportation” (p. 8), but there was much more at stake. The “bursting of forbidden sluices” (Mda, 2002, p. 59) was “A battle between lust and loathing...the devil made the Afrikaner to covertly covet the black woman while publicly detesting her” (p. 87)<sup>40</sup>. These are not simply Tjaart’s preoccupations. The transgenerational aspect to it was that: “Young Afrikaner boys were eager to taste what their fathers had been eating on the sly. They went out on hunting expeditions for what they called swart poes. In the fields. In the veld. In the byways of one-street towns. In the farm villages. And in the kitchens of their very homes, where maids and nannies cooked them their dinners” (p. 94).

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<sup>40</sup> The relationship between the little white boy and his nanny has also been taken up by visual artists. There is Penny Siopis’ *Thula-Thula* series. For an interesting discussion on these matters see Coombes’ (1997) insightful interview with Siopis.

## **4.6 *The South African Corpus of Knowledge***

### **4.6.1 Disparate Strands**

Jacqueline Cock formally initiated South African academia into the domestic worker phenomenon. In spite of the interest by their sibling disciple, psychologists were happy to leave these matters well alone. Local psychological literature on the subject can be described as partial at best, comprising a series of isolated pieces.

Of this body of work, only Hickson and Strous' (1993) piece is one to have been published. Hickson and Strous (1993) concern themselves with the extraordinarily oppressive conditions of domestic work. They look to psychological remedies, specifically “psychologically empowering mental health services”, to redress her appalling situation. Whilst this may be an interesting subject, it has no bearing on the present investigation.

Qualls' (1971) unpublished psychology Master's thesis asked questions about the influence of black nanny on her young charge. In this case she posits that nanny's influence will be deleterious to language development. Her contention was that there would be a transmission of linguistic incompetence from nanny to child - what she called “Bantu English” with its incomplete mastery of syntax and grammar, restricted vocabulary, difficulties with tenses, pronoun confusion, inability to manipulate nested dependencies etc. - being passed on to the white children. “In South Africa many children have a language model in an African nanny. For some children, this nanny appears to be a major, perhaps even the major language model throughout the pre-school years” (Qualls, 1971, p. 71). What implicitly she is giving credence to, that is relevant for our purposes, is the extent (and even quality) of the contact between the nanny and her charge. Qualls (1971) tested across two groups of children, one which had spent much time under the supervision of a black nanny during their preschool years and one which had not. On measures of the semantic and grammatical systems of language, her

hypothesis did not hold. This led her to argue for the precedence of nativist theories of language acquisition over environmental ones.

Ngqakayi's (1991) intentions for her master thesis were ambitious. She wanted to explore the manner in which "discursive practices in the social relations within the domestic worker position, the domestic worker and the work she does impinge on the child caregiving functions" (p. ii). As interesting as the project sounds for our purposes, her interviews of 'maids' and 'madams', and subsequent reflections afforded no new insights.

Shafer's (1983) doctoral thesis squarely looked at the domestic worker as caregiver. He, however, began with the premise that she is "an alternative to direct mothering" and hence is less than ideal. Further he takes the position that she is unskilled in her capacity to care for another person's children. In this vein, he set about devising an interpersonal skills training programme to improve the "quality" of the care that nannies could offer. His intention was to facilitate the "creation and maintenance of healthier emotional environments" (p.3). Shafer's work, like other authors has only passing interest to our concerns.

Burman and Reynolds' (1990) Growing up in a divided society: The context of childhood in South Africa was a very promising beginning to think about these matters on the subcontinent. While none of the papers in the volume expressly address the nanny phenomenon – the collection is indeed admirable for its examination of the relation between the material and discursive foundations of apartheid and specific childhood contexts. Unfortunately nobody has (yet) chosen to take up their baton.

#### **4.6.2 Diane Wulfsohn – The Impact of the South African Nanny on the Young Child**

Within the sub-continental literature, there is only one piece of research (that I am aware of) that contemplates the effect of being 'nannied' on white children: this is Wulfsohn's

(1988) unpublished doctoral research - “*The Impact of the South African Nanny on the Young Child*”. In its novelty Wulfsohn’s foray is groundbreaking. The tragedy is that it is tucked away in some remote corner of a university library accumulating dust. Using a systematic and controlled empirically-informed procedure, Wulfsohn focuses on two constructs: the “quality of the relationship” and the “intensity of the involvement”. In both her theoretical vision and her methodology, Wulfsohn is informed by psychoanalysis. To this end she employs various standardized projective tests - the Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD), the Bene-Anthony Family Relations Test and the Children’s Apperception Test (CAT) on first-born young children, in addition to interviews with their biological mothers and to a lesser extent, their nannies.

On both these parameters she concludes that the nanny is irrelevant, the biological mother predominating in the child’s psyche. She avows this finding in various ways: “the nanny’s impact is at best minimal” (1988, p. iii). “She is not introjected as a significant other” (1988, p. 37), “the nanny is not related to an internally significant object” (1988, p. 98). Inter alia, Wulfsohn finds that little boys, particularly, were found to be significantly more positively related to their mothers than to their nannies. Notwithstanding, Wulfsohn goes on to account for her findings in terms of three factors: “mother’s availability and involvement” (A small child is less likely to form an intimate, strong bond with a substitute caretaker when its primary nurturing object is present and engaged with his/her), the “family constellations” (the form of the family) and what she calls “values”, or later, “the current socio-political environment” (“the fact that nanny is not experienced as a person in her own right”).

#### **4.6.3 Beyond Wulfsohn (1988) – Outstanding Issues and The Present Research**

Wulfsohn’s conclusion that children deem their nanny to have little or no psychological import takes us to the heart of these questions. Are we to concur with Wulfsohn’s conclusions, or might we observe that once again we have corroboration that the nanny is so easily hidden away and obscured? Her findings would be readily explicable if these

mothers had been primary caretakers, using nanny simply as “help”. Although this is unclear, these appear to have been fairly typical middle class white families who would have left their children for protracted periods with their nannies. The decisiveness with which she asserts that children do not give a second thought to their nannies is startling, to say the least. One might even suggest that such a definite conclusion is counter-intuitive. I would speculate that for South African children (reared pre 1994), not only is the non-parental caretaker’s significance hidden because of what Wulfsohn connotes as the primacy of the mother cathexis, but because of the complex interplay between discursive formations, which constitute the nanny as irrelevant (an underclass and ‘racial inferior’), and psychological processes such as screen memories. Wulfsohn is unable to grapple with prevailing discourses around race and class, these women end up again as ‘merely nannies’.

Simply at the level of Wulfsohn’s methodology, there are a whole host of problems. Using projective methodology is accepted as notoriously unreliable (c.f. e.g. Anastasi, 1976). We are left to ponder how, for example, she coded the data in the instance of the beautifully telling situation of the child completing the Kinetic Family Drawing Test saying “There’s a nanny here, but I don’t want to draw her.” (Wulfsohn, 1988, p. 173). At another point she informs us that she made use of a form of modified CAT format: this is the bizarre instruction to young children that on one of the cards (that despite what they see) the “child should pretend that the largest figure in the card-picture was a nanny” (Wulfsohn, 1988, p. 162). The absurdity of this smacks of the TAT-Z, developed by the Human Sciences Research Council (1976) for Zulu speaking subjects<sup>41</sup>.

As much as she tried to adhere to scientific principles she was confronted by contradictions that were impossible to account for. There was the fact that children relate to the nanny positively being borne out on the Bene-Anthony Family Relations Test (probably the most reliable and valid instrument in her battery for the purposes of assessing attachment) and not on the others. In a state of bafflement she concludes “all

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<sup>41</sup> The caricatures in the TAT cards bear testimony to the perversity of the test developers long before they could discern anything intrapsychic in testees e.g. in one card there is the distinct figure of a white policeman amidst a crowd of black subjects.



these complications make it well nigh impossible to provide meaningful explanations concerning the seven hypotheses, confirmed each by only one measure” (1988, p. 181).

Perhaps more than anything, Wulfsohn failed to give credence to her psychoanalytic heritage. Reducing Wulfsohn’s research to its bare bones it comprised a simple frequency count of how often “nanny” was referred to in her data set. Such an activity is patently silly. In simple terms – when the child referred to “mother” or a maternal figure, who was being referred to and how did she code this? Reduced to dealing with “observables”, she fails to use her psychoanalytic appreciation of what “gaps in the data” may in fact signify. Indeed she fails to conceptualise our understanding of psychological life within historical and cultural circumstances, other than by paying lip-service to social psychology on these matters. In so doing, she ultimately gives no credence to the complexity of the material she had before her.

It is Wulfsohn’s raw data that is probably most interesting. These commonplace slices of South African life, at the time, elicit in us a feeling of recognition. We certainly appreciate in the few bits of raw data we find in the body of the text, a complexity that is lacking in the results. I am briefly going to list some of these.

- “When I ask my child to clean up his mess, he tells me that he’s not a nanny. When my child has to tidy up she responds, ‘Anna will do it; she’s just the maid’ (p. 168).
- “My child said he can’t see her at night because she is black. He also asked why Jesus made her black, and he teases her about her big nose...he speaks to her in a harsh demanding way. She accepts it” (p. 169).
- “When my child was younger he would call every black girl or boy ‘Jane’”.
- “By being with her and associated with our family for so long, it’s been a corrective experience for her and for me” (p. 178).
- “My son has asked why Eunice stays in a room outside the house; although he knows she is black; although he knows she’s black he would still hug and kiss her” (p. 171).

- “Sophie can’t be part of our family because she is brown, but she can still be a friend” (p. 171).
- My child has said to her – even if you are blue, green or purple, you’re still nice” but she has also said, “I can get lice from you. You’re a black” (p. 171).
- “When there was unrest in the townships, my child would be worried about Elsie when she went home” (p. 170).
- “My child is aware that Grace is less privileged than we are. If food is wasted she makes a comment that Grace could give it to her family. When blacks are intimidated on the train she asked about Grace’s safety” (p. 170).
- “When Catherine baths my brother and me I can see her titties. I try to pull her clothes away. I splash her with water. She gets cross with me so I smack her on her titties. It does not matter. She is just a maid” (p. 168).
- One mother commented “She would talk to my child whenever she passed by, whether she was sitting or crawling. I never did that myself until I noticed her doing that” (p. 183).
- “My nanny is Lydia. When I was small I used to call her Lala<sup>42</sup>. Sometimes I still call her Lala” (p. 183).

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<sup>42</sup> “Lala” means “sleep” in Zulu. In these terms, we can only but speculate how this name arose.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1 Aims

The detailed rationale for this study has already been dealt with in Chapter 1 - Introduction. What follows is a recapitulation of the main aims.

The present investigation explores white men's childhood under apartheid, more particularly their relationship/s with their erstwhile nanny/nannies. Specifically of interest are: 1. their *memories of* and 2. their subsequent *appropriation of the experience*.

To restate the twofold aims:

- to describe white men's recollections of their experiences of being looked after or cared for by a black nanny/nannies.
- to explicate what, if anything, has (either wittingly or unwittingly) been 'done' with the experiences of being looked after by a black nanny/nannies.

#### 5.2 Method

##### 5.2.1 Methodological Orientation – Between Narrative Analysis and Psychoanalysis

The relationship between nanny and white boy child qua cultural practice is complex, richly textured and not amenable to analytic fragmentation. Traditional research approaches are wholly inappropriate. As has already been discussed, this relationship stands at a conjuncture in the multiple interaction between the unconscious and social processes, in which the unconscious is formed via the insertion of the subject into

symbolic systems of culture, while retaining its own specificity and levels of determination. In the present instance, the concern is with how white male subjects, in their experience of being looked after by a black nanny, are spoken by cultural discourses but also by the unconscious. Before we proceed with the research methodology proper, it would be appropriate to orient ourselves within the conceptual research assumptions germane to the present study.

#### **5.2.1.1** *A Social Constructionist/Discursive starting point*

Discursive psychology emerges in the face of Psychology's failures to appreciate the social and linguistic constitution of psychological phenomena. It is a nascent discipline, in an interdisciplinary space, one that arises out of a need for a far broader repertoire of research methods and analytic perspectives for understanding social life (Griffin, 2000). There are many different types and styles of discourse analysis, all of which are underpinned by different philosophical frameworks (Burman & Parker, 1993). Most approaches are characterised by an interest in how language does not simply reflect a fixed or static reality, but rather that psychological phenomena (such as attitudes, identities) are multiple and variously created and recreated, through the language used to describe them (Burman & Parker, 1993; Burr, 1995; Levett, Kottler, Burman & Parker, 1997). In other words "in its various forms, discourse analysis offers a social account of subjectivity by attending to the linguistic resources by which the socio-political realm is produced and reproduced" (Burman & Parker, 1993, p. 3)

Discursive psychology treats spoken and written texts as practices, viewing talk as a form of action in itself (Parker, 1992). Text and cultural practices are the means through which individuals (and groups) are constituted or constitute themselves (Griffin, 2000). "Self", "relationships" and "experience", core concepts in this study, as much as they are traditional psychological terms, are recognised to be linguistically and discursively structured. As they are interpellated, so people create and sustain meanings of social categories such as gender, race and class. In the process they often "talk back" to the

dominant understanding of these categories (Burman & Parker 1993). Particular subject positions or “performances” are the product of manifold and competing intersubjective (social) and intrapsychic influences.

Within discursive psychology – the narrative approach is distinct. The beauty of this method is its appreciation of the linguistic and discursive structuring of “self” and “experience” while also maintaining a sense of the personal, coherent and “real” nature of individual subjectivity (Crossley, 2000c). A biographical-narrative approach is useful, enabling us to recapture the way in which selves and identities are grounded in “cultural” forms of language and sense making, whilst still maintaining a sense of the ‘internal’, ‘coherent’ and ‘personal’ nature of experience (Crossley, 2000b). Story-telling stays close to actual life events in a way in which methods that elicit explanations do not. For probably the primary way we make sense of our experience is by casting it in narrative form. Of all the discourse analytic approaches it is arguably one of the least prone to “losing the subject” or linguistic reductionism (Crossley, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; Gee, 1999; Riessman, 1994). Narrative interviewing and analysis - a systematic approach to studying experience - was the method of choice in the present instance. The reason being that narrative as “life story” lends itself to reflection on the disparate constitutive personal (unconscious) and social discourses. Both culture and the unconscious “speaks itself” through an individual’s story. Narrators speak in “natural” terms, but we can analyse how culturally, historically, individually and psychologically contingent these terms are.

#### **5.2.1.2 A Psychoanalytically Informed Methodology**

Discursive psychologists tend to have mixed feelings about psychoanalysis. There are those who recognise that much of what psychoanalysis has to offer has long been “repressed” by psychology (Parker, 1992; Shotter, 1990). Psychoanalysis’ “critical political edge” is deemed a theoretically powerful resource for analysing other forms of discourse (Parker, 1992). In the main, though, discursive psychology has tended to overlook the repressive dimension, concentrating on presences rather than absences in

discourse (Burr, 1995). The present research is deeply indebted to psychoanalysis both theoretically and methodologically.

In recent years there have been an increasing number of discursive psychologists who have availed themselves of psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity. These include the likes of Billig (2002), Frosh et al (2002), Hollway (1989), Hollway and Jefferson (1997; 2000; 2001) and Walkerdine (1989). To clarify the style of discourse analysis employed, it has been suggested that “the use of particular writers as references is a better guide to the framework being adopted than the explicit statement made by the author” (Burman and Parker 1993, p. 3). The discursive approach adopted in this study is based on the work of Hollway (1989), Hollway and Jefferson (1997; 2000; 2001) and latterly Frosh et al (2002). Such an approach, some would argue (Burr 1995, p. 154), would most accurately be described as “a psychoanalytic account with discourse built into it”. As much as this may appear to be a self-made, ‘new fangled’ methodology, this is not actually the case. In many respects, what we have is a “return” to the clinical research tools that are part and parcel of the psychoanalyst’s everyday currency. In the next section I will unpack Hollway and Jefferson’s (1997; 2000, 2001) and Frosh et als’ (2002) fieldwork approach, giving emphasis to their respective debts to psychoanalysis. Given that the application of clinical psychoanalysis to discursive psychological research endeavours is a relative novelty, it warrants amplification. This will be done under select, apposite rubrics.

### *5.2.1.3 Psychoanalytic Narrative Interviewing – elaborating and extending the Hollway and Jefferson (1997; 2000, 2001); Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) Approach*

#### **5.2.1.3.1 Intersubjectivity and the Research Relationship**

Before considering the intersubjective foundation of the research relationship it is important to briefly clarify Hollway and Jefferson’s notion of subjectivity. What they call the “psychosocial subject” is a long way from the sentient, sovereign subject of most

empirical research. This is not a research subject “whose inner world is simply a reflection of the outer world, nor a cognitively driven accommodation to it” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 53). Such a research subject’s “inner world cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way their inner worlds allow them to experience their outer world” (p. 57).

Hollway and Jefferson’s (1997; 2000; 2001) methodological contribution proceeds from discursive psychology’s anti-positivist stance: there is no objective vantage point from which data is “discovered”. Data is produced rather than collected in the intersubjective space between interviewer and interviewee. As discursive psychologists they know of the relational context of disclosure. They are quick to appreciate the similar emphasis within psychoanalysis. What they understand is that it is not simply the ‘real’ relationship between the researcher and the researched that counts, but it is the unconscious intersubjective dynamics that are crucial. “..... what we say and what we do in the interaction will be mediated by internal phantasies which derive from our histories of significant relationships. Such histories are often accessible only through our feelings and not through our conscious awareness” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 70). Hollway and Jefferson thus have invoked the complete psychoanalytic canon, comprising mechanisms of introjection and projection, amongst other things. Within the research context we can even begin to speak of transference and countertransference, in a manner comparable to how they occur in the consulting room.

#### **5.2.1.3.2 The Free Association Narrative Technique**<sup>43</sup>

Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000, 2001) “free association narrative technique” is one that evolved in the course of a series of pilots. As the name suggests, this research method

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<sup>43</sup> Frosh et al (2002) acknowledge their methodological debt to Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and dub this the “clinical interview method”.



derives from the marriage of psychoanalysis's technical offering with narrative-biographical approaches.

Their research-related objectives were twofold: they wanted to access data that was proximate to deeper levels of the psyche and one that was 'storied' (preserving the entire gestalt) in its form (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2001). In their words this method strives to elicit "the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic, that is the associations follow pathways defined by emotional rather than rational motivations" (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 64), but also "the focus of our analysis is the people who tell us stories about their lives: the stories themselves are a means to understand our subjects better" (Hollway & Jefferson 1997).

Methodologically, Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, 2001) core insight was their recognition of the coincidence between psychoanalysis and the German biographers/sociologists/Gestaltists (e.g. Bar-On & Rottgardt, 1998). Specifically - "The idea of hidden meaning being revealed through the gestalt of a story is analogous to the psychoanalytic concept of free association, in which the links between elements in the narrative are provided by unconscious meaning associations, which then provide clues to the significance of the person's account" (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 6). For the German biographers/gestaltists - "The main theoretical principal is the idea that there is a Gestalt (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, or a hidden agenda) informing each person's life, which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact and not destroy through following their own concerns" (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 8). Mainstream methods suppress narrative accounts; they are typically coded as "asides" (Riessman, 1994), seen as irrelevant. In fracturing, taking bits and snippets, they eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts. The imperative to pay attention to the entirety of discourse and not to fragment inheres within psychoanalysis' definition of free association. As psychoanalytic didacticians Laplanche and Pontalis (1983, p. 169) inform us free association, strives to elicit "*the totality of the*

*ideas* related to a specific event that is laden with emotional overtones”<sup>44</sup> (own emphasis).

Hollway and Jefferson (1997) draw out the German biographers’/sociologists’ interviewing techniques that preserve gestalt meaning frames (narratives)<sup>45</sup>. Unlike the German biographers the present investigation follows Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000; 2001) “focussed interviews”, paying attention to a specific experience; the task of eliciting stories, nevertheless, remains the same “to assist the narrators to say more about their lives (to facilitate the emergence of Gestalts)” (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 7).

### **5.2.1.3.3 Sensitive topics, defended subjects and the unspoken data**

Discursive psychologists have long been asking questions of the ‘unspeakable’. The ‘realm of secrets and disclosure’ has been addressed in topics as diverse as “rape trauma” (Bennett in Levett et al, 1997), “life threatening illness” (Crossley, 1999), “love relationships” (Hollway, 1989), “fear of crime” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), “sexual abuse” (Levett et al, 1997; MacMartin, 1999) etc. For Hollway and Jefferson, the way to access sensitive topics is once again the German biographers’/sociologists’ techniques.

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<sup>44</sup> This way of conceiving of free association was introduced by Jung, wholeheartedly endorsed by Freud (1986/1914) in On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement. This process is considered free so long as it is not steered by any considerations of reflection. Following Freud’s first topography the intention is the incapacitation of “Second Censorship” (between conscious and preconscious). In this way the unconscious defences are revealed – i.e. the operation of the “First Censorship” (between the preconscious and the unconscious).

<sup>45</sup> Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) strategy for eliciting narratives (a Gestalt meaning frame) can be summarised in four principles:

1. *Use open ended not closed questions*, the more open the better.
2. *Elicit stories*. (eliciting stories has the virtue of indexicality, of anchoring people’s accounts to events which have actually happened.
3. *Avoid why questions*. These serve to abstract and disconnect people from their lives, making the account hollow
4. *Follow up using the respondent’s ordering and phrasing*. Involves attentive listening and possibly some note taking during the initial narration in order to be able to follow up the themes in the narrated order. Respondent’s own words and phrases should be used to retain interviewee’s meaning frames.

The psychoanalytically informed reader will quickly discern the similarity of these techniques to the core tools of the psychoanalyst’s trade, specifically “the fundamental rule”, “rule of abstinence” and “benevolent neutrality”.

They are interested in: “faded-out memories/delayed recollections of emotionally/morally disturbing experiences” (Schutze in Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 6). These were no ordinary, everyday accounts, for these German researchers were co-producing “stories” of the lives of holocaust survivors and Nazi soldiers (c.f. e.g. Bar-On & Rottgardt, 1998). Plainly these narrations were highly defensive, given the painful subject matter, ones which needed a methodological strategy to, as it were, ‘speak the unspeakable’<sup>46</sup>.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 48) state: “Treating people’s own accounts as unproblematic flies in the face of what is known about people’s less clear-cut, more confused and contradictory relationship to knowing and telling about themselves”. Upon recognising that they are not dealing with transparent subjects, Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2001) introduce the notion of the “defended subject”. Psychoanalysis offers the bridge between the unspeakable and the defended subject. Indeed the realm of the unspeakable is the psychoanalyst’s bread and butter. In the psychoanalytic argot this is repression. At this level, what is being referred to is not derived from extraordinary circumstances, but anxiety, in the psychoanalytic sense of the word - a fundamental characteristic of the human condition. For the psychoanalyst, repression operates at the core of subjectivity – anxiety-provoking material gets separated from what is more acceptable within the psyche. Rejected material may then be modified through defences that can work inter- as well as intrasubjectively. One is left to conclude that Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2001) had found in the German biographers the essence of psychoanalytic epistemology.

It is important to appreciate that the issue of emotional valence or sensitivity of the topic is highly germane in the present study. In the very nature of the subject matter the

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<sup>46</sup> Billig (2002) takes the discussion forward in an original way, introducing the notion of a “dialogic unconscious”. Conversational interaction, a collaborative achievement, is said to be structured by normative demands. As much as talk has an expressive function it also has a repressive one. Everyday *conversational morality* (inter alia, including politeness, the search for codes of civilised behaviour) is accomplished within talk-in-interaction. Utterances which could well have been spoken remain unspoken. In these terms the likes of conversation analysis offers little more than codes of etiquette. The child, in learning language, is learning lessons of repression. The child who learns the codes of discursive politeness, which are integral to learning to talk, learns how to change the subject, to avoid questioning (‘it’s rude to ask’), to turn threatening topics into humour, and so on (Billig, 2002, p. 15).

researcher has ensconced himself in his research participant's most personal and private world. Put another way, the present investigation is the sort of enquiry that taps anxiety. In my first beginning to ponder how "white men being cared for by a black nanny" could be operationalised, I had the instinctive sense that these matters would be difficult for the participants to talk about. Reflecting on my own experiences, I knew that the datum I was curious about was highly emotionally charged and difficult to make sense of. My initial thought was to interview psychotherapists who had treated white male subjects, who would have reported being cared for over protracted periods of time by a black domestic worker. Given that such a line of enquiry was likely to be a minefield of confidentiality problems, it was summarily dismissed. The more I informally ventured into the field, the more my suspicions were confirmed. Acquaintances and friends were for the most part unenthusiastic about participating, observing they had only ever given passing thought to such aspects of their lives. Chatting about these matters further to prospective participants – their first response was – "but I did not have a nanny in the vein of primary caretaker which you describe. It was my mother/father/other who was prime parent and the domestic worker simply assumed a household maintenance function". In spite of this initial hesitancy, I repeatedly found that on second thoughts, prospective respondents evinced puzzlement and doubt – they realised that mother/father/other caretaker had been absent for a far more significant portion of time than they first assumed. What this meant was that a not insignificant feature of their lives and histories (being looked after by a nanny) had somehow been banished to some far-flung quarter of their memory.

#### **5.2.1.3.4 Symptomatic Reading as a Research Tool**

Probably Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, 2001) most audacious (and perhaps) significant methodological offering, even more than their willingness to introduce psychoanalysis into a discursive methodological framework, has been to suggest "an interpretative method that *does not take respondents' accounts at face value, which probes, using absences and avoidances in the narrative as much as what is said to identify areas of significance*" (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 54) (own emphasis). This is Althusser's

(1971) concept of “*symptomatic reading*”. Symptomatic reading is at the heart of the psychoanalytic project. To the extent that we introduce notions of “hiddenness”, we are alluding to an important significance that is not manifest. Symptoms, dreams and parapraxes have in common the fact that their true import or intention is kept from the observer’s gaze. It is only in the act of interpretation that the true meaning or (the latent content) can be known.

Following Althusser<sup>47</sup> (1971) – “problematic” may be defined as “definite theoretical structures”, a field of concepts, which organises a particular science or individual text by *making it possible to ask some kinds of questions and by suppressing others*. In “symptomatic reading” a text is *read as much for its “absences” or “silences” as for what it directly “says”*. The problematic(s) of a particular text may be more or less explicit. In taken-for-granted understandings, ideas and presuppositions may be very deep. They nevertheless exist. One aspect of analysis, then, is to render explicit what is implicit and to consider underlying propositions. For the literary theorist “symptomatic reading” is common currency: an indispensable tool of text analysis and critique. For the psychoanalyst, this concept is his/her conceptual *modus operandi*.

In the present research context – ‘straightforward interviewing’ is not sufficient. Even the move from straight question-and-answer based interviewing to narrative interviewing is insufficient, for in the absence of symptomatic reading, all we will discern is what Hollway and Jefferson call the “defended subject”. Traditional approaches, even narrative approaches, tend to draw attention to presences rather than absences in discursive utterances. They, as it were, work with the text or transcription rather than using the text as a sign of something else, which is itself absent in the text, but which leaves traces. Absences may in fact be more telling than presences in the interviewee’s utterances. Symptomatic reading is an important strategy for conceptualising the limits of conscious articulation likely to be revealed in indirect ways in the narratives and responses of interviewees. The idea that anxiety leads to distortions and displacements demands a

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<sup>47</sup> Althusser (1971) develops these concepts in refiguring the place of ideology in Marx’s base-superstructure model. For Althusser the task of scientific (Marxist) discourse is to deconstruct the problematic, to read through ideology the real conditions of existence.

methodological strategy to both recognise and decode anxiety's many guises (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, p. 54). The task before us is to employ our listening skills to appreciate our participants' express narratives of what they remembered, but also "the in-between, the indices and gaps of discourses, through which the fact of the forgotten makes itself heard" (Fuchs, 2002, p. 243).

## 5.2.2 The Sample

### 5.2.2.1 *Method of Obtaining the Participants*

By way of a start to recruiting subjects, an advert was placed in the Mail and Guardian beginning the week of 28 June to 4 July 2002. The specific wording of the advert can be found at Appendix I. Interestingly, this exercise proved to be a spectacular failure for only one subject volunteered. Again there was an attempt to publicly advertise for participants. This time, adverts were placed on various notice boards at the University of Pretoria, the University of the Witwatersrand and at Rand Afrikaans University. Again this was singularly unsuccessful – recruiting only one additional participant. Subsequently, it was decided that, rather than such a sampling procedure, participants would be recruited informally, through word of mouth, through what in research is called "grapevining" (Glad, 1973; Louw-Potgieter, 1988). Grapevining is commonplace when little information exists on procuring access to an unconventional respondent population. To begin to effect the selection the investigator contacted colleagues and personal acquaintances.

### 5.2.2.2 *Participants*

The nine white male subjects who comprised the sample were those who out of an original pool of eleven volunteers completed the interviews. The two protocols that were excluded comprised data sets provided by informants who were recognised after the fact to not have fulfilled the criteria for selection. In both instances, the domestic workers who worked in their homes were completely uninvolved in childcare.

### 5.2.2.3 *Description of the Sample*

In order to participate, research subjects had to meet the following criteria for selection:

- The participant's parent/s were unavailable (usually because of full-time employment) for large periods of the daytime childcare (4 hours or more per day) for a substantial portion of their childhood.
- They were taken care of by a black nanny/nannies until their high school years (at least for a period of 10 years).
- Interviewees had to be 21 years of age or older<sup>48</sup>.
- They should be willing to reflect on very personal aspects of themselves and their early history<sup>49</sup>.

A diagrammatic representation of each participant's history of being looked after by nannies can be found in "Nanny Timelines" which follow in Table 1. Table 2 comprises

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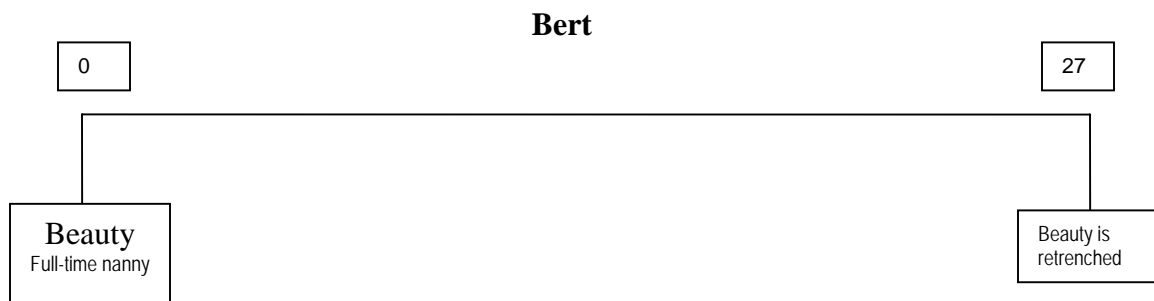
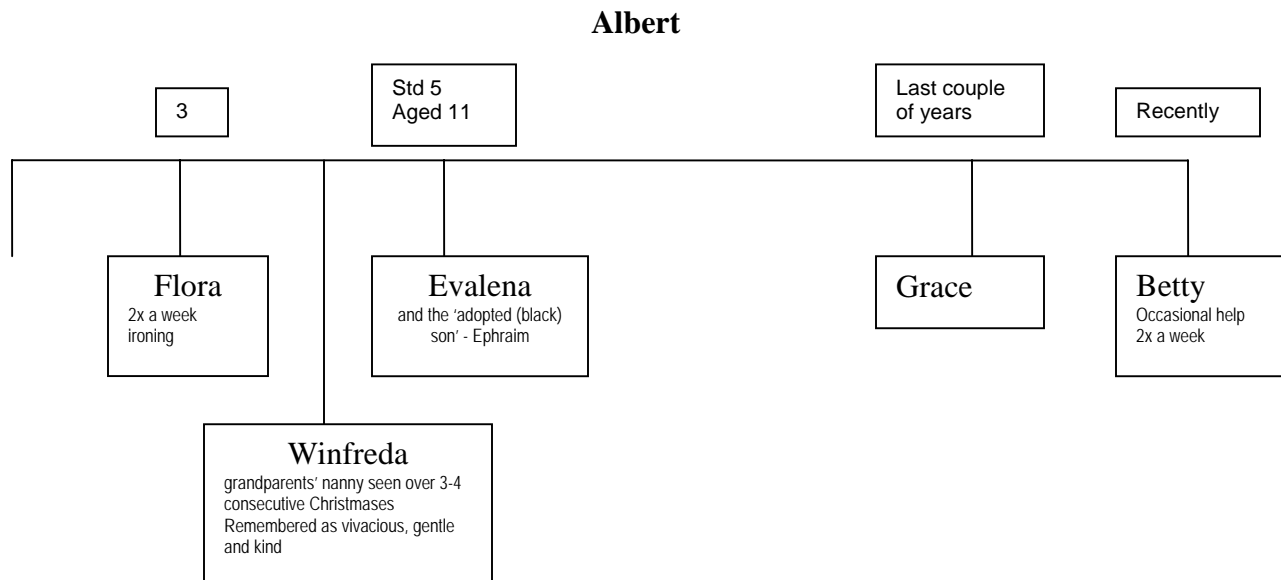
<sup>48</sup> Twenty one was taken as a threshold not simply because this is the colloquially 'accepted' chronological starting point of adulthood, but because if the participants would have at least have been in the adolescence (13 for the youngest participant) by 1994, they would have spent the preponderance of their childhood living under apartheid. Employing the age 21 threshold, most interviewees would have matriculated or reached the end of their secondary schooling by at least 1990.

<sup>49</sup> There was no specific criterion employed to appraise "willingness to reflect on very personal aspects of themselves and their early history". I make the assumption that implicit in agreement to participate in the study is some readiness to reflexivity.

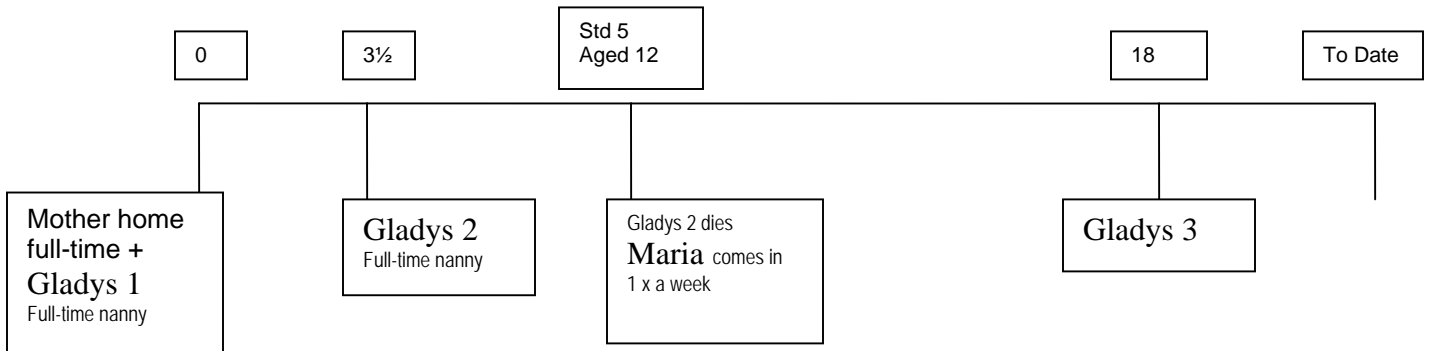


each respondent’s broad demographic profile. In order to protect confidentiality, I use pseudonyms for both participants and their nannies, with age and geographic place of origin given in broad terms.

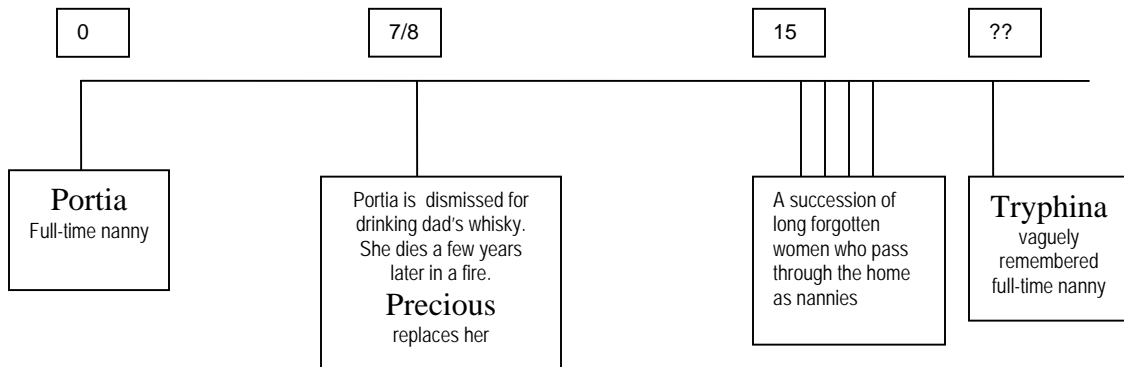
**TABLE 1 - NANNY TIMELINES**



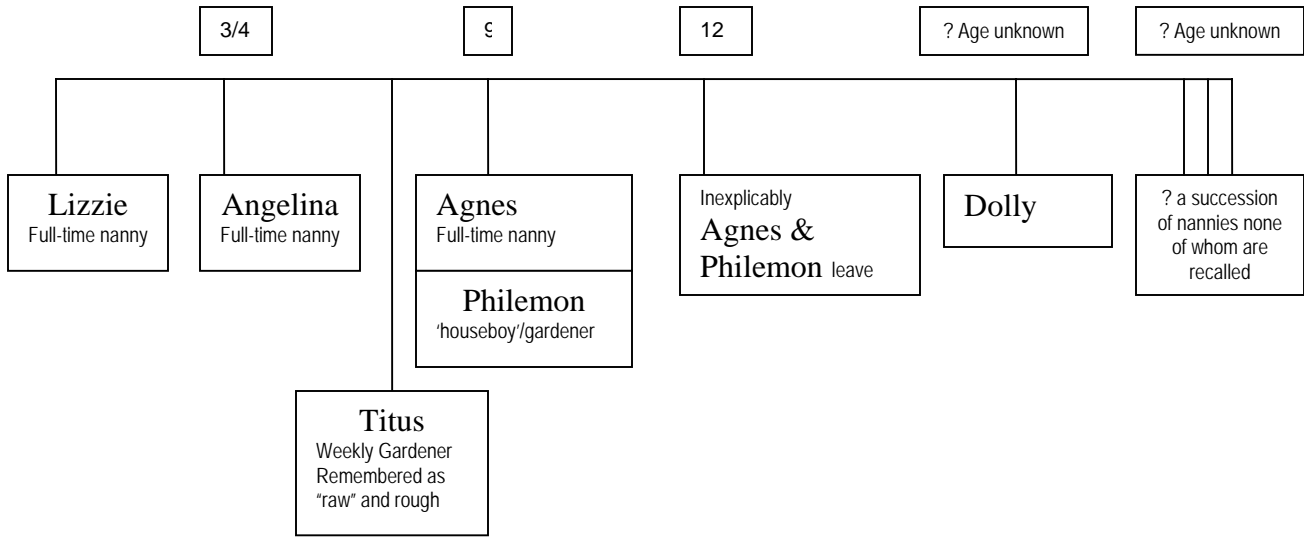
### Clifford



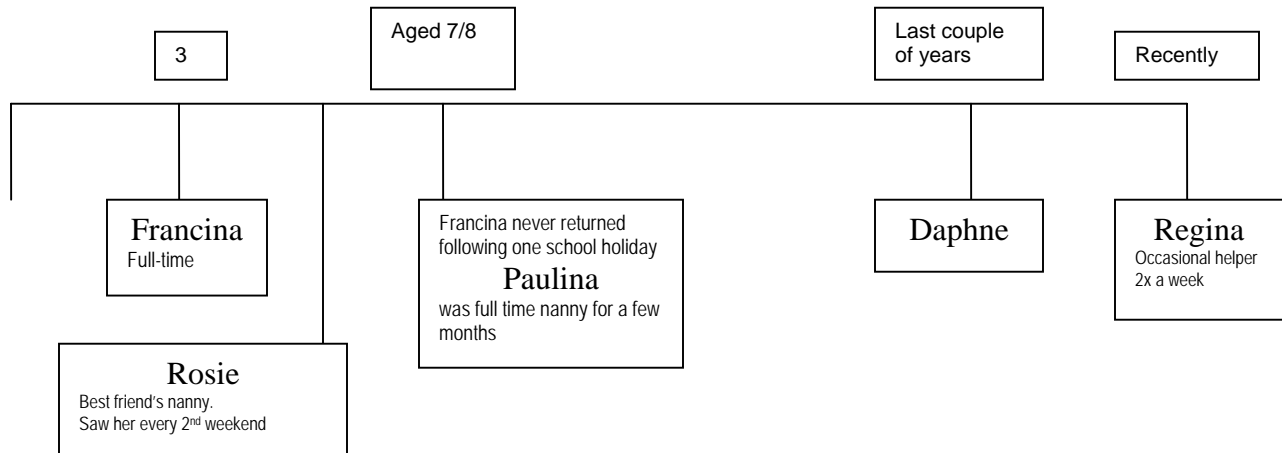
### Dave



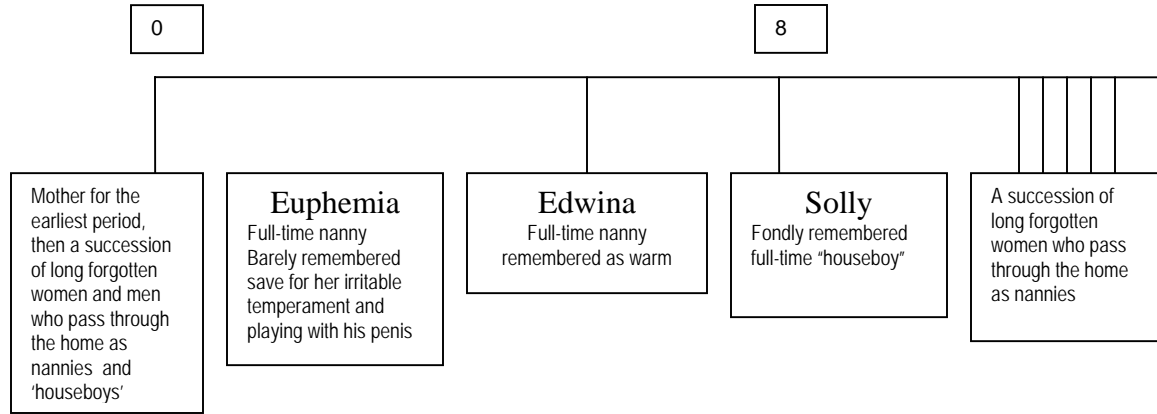
### Eric



**Fred**



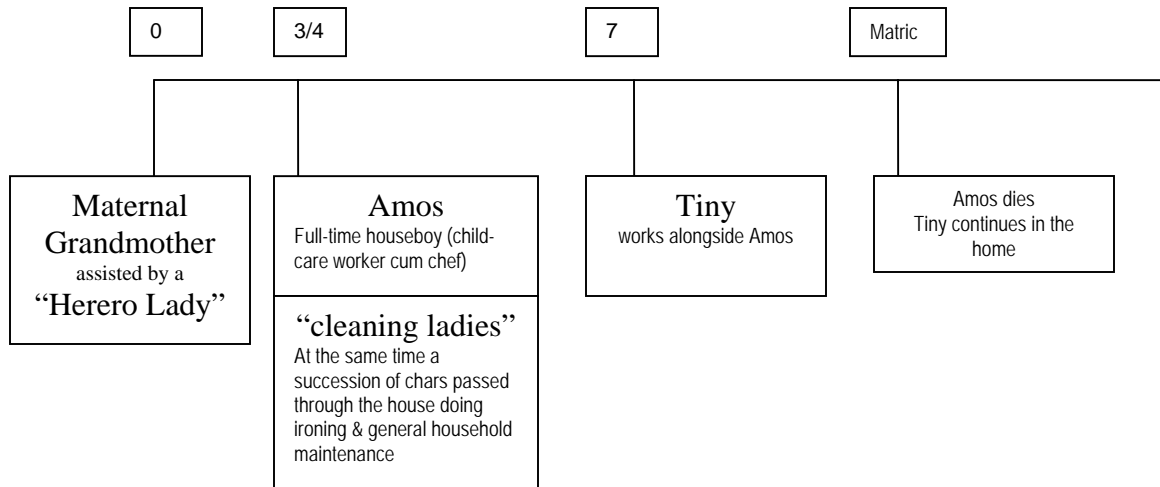
**Gavin**



**Harry**



**John**



**TABLE 2 – PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>	<b>Place of Origin</b>	<b>Home Language</b>
Albert	30's	bourgeois	left wing	Johannesburg	English
Bert	50's	affluent	liberal	Johannesburg	English
Clifford	20's	bourgeois	conservative	Pretoria	Afrikaans
Dave	30's	poor	conservative	Gauteng	English
Eric	40's	affluent	liberal	Johannesburg	English
Fred	40's	poor	liberal	Gauteng	English
Gavin	60's	poor	left wing	Johannesburg	English
Harry	30's	affluent	liberal	Johannesburg	English
John	40's	bourgeois	conservative	Windhoek	Afrikaans

If we look at Table 2 we see that the participants' homes varied in terms of demographic profile, albeit not especially markedly. All would have been children during the latter years of apartheid, with an age range between mid 20's and early 60's. Most had lived the substantive portion of their lives in Gauteng, although some would have lived in different parts of the country, even as far afield as, then, South West Africa. If an interviewee lived

in a small town outside Johannesburg, this is given in the table as Gauteng. The class differences between subjects were not particularly marked. Middle-class would be the appropriate appellation. There was, however, variance within this, from those who were barely managing to maintain a privileged white middle-class lifestyle, to those who were very affluent, employing 3 or 4 servants at any one point in time. In Table 2, I make this discrimination with a loose tripartite distinction between “poor”, “bourgeois” and “affluent”. An indicator of this variance was father’s (who was mostly the primary breadwinner) occupation, which ranged from those who practiced a trade or were in sales, to professionals and company directors. Within the sample, different political affiliations were represented. The primary differences which distinguished homes tended to be sub-cultural. Represented was an Afrikaans home, an English home, a Jewish home, a socialist home, inter alia. Amongst the participants, most would have had a nanny more or less continuously in the parents’ employ from the participant’s early childhood (for some it was in their infancy), at least, up until matriculation.

Insofar as our concern is with the participant’s relationship with his nanny, it is appropriate to make some general observations about the nanny per se. Within the sample, as far as all participants were aware, all nannies were “sleep-in”, living on the premises of the family home where they worked. Interestingly, not only women were employed in a childcare capacity. In two cases, men, colloquially referred to as “house boys”, fulfilled the same function, albeit they were either not primary caretakers or were present for relatively short periods. The homes employing houseboys as secondary caretakers were Eric’s and John’s instances.

The population of white men who “had been looked after by a nanny” comprised a variety of childcare contexts. For most domestic workers in our group, childcare was one of many household responsibilities, which included cleaning, cooking and the like. These women thus may be aptly described as general household managers. In some instances, generally the exceptional ones, she was *only* required to look after children. These women had no specific skills in childcare, other than having been mothers to their own children, or a minder of their own siblings as a child.

As expected, not all subjects were able to remember all of their nannies. Where they were not able to remember, this was deemed to have been significant in itself. In line with our theoretical orientation, what was remembered and remnants of what was forgotten (if there were any) were more important than the facts. Participants, on the whole, had richly textured memories of the various nannies who made their way through their childhood homes. There were some remarkable stories; a good few as novel-worthy as they come. Almost every one of the participants was able to single out at least one of the nannies as “special”, someone with whom they had formed an attachment. These participants were able to detail the aspects of their experience in often touching ways. I think it would be fair to say that most subjects even surprised themselves in what they were able to remember, and some of the links they were able to make. This commonly flew in the face of their first sense of the inaccessibility of this information. Curiously, often those who were most reluctant to participate, or who felt sure they had nothing to say, had the richest material to offer.

### **5.2.3 Design**

To further assist in the operationalisation, it would be well to restate and clarify the core concerns. Following previous considerations, the experience of being cared for by a nanny can be conceptualised in a tripartite structure, comprising three focal interview areas:

1. *Memories of Nanny*

This is the biographical-life story step. Participants were requested to reminisce on their childhoods, more particularly on their childrearing experiences under the domestic worker’s auspices. They were asked to detail significant memories of their relationship/s with nannies. This information served as an anchor point for what followed.



2. *The Conscious 'Doing' to the Experience: The Inferential/Interpretative Step Considering Her Emotional Significance*

This is a reflexive component seeking to establish (the domestic worker's) personal significance for the participant in question. Subjects were invited to consider the connotation of 'this woman' and 'this relationship' on their personhood. Where they were asked for their inferences, it was not these reasoned responses that we were excessively interested in. The contention is that the inferential part, whilst likely to be interesting, (from a psychoanalytic point of view) may merely be an opportunity to defensively construct an explanation.

Both as a means of triangulation and to render a symptomatic reading, special attention was given to symptomatic psychological productions around the experience/s in question. As much as this provided new data, it also deepened understanding of the information provided under 1 and 2.

3. *Unconscious Processing of the Nanny Experience - Symptomatic Psychological Phenomena*

As has already been affirmed, symptomatic phenomena (dreams, parapraxes and psychological symptoms) have particular significance in psychoanalytic theory. Inter alia, they afford privileged access to motivational imperatives and intrapsychic conflicts. Inasmuch as the intimacies of childcare are so near to that which has been defined as taboo (trans-racial relationships), such unconscious material may afford us more direct access to the complexity of this relationship. These unconscious productions were a rich source of data affording access to aspects of "forgotten" or "unthought" significance. Towards the end of the interview, respondents were asked to reflect on any prominent dreams, associations, phantasies, daydreams or the like involving a person of colour (more particularly a black woman). Whilst this afforded insight into the participant's unique subjectivity, it was also a means to, inter alia, consider the participant's later 'trans-racial' relationship/s in the light of their early childcare experiences.

## 5.2.4 Procedure

### 5.2.4.1 Interviews

Prior to beginning the research proper it was necessary to get approval from the Faculty of Humanities' Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria. Likewise, I would have obtained the participants' written assent, having assured them of confidentiality. One to two individual interviews of approximately one-hour duration were conducted with each of the nine subjects. All interviews were tape-recorded to assist with the later process of transcription. Interviews were all conducted by the author in a manner in keeping with Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) "free association narrative technique". In this the interviewer defined his principal role as eliciting narratives. Each interview was allowed to flow as a conversation, the intention to encourage a story or series of stories. The distinctive feature of eliciting narratives was that it kept the respondent connected to concrete, detailed experiences (incidents or hypotheticals), while remaining closely tied to the theoretical interest in discrepancies. There were constant invitations to explain actions and feelings, motivated by the pursuit of contradictions, inconsistencies and irrational explanation.

As far as was possible, the researcher sought to adopt the psychoanalytic attitude, resisting the "interventionist ethos" which only serves to interrupt the respondent's associations. This posture revealed important clues about the person of the interviewee – his anxieties, characteristic defenses, etc. Rather than treating the interviews as indexing pre-existing theories/views about the "experience of being cared for by a nanny" they were interviewee-centered with the interviewer assuming a facilitative role (Frosh et al, 2002). In this, I picked-up on issues the interviewees raised and encouraged them to develop and reflect upon these and to provide illustrative narrative accounts. I adopted an informal, 'chatty' style in order to engender a "collaborative context", encouraging participants to take the initiative as they chose (to retreat and proceed as they felt comfortable). Questions and answers became a circular process, as I, together with the interviewee, tried to make continuing sense of what we were talking about. In the vein of

Hollway and Jefferson (1997, p. 55) remaining close to an interviewee's own experiences - a "yes" response would be followed by - "Why do you think that?" A "no" answer would be followed by "why do you feel that?". The protocol guiding the interview is contained in Appendix II.

#### **5.2.4.2** *Interviewer Afterthoughts – critical self reflection, note taking and the countertransference*

Reflexivity for the discursive psychologist is not simply a theoretical concept, it is a practical activity (Burr, 1995). They know as researchers that they cannot be detached. More is entailed though: interviewers must actively scrutinise their subjective involvement. In line with the psychoanalytic *modus operandi* informing this research, "subjectivity of the interviewer" extended to include unconscious, emotionally laden, conflictual forces rather than simply conscious ones. Walkerdine (1997) used examples from her fieldwork observations in families to argue for the importance of being aware of the researcher's feelings that were brought up in the interview (and subsequently when analysing it). To allow oneself to be guided in one's understanding (interpretations) by one's countertransference is based on the tenet that resonance "from unconscious to unconscious" constitutes the only authentically psychoanalytic form of communication (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1983, p. 93).

Throughout the research process the researcher kept a diary, an accompaniment to critically self-reflecting on: the data, his countertransference feelings and the research process as a whole. This diary was of later assistance in considering data analytic themes. Psychoanalysts certainly insist on such clinical note-keeping as an accompaniment to their work in the consulting room. Like Frosh et al (2002)<sup>50</sup>, following each individual interview, the interviewer recorded his impressions of the process of the interview; e.g.

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<sup>50</sup> Frosh et al (2002) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000; 2001) have their theoretical home in British (Kleinian and post-Kleinian) psychoanalysis. Projective identification is a critical theoretical concept. More psychoanalytically, it can be seen, at least in part, as a "countertransference" reaction on the part of the interviewer to the specific unconscious thoughts and feelings projected into him by any particular participant.

whether it was “easy” or “difficult”, whether he liked the respondent or not, how engaged the subject was, whether there were surprising aspects to it, any strong feelings and phantasies he might have had in the midst of the interview, as well as summarizing the important themes covered in the interview. These summaries were used later in the data analysis to track the emotional response of the interviewer to the subjects and to the process of each interview. This arises from the idea that this response is a product of the specific combination of participant and interviewer in each case, intersected by the emotional impact of whatever it is they talked about (Frosh et al, 2002).

I have reflected on my position as researcher and the generation of data at various points in the thesis. To once again directly take up some of these aspects. Talking with white men about their personal feelings, I anticipated some discomposure. It was not just a lack of familiarity with being under the researcher’s gaze that made them uncomfortable. Certainly “family”, “childhood” and “sexuality” are deemed particularly delicate matters. Talking in the interview situation about their memories of their relationships with their nannies required drawing on personal resources that were a far cry from bar-room bravado or the aseptic, clinical research into private lives of the likes of Kinsey and Pomeroy or Masters and Johnson. Thinking and talking about these things promoted anxiety. It certainly was difficult to strike a ‘cool pose’ (c.f. e.g. Frosh et al, 2002). There was a sense in which to be a participant required brazening out some measure of social embarrassment. The present research enterprise’s invitation to endure mortifying revelations in the name of “understanding” resembled the psychoanalyst’s injunction to speak honestly implicit in the invitation to free associate. Conspicuous was the fact that for individual men, his childhood relationship with his nanny was not something that had readily been canvassed before in his life, certainly not with the level of thoroughness entailed in our discussions. For a good few participants, their disclosures were a first – confiding aspects of themselves and their experience that they would not have told another person. Those who had reflected on such matters previously would most likely have broached these ‘secrets’ with an intimate. What was clear is that for men there is a distinct lack of opportunity to speak these things. Indeed there is no setting, other than say the psychotherapist’s consulting room, that facilitates such remembering.

At stake in confiding these things, inter alia, is the maintenance of social face (Goffman, 1971). At the first level I was aware of my own reluctance to invite friends to participate for fear of obliging them to talk about things that were “too personal”. Where it had been easy enough to chat in an informal setting, expressly to invite them to participate seemed somehow too intrusive. To wear my psychologist’s hat to gain access to potentially compromising personal information seemed unreasonable. Besides my ‘hang ups’ there were those who simply refused to engage with me on such matters. The clearest demonstration of this was the very limited response to the newspaper and notice board advertisements (one participant responded to each format). Inevitably what this meant was that there were selection effects. These were men who were not just willing to participate in ‘feely feely’ psychological research, but they were to greater or lesser extent able and willing to ponder their internal worlds. To put this plainly, we might say that those who did participate were more open, self reflexive and even ‘masochistic’ than most.

Amongst those who did participate there were a variety of signs of discomfort. For one thing, there might have been very high levels of vigilance to matters of confidentiality. Alternatively there might have been a tendency to talk in guarded ways, steer clear of their personal story. That interviewees felt shame was apparent in the request (made by a couple of interviewees) that I turn the tape recorder off should they talk about a particularly sensitive issue. Some would have not been so bold to ask, but might have broached more personal aspects only at the end when we were about to bid our farewells.

Not only was there the risk to their social personae but there was the further complication of how to speak these memories. For many, the experience of being cared for by nanny remains at the level of ‘unthought’, certainly not formulated in any coherent manner. This of course is most interesting from a psychoanalytic point of view. Further confounding is that these experiences in their very nature seemed to cohere around a muddle of competing thoughts, feelings and actions of love and hate (exploitation). As they spoke these contradictory aspects, participants availed themselves of a variety of psychological strategies wherein, as it were, the right hand could not see what the left hand was doing.

These difficulties of representation, amidst anxiety and competing narratives, are of course important matters that frame the possibility of speaking in the first instance. The issue of how awkward it was to speak about these things is plainly an important one which requires further consideration. As we shall see - there were very good reasons for wanting to dispense with the nanny experience.

Having said how difficult it was to articulate these remembered experiences, participants, nonetheless, spoke with enormous candour. It seems that my sharedness of social position - me too being a white apartheid man - afforded some men a feeling of permission to talk. Along these lines, participants' awareness that I was a psychologist might also have encouraged greater confidence than it would have otherwise. In spite of the discomfort in thinking and speaking about these matters, interviewees, for the most part, appeared to have relished the opportunity to confide. For some it was therapeutic to have done so. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000) observe, individuals have very limited encounters with people who seriously acknowledge or "really listen to them in an active, sympathetic and thoughtful way". At the end of the interview/s a number of participants reported being pleased to have been given the opportunity to be able to reminisce on themselves, their histories and about issues that they thought were long forgotten. In all, both interviewees and interviewer recognised the enormous potential this untapped personal historical resource had to offer psychological understanding.

### ***5.3 Data Analysis***

Before considering the concrete steps employed in the analysis of the data, I make plain my theoretical assumptions germane to this process.

### **5.3.1 Data Analytic Orientation**

Clearly, the choice of interpretative framework is a crucial issue for research which focuses on accounts and hence, language, yet does not take these as unproblematic or “transparent” (Frosh et al, 2002). Hollway’s (1984, p. 238) argument that any description of the subjectivities “requires an account of the investment that a person has in taking up one position rather than another in a different discourse” informs this research, as does her election of a psychoanalytically informed approach (as detailed at the beginning of the chapter). In the present study, the analysis of the data, as with the mode of data production, was founded on a combination of psychoanalytic and discursive theoretical perspectives. As has already been argued, experiences, psychic investments and subject positions are constructed and sustained amidst sociality (linguistic and cultural forms) and the unconscious. As much as childhood and symptomatic discourses are the natural data of psychoanalysis, a psychoanalytic narrative analysis approach is certainly not untoward. A psychoanalytically informed data analytic reading of discourse has been applied fruitfully by the likes of Frosh et al (2002) concerning masculinity, Hollway (1989) concerning men and women’s relationships and Walkerdine (1989) on ‘girlhood’. The decision to employ both thematic and narrative analyses to make sense of data in this way is originally Frosh et al’s (2002).

### **5.3.2 The Diary as a Starting Point**

Immediately after the first interview there followed a process of generating the “interviewer afterthought data”. These process notes recorded in a diary comprised the interviewer’s general impressions/observations, memories of what had taken place during and after the first meeting, observations about general ‘feeling facts’ and noteworthy (conspicuous/untoward) features of the interview. This information was used to make preliminary connections across different interviews, amongst other things.

Again adopting Frosh et al's (2002) approach, a summary of the main content and process of each interview was undertaken prior to the actual transcription of the interviews. What distinguished the interviewer afterthoughts and the summary was that the former were a way of accumulating descriptive detail while the summary was used to begin to convey some kind of whole. In line with our psychoanalytic commitment, it was important for summaries not to iron out hiatuses, inconsistencies and contradictions. "To grasp a person through the whole of what we know about him/her does not have to imply that s/he is consistent, coherent or rational" (p. 9). Together the summaries and the interviewer afterthought data provided a cue to exploring "countertransference" aspects of the encounter, which might have provided clues to subjects' emotional concerns. In addition, they allow analysis of the ways in which the subjects "co-constructed" their accounts with the interviewer in the interviews. (Frosh et al, 2002).

All the individual interviews were transcribed verbatim from the tape recorder directly by the author. Whilst time consuming, this was deemed a necessary part of the process of "immersion into the data". Transcription is not a neutral act (Ratele 2002; Strebel, 1994). Transcribing discourse, like photographing reality is an interpretative practice. Decisions about how to transcribe, like decisions about telling and listening are theory driven and rhetorical; by displaying text in particular ways, we provide grounds for our arguments, just like the photographer guides the viewer's eye with lenses and by cropping images (Riessman, 1993). Riessman's (1993) argument here is that even the use of an audio recording is selective, for it too inevitably entails "a fixation of action" (p. 14). Interviews were transcribed in the line-by-line transcription method, paying attention not only to what was said, but how it was said, pauses etc. This narrative approach to transcription is different from the "cleaned" speech in most qualitative studies. The transcription conventions employed in the present study are those recommended by Parker (1992, p. 124-125). To assist in the reading of the transcripts these conventions are included at Appendix III. These transcriptions were the primary data-set for the analytic procedures.



### 5.3.3 *Immersion in the Data*

As a precursor to more formally analysing the data, the researcher sought to immerse himself in the text of the interviews by doing a series of readings of the raw data. During this process, I might once again have availed myself of tape recordings to rekindle the mood of a specific interview. At this point, significant extracts of the interviews were highlighted. Again the underlying philosophy was to attend closely to the form and content of each subject's description of his experience. While engaging in this process the author was at pains to maintain a gestalt in the face of the pressure to fragment and code the data. After a protracted period 'mulling over' the transcripts of a particular participant the researcher would feel himself "inhabited by the person in the sense that his imagination was full of him" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Hollway and Jefferson (1997) go further in talking about their subjects appearing in their dreams and waking fantasies. This, too, occurred in a few instances for the present researcher, more specifically as unsolicited thoughts and daydreams over the period of being steeped in the data. Such reactions are not untoward in the psychoanalyst's "unconscious *embrace* of another person" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The optimal detachment between researcher and researched, specified in psychoanalytic terms, should be "sufficient distance from the impact of the patient to think, yet not so much distance that empathic sensitivity and counter transference receptivity get lost" (Frosh, 1999, p. 387).

### 5.3.4 **Thematic Analysis**

As a way to begin to make sense of the voluminous narrative data, the interview material was sorted according to themes. This afforded an aid to begin to consider the capacious and complex data. Themes were systematically sorted on the basis of research questions rather than employing a set approach. In line with Frosh et al (2002) this effectively amounted to taking "sweeps" or "cuts" through the material guided by theoretical considerations and by key themes that arose from a close reading of the interviews.

In practice, thematic sorting meant identifying an issue which I sought to explore, extracting all material relevant to this issue from each of the interviews, categorising this material according to themes to be found within it, and then producing an analytic account of how these themes co-articulated. There was a quantitative component to this procedure, in that it enabled an enumeration of the frequency with which participants addressed issues in particular ways. Nevertheless, the main thrust of the analysis here was qualitative, constructing an in-depth account of the way our respondents made sense of the issues that were discussed with them (Frosh et al, 2002).

*The concrete data analytic steps will be presented following Narrative Analysis.*

### **5.3.5 Narrative Analysis**

There are a range of culturally and historically specific prototypes or plots which act as the scaffolding of our own life stories and through which they may be understood. This, Bruner's (1990) canonical narrative, is a means to conceive of ideology and discourse as it constitutes and engages concrete lives. *Canonical narratives* stand alongside *personal (autobiographical) narratives*. Canonical narratives can be identified in individual accounts alongside more "personal narratives" arising out of speakers own biographies. This distinction can helpfully be applied to the narratives produced by our men, in that they are personal and nuanced, yet imbricated in their local culture. Such a dichotomy is facilitative of operationalisation of a distinction between the realm of culture and discourse and the realm of personal biography, affect and the unconscious. Frosh et al (2002) used this approach successfully in their investigations of London schoolboys as did Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier and Pyett (2001) in their examination of teenage mothers' lives. Kirkman et al (2001, p. 283) neatly describe the relationship between canonical and personal narratives: "My personal story is some version of a more general story of how life proceeds in my culture." Before proceeding, it would well do to elaborate Bruner's (1990) concepts.

Personal narratives are not the work of a single author. They are dialogically constructed with those involved with the narrator. Autobiographical narratives are embedded in their cultures: they are structured in cultural terms and cultural forms. They arise out of participant's biographies. Many factors: biological, personal, social will influence the emplotment of each man's autobiographical narrative. In taking on a life of their own they may transform the conditions of their emergence.

Canonical narratives are the "received wisdom" borrowed from the narrative stock, guiding us in constructing and understanding our lives in ways which are appropriate to our culture. We enter society with one or more imputed characters – roles which have been drafted, and which we must become skilled at in order to be able to understand how others respond to us, and how our responses to them are apt to be misconstrued.

Canonical narratives are also the means by which we learn the cast of characters in the drama into which we are born. It is through hearing and telling stories that a child learns what a child is, a parent is, what a nanny is, and indeed what he himself is. One is situated in social space through these narratives as one is recognised and granted identity.

### **5.3.6 Concrete Data Analytic Steps**

#### **5.3.6.1 *Regarding Memories***

In beginning to approach the data, attention was given to the language and representation of experience in the talk of the informants, as much as the content. The form of narrative analysis employed was the linguistic approach to the systematic study of accounts (Gee, 1985; 1986; 1991; Riessman, 1993; 1994). Analysis followed Riessman's (1993, p. 61) suggestion of beginning with the structure of the narrative. Likewise, to the fullest extent possible, analysis "starts from the inside, from the meanings encoded in the form of the talk and expand outward, identifying, for example, underlying propositions that make the talk sensible, including what is taken for granted by speaker and listener" (Riessman, 1993).

As a first step, a summary Listing of All Experiences was drawn up. This listing was made up of a word or words, even a short sentence or two, of what comprised the participant's specific stated experience. Already at this stage, some unpacking of the text was called for. From the listing, a Comprehensive Catalogue of Themes was developed. Here the intention was to ensure comprehensive coverage of types of experiences our participants would have had with, or associated with their nanny/nannies. The raw data was again referred to, to ensure that no one type of experience was omitted. In drawing out themes, the research questions comprised the primary referents. Specifically, I was concerned to focus on the *relationship* - the interactional exchange between the two primary protagonists. Of interest was "who did/said what to whom and with what effect?". Essentially - what happened in the story, how did the plot unfold, how were the respective protagonists' actions construed. It was deemed important to cover the full gamut between loving and hateful engagements as they emerged in the disparate experiences. At this point there was a beginning of Observing Commonalities. Commonalities formed the basis for a First List of Themes. Under a specific rubric/theme, a particular type of engagement between the two participants was captured. The data, thus, had begun to be classified. Inter alia, note was taken of those that arose with the greatest frequency. Again, at this stage, it was important to avoid the loss of any possible "types" of interpersonal exchanges between nanny and little boy. Again I referred back to the raw data, notes and listing of all experiences, to ensure that all the little themes were able to address all the specific types of experiences. Now having such a first list of themes, I began Merging Themes. Strategies for data reduction were informed by Riessman's (1993) analysis of the poetic structure and her employment of Bell's reduction to the core narrative. A narrow course was stepped between redundancy (too much information) and the loss of important information (under inclusive categories). A Second List of Themes was developed.

Having established a list of themes, so began a second phase of detailing memories: the Analysis of Narrative. As a starting point, the second list of themes was considered in the light of Bruner's (1990) distinction between canonical (cultural) narratives and personal (autobiographical) ones. This separation occurred relatively easily, for the men seemed to

have made the distinction between what it was to be looked after by her, and what it was to be her employer's son (specifically to be white, male, middle class in her company). Those latter stories, canonical narratives, very obviously seem to have had their origins outside the dyad. Included here were any specific messages about how the participants were instructed to be within the relationship with one another that were not theirs. Having sorted "remembered experiences" into personal and canonical narratives, transcripts and themes listings were once again scrutinised to discern which specific messages canonical narratives sought to purvey. From the data set three clear canonical propositions were distilled.

The raw interview data was read again. In this analytic phase, notice was given individual protocols rather than the entire sample of accounts. Transcripts were revisited with an eye to discerning how individual men fared in Reconciling Anomalies, specifically competing versions of experience proffered in personal and canonical narratives, if indeed they sought to do so. Having read each transcript – the particular type of rationalisations/explanations a particular man employed was noted. Comparisons of these rationalisations/explanations then were made across respondents. A complete listing of rationalising strategies was created. A final inventory of "ways of dealing with the contradictions was developed", again by merging themes.

#### **5.3.6.2 *Appropriating Experience - Nanny's Continued Existence in the Present***

Intra-individual analyses were once again conducted using individual transcripts. Considering the interview as a whole, data on this occasion was treated like a tract of clinical material. Specifically, now, the intention was to see how individual subjects had appropriated their experiences. The question was – what, if anything, had been done to memories. The interest, in particular, was with the specific form nanny would take if she was in any way alluded to in an individual's present life. A typology of "what was done to nanny memories" was created - ranging from those who simply retained nanny as a memory to those who appeared to be continuing to engage her in one or other

symptomatic way. In doing this symptomatic reading, going ‘beyond’ or ‘beneath’ participant discourse, I did not have the kind of interpretative verification available to the psychoanalyst in the consulting room, therefore that which could be developed were tentative hypotheses. Such a move as Frosh et al (2002, p. 41) say “has to be made cautiously and respectfully to be sure”.

The themes in their final form, as taken up in the results, are enumerated below. Apparent in this inventory, is the complicated tree or “mind map” relationship between one theme and another.

## 1. Detailing Nanny Memories

### 1.1 Personal Narratives - “Remembered Black Hands”

#### 1.1.1 The Daily Labour of Love

#### 1.1.2 Part of the Family

##### 1.1.2.1 A Rescuer from Parents or Siblings

##### 1.1.2.2 Joining with the servant as an act of rebellion

##### 1.1.2.3 Rivalry for her Affections

#### 1.1.3 My Body/Her Body – Childhood Sexuality and the Nanny

### 1.2 Canonical Narratives - The Experience of the Relationship as a Cultural Moment

#### 1.2.1 “I never really knew her”

#### 1.2.2 She is so Readily Dispensable

#### 1.2.3 “’n kaffir op sy plek”

##### 1.2.3.1 In the Servant’s Quarters

#### 1.2.4 Stepping Outside the Home – “I live in a racist, exploitative society”

### 1.3 Nanny’s Continued Existence in The Present

#### 1.3.1 As a Cherished Memory

#### 1.3.2 As a Real Relationship

#### 1.3.3 As a Symptom

## 5.4 Concluding Remarks

The present research sought to elicit a narrative/s of being looked after by a black nanny structured according to the principles of free association. Where participant’s problematic of this experience (the manifest account) was likely to be interesting, this was not the only concern. It was a symptomatic reading of their narratives that would have assisted

in, inter alia, recovering remnants of the nanny as she currently ‘existed’ in a participant’s life. The present investigation thus employed an analytic framework with a focus on emotionally laden material, on absences as well as presences in the ‘texts’, as a way of documenting both the conscious positions taken up by men who have been looked after by a black nanny, and their less clearly articulated wishes and anxieties. The interview process was certainly a productive enterprise. Coming out of these discussions was a body of narratives that were complex and abundantly textured. The distillation of themes, including their theoretical significance, will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RESULTS**

#### **6.1. Introduction and Layout of the Chapter**

This chapter comprises an enumeration of the principal findings of the present research. As every clinician knows there is a risk with richly textured material of premature interpretation. To avoid such pitfalls I am going to follow in the empiricist vein and, as it were, first present ‘the facts’. A more informed consideration of some of the many issues raised follows in Chapter 7 – the Discussion.

White men’s *memories of their childhood nannies* at their most essential comprise two types of stories: this is the bifocal lens of personal and canonical narratives. I commence presenting the research findings with personal narratives, what I dub “remembered black hands”. Every participant, except for one, described a deep and meaningful connection to at least one nanny. She was steeped in their daily care, the most basic instrumental tasks as well as ‘sophisticated’ psychological “containing functions” (Bion, 1962).

The derogatory colloquialism, “n kaffir op sy plek”, most aptly marks the little boy’s engagement with canonical narratives. Critical to this moment was not just a re-designation of the nanny in the realm of alterity, but the awarding to the child his privileged position in the social order. Throughout these two sections, comprising the domain of memory, I will employ participants’ actual words, as they pertain, to convey something of the sumptuousness of idiographic accounts.

Finally, having detailed our participants’ remembered experiences, there is the matter of *how nanny continues to exist in the white man’s current life*, if indeed she does so. For most participants there is a trace of nanny to be found in the present. Nanny’s continued existence in the minds of her charge takes various forms - as a 1. (usually fond) memories 2. a real relationship or as 3. a symptom.



## 6.2 Detailing Nanny Memories

### 6.2.1 Personal Narratives - “Remembered Black Hands”

The personal narratives consisted of a variety of engagements between the nanny and the little boy. There were nannies for whom childcare was a contractual obligation, one chore among many. Almost without exception, every participant recalled such a detached, background figure, either consumed by the demands of the job, or merely disinterested in them<sup>51</sup>. As much as this was true, there was a nanny with whom they shared an extraordinary closeness. Participants’ personal narratives comprised stories on what it was to be cared for by her.

As our men rifled through their memories, over and over again, there was the recovery of long forgotten physical closeness. As they began speaking about their past, they were able to recover moments of startling intimacy, instances of her devotion existing vaguely in the recesses of remembrance. For every participant, except for one, they described a deep and meaningful connection to at least one nanny. Nanny was steeped in their daily care. In the ensuing pages, it will become clear that this was not merely a warm and secure association - it was constituted in some notion of “specialness”. Given the mutual privileging between child and caretaker, it would be accurate to describe this as an attachment in the terms in which Bowlby (1980) described it. Arguably the child’s reaction, his capacity to form such a ready attachment with a stranger is unremarkable. Quite simply, putting a young child together with a caring adult is an invitation to

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<sup>51</sup> For some domestic workers this was merely a job. Some men recalled, amidst the succession of women, at least one or two who were overwhelmed with the demands of household duties. The child seems to have readily sensed that he was just one of many job tasks. There were other women, subject to the constant interference by their employers, who might have taken their frustration and resentment out on the child. As much as this attitude may be circumstantially created, it could just as well have been about the nanny’s personality, or her specifically not liking a particular child. Our respondents variously recounted sulky, withdrawn, uninvolved women. As able as they might have been to identify these remote, even malevolent figures, they tended to recede into the background, existing in mind as someone that is best forgotten.

The obvious conclusion is that she made no impression on them whence she is lost to memory. There may be more insidious reason for this forgetfulness. Indeed the inability to recall may well be some unconscious talionic response – a reprisal for the narcissistic injury they suffered at her hand- she is cast into oblivion as she dismissed them all those years ago. The little boy’s subjection to nanny (qua adult) may have formed part of the white man’s ‘weak spot’. This issue is explored more fully in the theoretical discussion.

attachment. What must be borne in mind is that these are children who would already have suffered their first disappointment – the loss of their first love object, to pregnancies, to employment, to the mother’s decision to employ a childminder. Certainly it would seem that given the extent of nanny’s involvement in these children’s lives, forming a deep and meaningful bond was natural. In the local context, this insight was appreciated, and so descriptively captured by the unlikely figure of Betsy Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid’s wife. Mrs. Verwoerd’s wonderfully descriptive term “Remembered black hands”, penned in a debate in the Rand Daily Mail of the 1970’s centred on her declaration that for this reason alone she would not allow a black domestic worker to look after her children (Weltz, 2002)<sup>52</sup>.

Respondents were repeatedly taken aback at what they remembered of nanny’s fidelity, her constancy and magnanimity. As they spoke, it was almost as if they surprised themselves in what they could recollect. These loving aspects do not form part of the ready-at-hand, public discourse. The question arose - was this only the exemplary fulfilment of duty? For the participants the answers, predominantly, resembled Gavin’s: “One didn’t know for sure if they really did care for you or love you. I’m just assuming that, because of the care that they took and the anxiety they felt about us”. One would talk about her loving him long before he could ever remember any feelings of affection for her. Time after time, respondents affirmed that such was her generosity, that she treated them as if they were her own children. We are left to speculate - is this a distortion of memory, or perhaps the child’s narcissism which presumed her love where he needed it? As they applied their adult minds to the specifics of their own situations, most were led to conclude that she transferred her love of her own children to them. These aspects, as they emerged in the interviews, will be elaborated on further in the sections that follow.

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<sup>52</sup> Try as I might have I was unable to locate the newspaper source wherein this debate took place. Purportedly following Mrs. Verwoerd’s declaration, Wits University sociologist Henry Lever took issue in the public debate by disputing whether, in fact, attachment occurred (Weltz, 2002).

**6.2.1.1** *The Daily Labour of Love*

Those whose job function was defined in childcare were in constant attendance of their charge. Every aspect of looking after the child was her province. Routinely, there were all the basic functions of instrumental care – feeding, bathing, toilet training and the like. For participants, feeding assumed special significance in its close association with early maternal nurturance. For some, nanny played a role very similar to that of wet nurse, in her instance, though, she bottle-fed. She would make it her purpose to ensure that the little boy got his favourite food for lunch, be it Marmite sandwiches for lunch, or phutu pap and inyama, shared with her from the same pot. Some reported that, as children, they developed a taste for African cultural foods like mopani worms, morogo or specific brands of mageu. For Fred there were the recollections of bathing together in the zinc bath outside in the backyard sun:

“I loved bathing with her. Those big silver...you know those big silver baths..... I can see the bath. I can see the room, her room. I can basically vaguely see her and ...err ...the back yard and ....err ...the bath and I can see myself in the back yard with her”.

For Fred it is not only baths, it is Francina’s voice singing lullabies<sup>53</sup> that are recalled.

This, despite the fact that it was his mother who was the professional opera singer. Under Francina’s aegis, Fred’s care felt all inclusive. Dave’s remembrance corroborates this sentiment:

“.....if I can start off....I was involved with a....brought up, in Springs with a black nanny from age zero up till age.....it must be about 7. Thereafter the nanny.... I had nannies coming backwards and forwards but that was the one that really influenced my time....my life – her name was Precious. Now Precious was like a typical maid – good to us as kids ....err. Ja she...she looked after.....my mom and dad worked full day with jobs. And err when I started going to school she cooked and she prepared....She looked after me from start to finish. I suspect she must have cleaned my nappies as well....but I don’t recall”.

There were many hours of doing nothing in particular, whiled away in her company. An almost universal recollection is the afternoon hours, after school, in her care. Let us listen to Bert on the subject:

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<sup>53</sup> Of course, the means she used to soothe the white child was the vernacular lullaby which she would have used to nurse and comfort her own black child.

B: Errrrm but I do often remember. I have a lot of memories of coming home from school, putting my stuff down and then ..... having lunch there in the afternoon and just sitting around in the yard

SG: Yes?

B: Playing and errr talking to her.

SG: Yes?

B: Or just watching her doing things. Like if she was cooking....cooking food for herself, she was cleaning or she was just sitting there reading the paper or doing some knitting or something. I can see myself standing..... I have a lot of memories of standing around there asking her what she was doing.

There was night-time care when parents had other commitments or were simply going out on the town. At such times, nanny would have been the one to receive news of the day's happenings, or to tell bedtime stories. Each and every interviewee had tales of tokoloshe mythology - stories she would tell of the little man who terrorised vagabonds and naughty children.

There were other intimacies of care. John asserts that the basis of his self assurance derives from his early experiences with Amos, the houseboy:

SG: would there have been a lot of affection?

J: Oh yes. Oh yes. I remember him. I had a sleep in the afternoons

SG: Yes?

J: and he would sit next to me on the bed and he would rub my head like this (demonstrates with an affectionate pat/stroke of the head and hair) until I would fall asleep and errrr.....that ...that gave me this incredible sense of security. And when you wake up he's there.....

SG: He would be sitting there?

J: He would....Well he would be....he would be sitting.....I would wake up and at 4 o'clock – I would sleep for an hour in the afternoon

SG: Yes

J: and err.....4 o'clock he would be there. He would be hanging around. You know so – he was always there for me. And that's that sense of security that I have.<sup>54</sup>

For Fred what stood out about his middle childhood was the parental advice he received from his beloved Paulina. Even treats were associated with the child's caretaker.

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<sup>54</sup> For the likes of John, that his primary caretaker was for a brief period a man seems to have been irrelevant. In the child's mind it was not the gender that was important but rather the functions the person fulfilled. Arguably the two participants who had male caretakers available were able to subsume the masculinity of the childminder into the fact that the vast proportion of their experience was with women caretakers.

Purportedly she would purchase Fred toys from the local toyshop when his mother was away over protracted periods. Providing comfort included watchful looking after when Cliff was ill. Looking across their experiences, participant's recognised nanny amidst the mundane, but also at those critical developmental moments. For Dave, she not only fetched him from school each day, but she was the one who was there to witness his first swimming. In Bert's family, Beauty doing her duty was literally a '24-7' job. She even accompanied the family on coastal holidays in order to assist with household chores and childcare. Bert's first memories of walking on the beachfront are with Beauty. John's houseboy's situation was hardly different - he worked all year round, with no semblance of a private life.

It was in fact her reliability that was for many of the little white boys decisive. Bert reported "I have the feeling that because she was so constantly around, it becomes difficult to pin down anything specific. Listen I can say an infinite number of things.....she was actually with our family shortly after I was born and she stayed with us until I left home". She was the one who woke them up in the morning with coffee, who ran their bath, prepared their breakfast and ensured they were ready for school. For children like Bert just before he left for school, he and his siblings would, go into the parents bedroom where "mom and dad would be still lying in bed ..... and say 'goodbye'". For the likes of Bert, nanny was more familiar than his own flesh and blood mother. In his case he is unequivocal - Beauty was the primary parent: "My mom would occasionally do stuff ...but ....but the nanny Beauty was the mostly involved". Beauty's vernacular comprises his first spoken words even before his own so-called mother tongue.

Dave's parents would receive their children when they were ready - much in the way the Victorian gentry might have - "And they used to come home in the late afternoon .... by that time I would be bathed, I would be dressed in my pyjamas and stuff like that. They ...they....they would come home and we would sit down as a family. Sit down and chat. And she would carry on preparing the food and so errr.....so we ..... I did spend a lot of the time over there".

For Fred, the earliest memory he is able to access is of Francina. His tie with Francina is almost pre-verbal in its origins; it occurs “in that period of my life where I don’t remember anything else, going back to age 3, where there is very little I can remember”.

It was more than instrumental care. John tried to describe the ineffable link:

“I’m not sure what to call it – the relationship. All we can say is it was very close: that she would look after me, she would protect me and she would be my friend. My guardian (long pause) so that was very special (pause).....You know I would get up in the morning and I would go and hug her. That’s how our relationship was. I was, I think at one stage, closer to her than I was to my brothers and my sisters. Because of the age gap and they didn’t take the time ....they spoilt me....but they didn’t take the time out to play with me, when I wanted them to play games that I wanted to play. She would always do that”.<sup>55</sup>.

Her significance for Fred is clear:

SG: You felt like she loved you?

F: (very quietly) Yes

SG: And that you loved her?

F: Yes. I don’t .....Absolutely – I cared about her (quietly). She was very important to me (pause).

Given the pre-eminent importance of nurturance, our men commonly described the relationship in parental terms. The maternal metaphor was constantly in evidence. The notion of surrogate was seen repeatedly. Bert confirmed that as much as Beauty referred to him and his brothers as her “real sons”, he called her his “surrogate mother”. For Harry she was “my black mother” who sat alongside his white one. Fred linked his psychological survival to his “big black mama” - the succour received from her was the most significant he received from an adult in his first seven years of life.

Eric makes this sort of comparison with his father:

“I had a very good feeling about, it was Philemon (the houseboy). He just seemed like you all time good....good guy, nice guy, guy to feel comfortable with ....err ....I don’t think I’d go so far as to say he was a surrogate father (laughs). Because I had a very, almost vacuous relationship with my father, kind of non-relationship. But more significant – he was emotionally absent”.

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<sup>55</sup> We are struck by John’s qualifier - the relationship is compared to the relationship with the siblings and not his parents. In this he is typical – all said and done, having made the declaration he has – parents are idealised and nanny is relegated to second place.

Dave describes the familiarity with Portia in the concrete terms employed by Betsy Verwoed.

SG: if she was around when you were a baby – she would have been the one to soothe you?

D: she must have – but I have no recollection of that whatsoever.

SG: Touching – you have no sense of that at all?

D: No (definite tone). Black hands...I remember...kind of...slightly rough hands. Hands the inside of her hands.....I remember I was interested to see...the outside of the hand was dark black and the inside was white...almost like a pinkish colour...I was... I was fascinated by that. Ja. Ja. This is quite interesting just to talk about it

SG: It's fascinating – the image of the hands seems to stay with you

D: The hands that clean the floors (laughs)

SG: That's the roughness

D: Ja

SG: But you also have a sense that those are loving hands

D: Ja. Yes. Yes.

SG: You inspect them so closely – they are right by you

D: Yes – that's right.

SG: you're looking at them. You're touching them, playing with them.

D: That's right – old Portia (in a wistful tone) (long pause).

### **6.2.1.2 Part of the Family**

When the nanny took her place in family, she was initially an interloper, merely a servant with a job to do. Rubbing shoulders with family members day in and day out, she soon found herself embroiled in the idiosyncratic dynamics of this very particular small group. Some families would have made special provision for her as a 'nominal family member'. It was John's conservative Afrikaans family where "My dad actually came to see him (Amos) at home when he was ill ...and I remember that we used ...my mother would tell him to stay in bed and she would cook .....and put his food on his tray for him and we would take it for him in his room. So he was very much part of the family". In Clifford's family - when Gladys died the whole family attended the funeral. This was Clifford's first funeral. John concurred. Talking about Amos: "we saw them more part of the family than not part of the family. The day he died was actually quite traumatic for us (pause). He was...it was like a family member dying". This description is so telling, capturing the indistinctness of the caretaker's position, for alongside the suggestion of inclusion into the family is the racist impersonal pronoun "them". In Dave's family, despite the parents'



white working-class politics with its allied racism, Precious participates in “roundtable family discussions”:

“Her English was pretty good. Better than most cos I remember I recall, for instance, her – the whole family sitting around a breakfast table and she would be washing dishes – Precious would be washing dishes and we would have a debate right round the table, on a Saturday morning, talking about whatever had been happening in the news. Precious would have her input. My dad would say...and we’d all talk together. So it was quite close and err ....err...she could communicate at that level with my dad and my dad was err...conservative, yet he.....he liked her quite a bit, before she started drinking.....err .....err .....stealing his whisky. ....”

Others participants spoke of their family “adopting” servants or their children. Despite the diverse contextual meanings this might have had, “adoption” has the paternalistic ring of colonial welcome. For some, as the medieval lord defended his servant’s honour, so parents stood by the nanny. In Gavin’s family, this was their open opposition to apartheid:

“She was like part of the family. My parents were socialists. Now, this might sound a severe sort of contradiction but ....like all socialists-communists, basically, at that point - while playing Paul Robeson and going mad about the situation they had to work and so this ambiguity that they had servants. Erm just the attitude towards them was very different from other people. I remember my father rushing out and almost attacking a policeman when they did a pass raid, late at night. He nearly got arrested and so yes put it in my mind about treating people equally”.

The servant in the family was rarely just a passive witness to the run of family affairs. For soon upon her arrival, she was drawn in as a significant player in the family drama. Here she was expected to know her place. She was never to extend herself beyond her station. It is quite surprising how vague these norms were, for not only was she privy to the most private aspects of family life, but family members would often confide in her. A few of our participants have a sense of the domestic worker having been mother’s confidante. Fuelling these suspicions would be hushed conversations between mom and nanny, say, following an argument between the parents. In these they might have overheard mother intimating the troubles in the marriage, what she, the madam, wanted of her husband, what was important for her, what made her happy, what upset her and the like. At such moments, mother and nanny met as women, standing at odds with men.



**6.2.1.2.1 A Rescuer from Parents or Siblings**

The inimitability of nanny's position in the family both as insider and outsider commonly privileged her as someone neutral, who was at one remove from the fray. The child may have exploited this situation, using her as a retreat, a place of safety within the family.

Bert's family was a particularly high-conflict one, with his parents often at loggerheads. He observed that a common aftermath of such fights was that one or both parents withdrew, not only from one another, but also from the children. Beauty, it seems, was quick to recognise how distressing this was for the children, functioning as a "refuge". Bert reported that over these drawn out periods of strained household relations; Beauty would have been the only adult communication available to the children. Inter alia, it was Beauty who alerted him to the fact that father was having an extra-marital affair. Bert surmised that this knowledge was not simply an intuition, but awareness derived from the fact that her room was attached to the garage, enabling her to monitor his father's nocturnal movements. Reputedly, when the affair finally did become public knowledge, Beauty was the one to console the children. Beauty's offers of comfort extended to include offering solace after parental punishment or reprimand. Bert indicated that if she had ever 'dared' to intercede directly in the parents' heavy handedness, they would have "annihilated" her. Summing up Beauty's familial contribution, Bert observed that not simply did Beauty keep him and his brothers on something of an even keel, but that: "If it wasn't for Beauty we would have been insane".

Cliff's told of her taking the blame for his childhood misdemeanours:

C: ... I remember her. We were very naughty but she wouldn't tell my parents. That was a thing throughout all of that...where we were naughty and she would...you know...I remember breaking something and she would clean it up. I can't remember if it was her or the second one who took responsibility for something that I broke. I can't remember if it was the 1<sup>st</sup> one or the 2<sup>nd</sup> one. The second one was from about 3½/4 up until about Standard 5. Now I don't know how old I was in standard 5 (4) I've got no idea..... I remember I broke my mom's vase. But I think it was the second Gladys

SG: you broke your mom's vase...

C: and she cleaned it up and she took responsibility and I still haven't told my mother... I still (quickly and almost inaudible) I feel guilty. Nothing happened to her in the sense that my mother didn't scold her or anything. But I feel guilty that she took the responsibility.

On other occasions she aided and abetted the little boy, and so prevented his being chastised by the parents. This is Cliff again:

“I can't remember much about it um I remember when me and my brothers were very naughty. We were smoking and we were smoking. My older brother who is three years older than I was... was smoking at that stage...we were experimenting. I remember that I....she I puffed a cigarette um and my older brother was smoking with his friends. He was about 6 then and very naughty...and because he had older friends. I still remember her coming to warn us that my father was coming. I can't remember if it was we...if she gave us the toothpaste or we took the toothpaste ourselves to put in our mouths....to take away the smell. I can't remember...I remember getting the toothpaste. Whereas with the first, with Gladys it was clear...the way ....and also her hiding it away from. It was clear that ...not that it was condoning it but that it. ...that we must keep it inside. The cigarettes also for her...that was not a big thing....but the fact that she would prevent us from being caught...that she looking out for us....picking up the (inaudible)”.

She was not just protection from the parents, but she was also quick to spot iniquity in sibling disputes. A good number of interviewees reported how she would have interceded on their behalves against older brothers or sisters. Amos, for one, would not countenance Johns being bullied

“...he would get incredibly uptight with that...he couldn't ..... He would say to my mother .....he would say to my mother. If my mother would give me a hiding he would say that my mother was too harsh on me. And then she would go to great lengths to explain to me why I was getting this hiding. It was not that she would sort of brush it off and say you have got nothing to do with it –she went to great lengths to explain and I ...I ..... I know if I cry hard enough and I go and sit with him I'd get sympathy. And I think – you know - he talked my mother out of giving me a couple of more hidings than I would have got”.

In Dave's family, Precious got into the thick of things. Having prevented an older brother from bullying him, she would make certain that “mom would dish out retribution to my brother. And that obviously caused resentment with my brother and me.....who took great pleasure in giving me more stick”.

#### **6.2.1.2.2 Joining with the Servant as an Act of Rebellion**

Nanny was even an identificate in opposition to parental injunctions. On these occasion she would have been complicit in affording the little boy tacit or even explicit approval of acts in breach of parental regulations. There was Cliff's smoking which was permissible in Gladys' presence. Joining with the servant against the parents included illegal activities. This was how it was with Eric.

E: (softly) Yes (long pause). No ..... a much later recollection, also when I was about 3rd year university, we had a guy working for us who I remember was called 'Boy' – a scoundrel, total scoundrel. But errrrrm ....he had a fairly, kind of a good vibe – he used to get dagga for me on occasion.

SG: (chuckles)

E: And I had a very (pause).....good outlook sort of a joy with the feeling of subversion..... with the scenario I'm getting dagga from ....from my parents ....from the servants ..... the guy who was employed by my parents. You know something deliciously rebellious about that.

#### **6.2.1.2.3 Rivalry for Her Affections**

Given the presence of a sibling or another child in her care, rivalry for her affections was not atypical. This would take all sorts of forms. Cliff told about the ongoing fight between him and his younger brother as to who would have prize of place on her back. Intriguingly a few participants asserted that they were their nanny's "special one", having been singled out for gifts, toys, special treatment and the like. There was Harry who claimed to have "got a little bit extra from her" as compared to his brothers and sisters. There was John telling how his houseboy really "spoil" him. Or there was Dave, observing this "undercurrent" wherein Precious made sure that he was protected, giving him small change even after she was dismissed and would happen to "bump into him on the street". Alternatively she made certain that he was "given the prime piece of meat". Given the purported frequency with which "specialness" was reported, we are left to surmise its basis - is this that the present sample comprised participants who were always nanny's favourites, or is this the childish expression of little boy's loving and being loved by her?

**6.2.1.3** *My Body/Her Body – Childhood Sexuality and the Nanny*

In the little boy's first efflorescence of sexuality, nanny would have been present. The eroticisation of the relationship is noteworthy to the extent to which we bear further testimony as to how nanny came to assume all that typically belonged to primary caretakers. "Childhood sexuality" is used here in the sense in which Freud spoke of "infantile sexuality". It is a domain of sexuality that is distinct from adult sexuality wherein genital satisfaction is emphasised. It embraces a whole range of excitations and activities, which may be observed from infancy onwards, whose aim is to procure pleasure rather than satisfaction (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1983). It is always in the form of desire that Freud identifies infantile sexuality. As opposed to love, desire always has specific somatic foundations. The family is the firmament of sexuality *qua* somatic excitations. The child's first sexual awareness arises in the caretaking context surrounding rudimentary bodily functions. In the ordinary caretaking situations, the child first recognises his own body and that of the adults around him.

These matters were inaccessible for some. For these participants, the idea that nanny's sexuality was the subject of their childhood attention, or that this relationship could in any way bear on their own sexuality, was as unthinkable and absurd as the notion of infantile sexuality was to the Victorian world. Notwithstanding these, a good number of participants spontaneously volunteered infantile sexual aspects of their lives at the interviews.

To illustrate how deeply she was absorbed in our men's psyches, more detailed interview material provides a point of entry. Each of these examples is enormously rich, and will be dealt with here in a somewhat adumbrated form. The accounts we bear witness to, occur at the first dawning of sexuality. They include ordinary childhood concerns with anatomical differences, otherwise the child searching for some form of corroboration of his sexual theories. Simply put, this is curiosity – a normal, productive and healthy feature of development. It is the quest to understand origins. We could simply leave it at that. However, what each one of these stories have in common, is that the child's

preoccupations centre on the person of his nanny. And it is with this fact in mind, that research participants' observations and feelings take on new significance.

The first data fragment, innocent and wonderfully intimate, has been referred to before. It concerns Fred's early bathing with Francina in her zinc bath outside in the back yard. I reintroduce it here to affirm how natural and perhaps inevitable it was, for the child to have feelings for his nanny, including sexual ones. For Fred, his regular bathing with Francina is one of his nodal childhood memories. It is one remembrance around which much of his sense of his relationship with his nanny coheres. Fred's first nanny was the most involved adult in his early life. He affirms that despite nominally having a mother and two older sisters available, she was also the only one who was truly accessible to him at this critical time. Whilst the child bathing with his nanny (as with his mother and father) is many things, it centrally involves observing her naked body at close quarters. Such a setting is highly evocative for the child. It is these ordinary caretaking situations that stimulate excitations in the sense in which Freud talks of sexuality, that is not a genital sexuality. Another similarly evocative situation would have been the tending of bodily hygiene functions. In such a context, the nanny's cleaning the child could stimulate and perhaps even rouse pleasurable sensations in the genitals for the first time.

Given the intimate proximity with their nannies, it was not unusual for some participants that the first naked woman's body to have been seen (other than mother's), would have been nanny's. It may have been that the first female body that was eroticised was a black one. There were the "doctor-doctor" games with her children, the proverbial bursting-in while she was bathing or on the toilet, peeping through her window whilst she was changing or looking up her skirt. The example that follows suggests that the line between curiosity and scopic possession is not easily drawn. It centres on a pubescent Dave, who repeatedly lifted his nanny's skirt, despite her repeated protestations. Within Dave's account a number of elements were conspicuous. It was patent that he was very uncomfortable talking about these things. As I listened to him talk he seemed to get into deeper and deeper trouble. Having strayed into these areas blindly, he used humour to put his feelings at a distance. Immediately, I was struck by his sense of entitlement – he

believed he could scrutinise his nanny's genitals in a way that he would not with anyone else, be it his mother or another stranger. At the end, in declaring his intention as playful ("to tease"), he as it were, really gave himself away, making manifest that it was not only precocious curiosity that was at stake, but also power. This was the little boy's first experimenting with his social position; availing himself of the advantages of what accrues to being white and male. What we see then, were his sexual interests, and also a demonstration that he could assert his will over nanny's, even to the extent of intruding upon her most private self, secure in the knowledge that there would be no repercussion.

Clifford's story began in a similar vein. However, it takes us down a different path, invoking other interesting associations.

C: ...my older brother had pornography...it was when he was standard 5 so I was plus minus standard 2 standard 3...and I remember him giving me the stuff to look at and I left it in my room...afraid that my mother would find it...and if I ...if ..Ja ...it was as if it was put in another place ...and she (the nanny) told me it was put in another place.....I left it on the table there, just by my books and papers and stuff. And she put it in the drawer and she told me that she had put it in the drawer....

SG: Interesting...what do you make of that?

C: Now?

SG: Seems like you didn't want your mom to see but Gladys ended up seeing it

C: Well it felt ...I didn't feel.... I didn't....I remember that nothing that I did would be judged. I wouldn't be a bad person if she...if I ...if I broke something or if I left something lying around. There was never...there was never judgement....and something like that I think my mother would have frowned upon. So the fact that she put it away and she told me that she put it away..... What do I make of it?...I didn't feel embarrassed that she had seen it. It wasn't important. I didn't feel guilty that she saw it...and I remember at a later stage, my brother gave me a second book and I showed it to her.

SG: aha

C: She said she didn't want to see it. I must put it away. I must put it away. That was strange, ja.

SG: what do you think you were doing in showing it to her?

C: hmm I don't know (smiles)

S: I see you smile – perhaps there was something playful about it?

C: it was playful because she didn't want to see it. She didn't want to see it but she wasn't angry. It wasn't like.....now I gonna get a hiding now, it more like ...I got the idea that it was wrong. I mustn't show her, I mustn't look at it. But she didn't say. ... She didn't tell me what I must do. It was more, "don't", "put it away", "Hmmm – you mustn't let your mother find out what kind of ....." (inaudible) I must put it away. It didn't feel ...I dunno why I wanted to show her. There was a strong pull to show her. I remember when my brother gave it to me...well it was

another book that he gave to me. I think the following year and it was the first thing that I did was to show her. I dunno why? (5) It must have been about standard 2, plus minus Standard 8 and my mother found out ...she found a book in my room (embarrassed laugh). She didn't say anything. (sniffs) but I know she found it. The next day it was....it was ...she spoke to my father about it and she joked about it (downward inflection to voice) and that her son's are looking at (inaudible) and things like that (nervous laugh). Ja ...lady who used to stay – her children – she had an older daughter. I did fantasise about having a relationship.....but that...that was just a fantasy at one stage...

SG: with her daughter?

C: not Gladys. Phindi and Jabu....Jabu had an older sister.....I saw her naked once (quickly) and I saw Gladys naked once. Not naked...just the top half (quickly) it was strange for me...we don't walk around with our tops ...but they walk around

SG: can you say more...she would have been a young girl a young woman

C: Ja (long silence).

SG: Have you spoken about this with anybody before?

C: No it wouldn't have gone down well with anybody (laughs). I think the first person that I saw naked was Gladys...the second.....not fully naked...but just the breasts.....besides my mother....we used to bath with my parents.....my mother used to bath us.... I saw my mom. But after...anybody outside my parents...that would be Gladys.....but it felt comfortable....but I think back ...it was also stimulating, in a sense. Maybe that's why I showed her the books – I dunno.

Hmmm- maybe a whole sexual dynamic dunno ...ah... ah I dunno. You can go and interpret that (laughs).

There is a striking similarity between Cliff and Dave's accounts: introducing a sexual self is more permissible with nanny than with any other woman (certainly more than with mother). For Cliff, this was Gladys' accommodating nature as compared to mother's evasiveness and propensity to ridicule. He suggests that his mother promoted in him a sense of inadequacy. The Oedipal aspects are manifest in this: he cannot have his mother, she is already spoken for and she makes no bones about this fact. In Gladys' instance, this is less clear. Nanny exists at a threshold – to have her is somewhere between incest and exogamy (Gallop, 1989). In psychoanalytic terms, mother's mocking laughter touches his castration anxieties. Where he makes a positive statement about nanny in this context, one must recognise he was also commenting on the position each of these women stood in relation to him. To the one he was answerable; the other was answerable to him. With Cliff, the erotic overlay was clear: he acknowledged a direct sexual interest in nanny and her child, which provoked excitement in him. As much as he admitted it, it is a deeply held secret. One that evolved many years later into furtive looking for black women in



pornographic magazines. We will revisit these issues when we consider remnants of nanny in the present.

Gavin, too, offered a fragment of sexual history, but this was much more difficult to code. It was almost as though, unconsciously, he was engaging with the fact of the inordinate power that she, as an adult, would have wielded over him, a child. He reported an incident wherein his nanny “played” with his penis whilst putting him to sleep. The memory took him back 58 years to when he was 5 years old. He was unable to make sense of it. He reported that nanny’s actions neither caused him discomfort nor pleasure. He recounted these incidents in a deadpan fashion, unable to ascribe anything either unsettling or gratifying to it. He admitted there was something about his manifest neutrality that was suspicious: “In fact the non-event is contradicted by the fact that I do remember that. Something sensible tells me – but it stayed in your mind – it obviously was an event. It is an event that I cannot put into any perspective in the sense that it is like this, or like that, like that or so or so”.

The interviewer’s first reaction to this account was to wonder whether this was a remnant of some childhood sexual abuse. This, indeed, may be the case. There was another aspect to this story – it comes so close to Freud’s description of the maid as “the ultimate seductress”. Directly Freud (1979/1914, p. 48) says “It is well known that unscrupulous nurses put crying children to sleep by stroking their genitals”. Underpinning such an assertion, is that she, as a member of the lower class, is capable of perversion (McClintock, 1995). There is Freud’s elaboration of the “common phantasy which makes the mother or nurse into the seducer” and notes that while “actual seduction is .....common enough; it is initiated either by other children or someone in charge of the child who wants to soothe it or send it to sleep or make it dependent on them” (in McClintock, 1995, p. 85)<sup>56</sup>. Most disquieting for the adult Gavin was the “strangeness” of the situation. We get the impression that whilst this may be his masked distress

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<sup>56</sup> Clearly there are various readings that might be given of such data. One feminist view (e.g. Potgieter, 1997) would argue that an act is sexual only inasmuch as participants construct it as such.



consequent on abuse, what really is strange, is the inversion of the power relations that he knows all so well, that normally exist in the world.

The last fragment arose in the nether world between dream and forgotten experience. Albert had some recollection of being in the servant's quarters with his nanny who had her breasts exposed. This initially comfortable scene was suddenly disrupted and the little boy became aware of a black man fondling these breasts. We can speculate that the frightening overlay to this picture was Albert's first happening upon the primal scene. This of course, may have derived from an actual experience, or it may be his dawning awareness of a substantial rival. Walking into her room ..... Stumbling into her room - his sense of entitlement, perhaps even precocious intent, was apparent. Much to his chagrin, he was rudely disabused of his sense of possession and prerogative.

I trace a line from Fred's noticing his nanny's body to Dave's taunting curiosity to Clifford's prying attention and arousal. These are very ordinary things - they concern the person who looks after the little boy – his nanny. By the time we reach Clifford, the interest is clearly prurient. He is stimulated as he captures her in his gaze. A fair measure of his excitement is his power to reify her. This is Sartre's (1972) "look" – instead of the customary being an object in her hands, he, as it were, catches her through the keyhole in a state of "being-in-itself". The scopic drive brings together a sense of mastery and excitement. Here a few facts are relevant. Principally she is accessible, the nearest person at hand. More pejoratively, she is easier to exploit in this way than other adults. For, amongst other things, nanny was seen to exist in an intermediary space between adult and peer. This was a reconfigured Oedipal drama with the little boy triumphant in his imagined possession of the phallus. His sense of potency did not completely eliminate guilt and shame. His first conscious foray into sexuality was still at odds with incestual and other taboos: this was an infraction of generational and racist political prohibitions. By the time we reach Gavin and Albert, there is no doubt that nanny's caretaking has become overlaid with sexual feelings. These aspects become even more interesting and noteworthy as we venture into our subjects' adult sexualities, which we will address presently.

### **6.2.2 Canonical Narratives - The Experience of the Relationship as a Cultural Moment**

Participants' personal narratives establish how emotionally evocative the relationship was for the young child. Being under her care was particularly highly charged with feelings of tenderness. Obviously when culture entered the frame, the atmosphere seemed to change. The booming voice of apartheid discourses appeared to disrupt childish reverie. Issues of class and race barge into the picture. They were more than a backdrop to a psychic scene – these discourses structured the experience in important ways. For the child this concerned his membership of the white family, that nanny was merely related to him as an employee. Prior to this - already as the child he began to speak - he had been drawn into the everyday life-world of apartheid. At that point, though, he was not aware of it. While much, probably most, of what occurred between nanny and the little boy was not defined, the participants in our dyad were now called upon to act and be together in highly specific ways.

Apartheid existed as a series of canonical narratives. This was not the obvious direct intervention of the apartheid state but the workaday common-sense manifestation. In fact, we might say that as soon as our little boys began to talk as white boys, they had stepped into a particular universe of signifiers - the language of the hegemonic. The terms of meaningfulness and comprehension had already been ordained. Definitions of “nanny”, “mother”, “father” and “white boy child”, as much as they may have been felt to be private matters, had already been specified.

In the sphere of canonical narratives, participants might have been eager to enunciate the distinction between family membership and an employee status. It affirmed what it was being white and male in spite of being with nanny. It was about little boys' growing up with expectations of wearing their masters' mantles. The unspoken intent of these narratives is the preservation of the order of things, specifically the maintenance of power and privilege.

Engaging and reengaging with the data, a series of fairly distinct canonical propositions were apparent. These canonical narratives refer to nanny, but concern the participants in relation to the wider group (society), as subjects within history and as subjects within and possessed by power relations. As much as apartheid discourse is presented in this form, these narratives are not merely statements but have elaborated meanings attached to them. Where there may have been various strands, three canonical propositions were clearly distinguishable:

- 1. Her personhood counts for nought**
- 2. She is readily dispensable**
- 3. “n kaffir het sy plek”.**

Of the three, it is the third, summed-up in the colloquial racism of the time, that is most incisive. It is a politics of place and position, of socio-political designation. It defines the geographies of home in accord with the wider geographies of the society underscoring the contractual foundation to the relationship with her, her race and gender.

Substantive interview aspects of the three canonical propositions will be elaborated in the sections that immediately follow.

#### **6.2.2.1** *“I never really knew her” - Who she really was, was unimportant*

In the course of interviews, I found out very little about who the nanny really was<sup>57</sup>. Universally, participants knew almost nothing about the person of the nanny or her situation. In the more enlightened homes they might have known her surname, perhaps even the broad demographic aspects of her life. Dave’s sentiments are characteristic of most of the participants:

“I didn’t really know who she was and it didn’t really matter to me very much. All I have is a vague sense....all I knew is that ...her family she...she...her family stayed in Daveyton. I’m not too sure”.

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<sup>57</sup> By contract I got to ‘know’ the biological parents reasonably well. I certainly would have learned a great deal about their childrearing attitudes.

Certainly, as children they seem to have had little concern or interest to find out more about their nannies. Even as some of our little boys were interested, theirs was always more perplexity than curiosity. And even if there was curiosity, it was insufficiently compelling to move the person beyond a superficial knowledge.

The extent of our respondents' ignorance in this regard is quite astounding. Gavin's thoughts on these matters seem to resonate for most –

“Where did they come from? No one knew ...or, in those days, no one knew who they were, where they were, where they came from or what's important. There's no surnames. They called themselves Six-foot John just so that you could pronounce their names. Those were terrible days. You know the sort of servitude”.

Eric gives a passing thought to the fact that she may have a life that is independent of her caretaking role. This though, he explained, was subdued:

E: (spoken in an incredulous tone) It's a kind of fascination with these .... The fact that these people – it might well have been Elizabeth in particular – had any kind of life of their own. This was their room. This was their living space. Hey! This was their .....What was this about? Trail off into incoherence here. These are almost forgotten feelings.

SG: Uh huh

E: But there was kind of a muted sense of curiosity about how these people lead their lives. What were they about? And..... No sense of moral judgement. These people are here at our beck and call. They are just here to serve our comforts and they have lives of their own. What are their lives outside of here all about? Nothing .....

In the midst of the interview, Bert's inquisitiveness was momentarily piqued by thoughts of her other life. The only vindication Bert was able to offer for his ignorance is “I was not an insightful schoolboy”. This explanation, patently, does not go far enough.

For most participants, their lack of knowledge about their nanny was unwitting, a moment of blindness, a lapse. Initially at least, there does not appear to have been an express intention by parents (or anyone else for that matter) to eject her from the perceptual field. As it were “I notice her then I don't. I see but I don't look”. Part of the explanation must surely be the child's myopia, his solipsistic concerns with what is

directly imminent and at hand<sup>58</sup>. However, even this is insufficient reason in Bert's case, for his nanny would have taken care of him day in and day out, well into a period when he would have had both the intellectual and emotional wherewithal to understand. Ultimately, it may have had to do with the predominance of a singular recognition over all others, namely that she was first and foremost a servant. She existed as a placeholder, defined by her function, her position in the employer's home. All her attributes, thus, were deemed to be contained in her role. Other things about her, in these terms are really unimportant. Both her personhood and her life beyond the confines of her duties did not count for very much. Of course conceived in this way she was an easy receptacle for the child and parents' projections.

There may have been other times when a hand directly intervened to prevent true recognition e.g. proscriptions against entering her room that seemed to have little to do with preserving her privacy. The parents' direct involvement in the little boy's ignorance was patent in Albert's instance. The contact he had with nanny Flora was subsumed and policed by the micro-politics of maids and madams.

A: I don't have particular strong or resonant sense of Flora at all

SG: She is very much a background figure?

A: I get the feeling that it was a menial.....it was quite a menial position, *quite tightly controlled by my mother* (own emphasis).

For still others, the parents would have had a directly pernicious influence (in e.g. explicit bigotry) frankly, almost obliging the child to cast her out of his mind.

Where for the most part our participants were able to safely carry on with their lives, without giving much thought to who nanny really was, there were occasions when her separateness and independence came crashing into the little boy's space. These were rather unsettling moments. There were the likes of Albert's horrible shock when he stumbled in upon the primal scene of nanny and 'the other man in her life'. There may have been times when the oppressiveness of her wider situation would have encroached

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<sup>58</sup> Kleinian developmental theory may assist us here – the child's failure to apprehend what is before him may derive from a failure to attain full object appreciation. According to Klein, who follows Karl Abraham, the capacity for object-relationships - moving from the apprehension of part to whole objects is an evolutionary process-component of the difficulties of ambivalence (Hinselwood, 1989).

upon the home, e.g. Gavin told of pass raids, occasions when he was all too aware that her troubles were of a very different kind from his own. Philemon, the houseboy's removal of the scales from young Eric's eyes, making him aware that there is a wider socio-political world in which their relationship takes place, is exemplary.

E: And it was so...it was so enjoyable. It was such a warm feeling being with this guy. He even tried engage me in political conversation.

SG: Oh really

E: Yes! And I didn't ..... (clears throat) I wasn't able to.... I didn't have any form of ideas at that stage, not anything. I was very uncomfortable about ..... He asked me probing kind of questions about apartheid. What did I think about it? I felt terribly uncomfortable about that. (Quickly) But I mean that aside I had a very warm.

SG: (interrupts) You felt put on the spot?

E: Jaaaa. I had to answer for everybody. That ..... that unnerved me. I knew I should have something..... I suppose politically correct (raucous laughter) to say...I dunno...I felt

SG: (interrupts) But you were a small boy – a boy of 9

E: Ja (laughs) I knew he was asking me questions that I should be able to answer

SG: You're suggesting something critical in these question, but I wonder. He obviously also had a sense of a warm relationship with you whence he could talk to you in that way.

E: Ja sure .....though I had the feeling that I had to answer for all of the whites ...all of the white community. What were we doing to them? And what was apartheid about? And what did I think about it? What did I think about apartheid? I was flummoxed. I didn't have any special thoughts – I mean that was before I had a political thought in my head. And yet I knew he was asking me something important that had to be answered for. And I think I was intrigued that here was a seemingly intelligent, thoughtful black person who asked these kind of questions, who spoke about these things. (in an incredulous tone) I mean, before my 20<sup>th</sup> year or whatever - this was the first time that I encountered a black person who spoke about such things.

Of course revelatory moments, as pellucidly clear as these, were unusual. However, there were the ordinary, workaday happenings that established her separate life. This was her weekend or her day "off", the evening or occasional day-time hours spent in a separate servant's quarters, there might have been her visitors, or the sight of over-posed photographs of friends and family, curling and worn from too much handling, or perhaps it was simply seeing her in a set a clothes she would never would have worn during the week, (e.g. those for Church). There were those 'irksome' phone calls or visits from her friends intruding into the comfortable calm of just you and her. Alternatively there was something other than the child's house which she called her "home". One place in which

a few respondents were able to clearly distinguish her other life was in meeting her children. It seemed that rather than affirming her other life, though, these youngsters were annexed by the household as surrogate children, ready made playmates or helpers in the domestic tasks. There were the days, usually Monday mornings, when nanny would, for one reason or another, not make it back to her employer's house. There may have been instances when she left never to return. There were seemingly innumerable signs which were glossed over as mere trivia, irrelevancies and besides the point. These so called exceptions might have facilitated a greater understanding of her separateness.

#### **6.2.2.2** *She is so Readily Dispensable*

Universally the little boy's relationship with his loved nanny had a premature ending. For most there was a succession of nannies who moved through the home. Two participants would have been the exceptions, being fortunate enough to have her in attendance until their late adolescence or early adulthood.

We get some sense of the child's trauma of a valued nanny's leaving in Fred's recounting of this:

.....she was with us for about...I can't remember how many years.....but I just remember one holiday she kind of ...she never came back from wherever she had gone for the holiday and I was....I felt particularly sort of devastated and frustrated and I ..... because I couldn't do anything about it. And I asked – “where's Francina? Where's Francina? When she coming back?” And errr she never came back thereafter, you know. .... She was there for my very formative years..... I can remember is just absolutely missing her, being very devastated that she wasn't around. Always wanting to know – “Where she was? What happened to her?” and errr...ja...and then from her on...from thereon in – you know I must ask my mom exactly when Francina left or when Francina never came back. I remember for years saying to my mom – “where's Francina? Why don't we go and find Francina? Let's go and look for Francina”... “Where's her house? Why don't we go?” (pause) (sighs).

There was Beauty who worked for Bert's family for 27 years, who was summarily dismissed with the most meagre of pensions. In Dave's case: Portia who was intimately involved for his first seven years of his life, was abruptly sacked under the vaguest

(unfounded) suspicion of drinking father's whiskey. Dave's reactions to the dismissal were most interesting.

“There is a bit of a sense of grief that she left.....errr .....but that is an issue that I picked up through my parents or something....or my brother.....I'm really careful not to show any reaction to.....” or later “When ....when she left I don't have any feel....the only recollection....the only feeling that I had was (pause) ....a little bit of fear....a little bit of fear. Dad's now laid down the law. She's done wrong and she must now suffer the consequences. Ja so (pause)....I see myself.....you see yourself the way your parents did things”

What is so pointed is that somehow the little boy could not really reveal his true feelings. Aware that he stood at odds with his father, his reaction was muted. The way to safely deal with the conflict of interest was to do as father did and dismiss the part of himself that was joined with Portia. Thus he identified with the father.

Eric also stood in disagreement with his parents. He, too, never got to speak his mind. This is in the instance of the dismissal of the 'houseboy' Philemon.

E: I think I had a sense of outrage when, for whatever reason, he had to leave us. I can't remember whether that was when we began perhaps to deal with just one servant. I forget. I can't ..... I can't remember ..... I dunno what it was. I was outraged. But why?....Why should this good guy have to leave? Why? (nervous laughter)

SG: Your parents would have dismissed him because they could no longer afford the two servants? Is that what you are saying?

E: Awwwww. I mean we were comfortable. We were reasonably comfortable so we shouldn't have had to have.....I dunno. I ..... I..... I can't remember what other reason there might have been. There was certainly was.... I'm sure there was no question of err....negative behaviour on his part or anything like that, that would have caused him to have to have been dismissed. I doubt it very much.

As baffling and disquieting as this event was for the young child – there was inevitability to it. Often enough she may have left for reasons of her own, e.g. to take up a better paying position, for personal reasons etc. More often, though, she was replaced because that was her employers' wish. Amongst participants, the common understanding was that nannies were dismissed for some supposed minor indiscretion, even after many years of service. Parents, it seems, had no compunction about dismissing her, because there were many more prospective nannies to be had. In all, not one parent seems to have given a



second thought to the emotional effects such an action might have had on the child. The frequency with which nannies were replaced would suggest that there was something more at stake, perhaps an implicit intention behind such an action. Contained within the gesture of dismissal were specific sets of meaning – allocating the respective individual their position in the home, but also in the social order. Affirming nanny's expendability was a demonstration of power. Both parties' appreciation of the canonical proposition that nanny was dispensable forever loomed in the background, shaping the nature of the encounter between the two leading players in fundamental ways.

Our respondents' parents unanimously demonstrated a lack of cognisance of what the loss of a primary caretaker might mean for their child. It would be absurd to suggest that this was merely a lack of sensitivity to their children. Rather it would seem that to have given credence to this set of facts would challenge some very deeply held assumptions and engage another understanding – a psychological discourse wherein we talk of the little boy-nanny relationship as substantial relationship in its own right. Patently, such a view would challenge the contention of the irrelevancy of her personhood and indeed her superfluity. In fact it may well bear out the converse, that she was emotionally important for the child. Parents, it seems, might have had their own motives for this, other than self serving economic ones. Anxiety about motherhood filters through and structures contemporary discourses on motherhood. For mothers standing alongside a woman doing tasks that have been traditionally designated as from her domain may have aggravated fears of their own redundancy as mothers and wives. One may say that, however much homecare assistance was desired by the mother, it was often perceived as disrupting the mother-child relationship.

The net result of all of this for our little boys was that abandonment was a recurrent feature of their lives. There is the first abandonment by the first caretaker (mother usually) and then this was repeated serially across a string of nannies. There is no doubt that the serial nanny phenomenon bore on the kind of attachment that could be formed. It is clear that for those who were allowed to have a relationship with one nanny over the duration of their childhood or for a substantial period, the bond was more substantial.

Quite simply, short periods of contact do not distinguish themselves in the child's mind, and were either less readily recalled or remembered with some antipathy.

### 6.2.2.3 “’n kaffir op sy plek”

This derogatory colloquialism employed by one interviewee concerns the derisive place nanny comes to be allocated. For the participants, what was expected of them was decisively different from what had gone before. Nanny's position in the status hierarchy abruptly appeared inverted and she was 'othered' in a whole complex of ways. Critical to this moment was not just designating nanny a place that is 'alien', but about awarding the child his privileged position in the social order. At this juncture, the participant's own home had now clearly become a vehicle for cultural transmission, and the household was the medium of her oppression. Primary instruments would have been the biological parents' attitudes and employment practices. The child in turn, was called upon, perhaps for the first time, to engage apartheid canonical narratives.

The nanny's conditions of employment varied markedly from one participant's home to another, as did the parents' styles of employment. In spite of this there seems to have been inevitability to the exploitation she would suffer. Her position and place were clearly demarcated. For many it was cast in the sanctioned racism of the time; now brought to bear in daily, proximate encounters between the employing household and the servant. It may have been spoken in the personal politics of 'maids and madams'. Albert illuminated some of the dynamics of this kind of inter-relationship:

“..... and growing through.....growing up then, at high school I think I became aware of Evalena and my mother had quite a strained relationship.....Evalena is my first significant nanny.....and to extrapolate from that my first sense of the problematic sort of master-slave relationship between a domestic servant and a madam. I don't have a sense of my father ever getting involved in that side of how the family was run. It was my mother's cross.....and my first sense of there being a problematic dynamic between my mother and a maid was the relationship between Evalena and my mom”. He continues: “My sense without remembering any incident in particular –I just got the sense that it was quite a tempestuous and steamy relationship and I don't think....I don't think Evalena was

great to work with but I also think that my mother could be excessively bossy and quite vigilant about what Evalena did. I think Evalena...my sense of it is Evalena wasn't a particularly sort of articulate person and would be difficult to be with, obviously. I think she used to seep into silent resentment. I think she used to simmer and I think there was a lot of passive aggression coming off her as well. And I never got the feeling... I didn't involve myself. It wasn't my place and I was young and growing up, but I never got the feeling that it was a particularly happy relationship with Evalena..." And then again later: "Maids were very carefully policed by my mother, very controlled to the point of virtual obsession by my mother, and the whole food issue and the preparation of the cooking would be one such manifestation of that. It must have been a fairly oppressive relationship for the people who were doing the work for the family, because I don't think my mother allowed them much of a free reign, much initiative, any opportunity to express themselves. I think it would have been a very, very controlled environment and controlled relationship. My mother was quite cutting and unnecessarily harsh. There is a particular *tone* of irritation that my mother used in relation to her servants".

Albert's experiences of his nannies were very powerfully mediated through his mother. Albert had no doubt that his having a good relationship with his nanny would provoke his mother's annoyance. In the Jones' household food and cooking was one terrain on which this battle between the two women was fought: Mrs. Jones jealously guarded her control of these aspects of housework in order to restrict the amount and quality of the nanny's contract with the children. Albert, in these terms, distinguished himself from the rest of the sample: nannies, whilst playing an important part in his care, were never perceived as more than "chars" or servants. In the course of the interview he suggested that there might have been rare moments when he would have tentatively have reached out, often to reciprocate to the maid's care. Quickly he came to know that his mother would not permit this kind of contact. He sums this complexity up with: "My mother was quite a jealous mother I think".

Dave's was a conservative, Afrikaans household. He was unequivocal about the oppressive regulation of his nannies' lives. Her place was defined in highly specific prejudicial practices which had concrete material consequences. He began explaining that the family adopted the "standard" employment regimes of the time: ill-defined work hours ranging from 6.00 am till 11.00 pm on those evenings his parents elected to go out, no employment benefits, the most rudimentary accommodation without electricity or hot

water, and the lowest salary the particular nanny was willing to accept. If anything, what set Dave's home apart from other participants, was the parents' readiness to flagrant abusiveness. "This was another one of the nannies – can't remember her name.....errr....Mary. Then we had another one who was very cheeky. Also stupid, but cheeky at the same time. My dad got so angry with her the one day – he climbed over the kitchen table to get hold of her and she ran (laughs) and she errr....she got her...she got her bags and that was that....."

Bert comes from a liberal, Jewish home. He had this to say:

I do remember being embarrassed at the way my parents treated Beauty e.g. her living conditions and she didn't eat off the same crockery and the general food that she was given, the kind of tinned pilchards and tomato sauce scenario and being decidedly uncomfortable with that.....my father would have been quite sympathetic on an abstract level but he wouldn't have been willing to do anything about it"

Whilst it would be unfair to uniformly describe all participants' homes in the same exploitative way, those that sought to remedy the taken-for-granted basic conditions of employment were the exceptions. Of all respondents, I think it would be fair to say that only one interviewee's family went to any lengths to improve the nanny's lot. Even as they made these sacrifices, they were not particularly remarkable. In most households there were a whole host of markers of distinction setting the nanny aside from the rest of household. Her station was defined as lesser and she was never to move outside of it. She was never allowed to sit on the family furniture, use their crockery, toilet or bathing facilities. Conspicuous was a deferential etiquette that was expected of the servant. In turn, employers would often be quite authoritarian and even offensive in their conduct.

Gavin's socialist parents tried to do it differently. He described strict codes of conduct centring on treating employees with dignity. Even in his instance, his family came to reproduce the inherent inequity of this institution, becoming "unwilling beneficiaries of a system that they didn't approve of":

"They were servants you know no matter what...how liberal or left wing you were. I suppose servants can never be justified. That's all there is. I don't know...doesn't matter how well we treat them. They are in a remote role. No matter how much time they spend with you..... No, I don't think it could have been for a number of

reasons. I think it is an unnatural situation - living with strangers, so close to you. When you try and have this family unit there is this intruder...whom you need....you perceive that value but you don't have to....it's a very interesting situation isn't it? You value this and everything else. But a nuclear family, it doesn't want an outsider in - no matter how or where .... you know".

Eric talking in a similar vein puts it very succinctly:

"What being a servant really implies - I mean they were sort of *adjuncts to our comfort or lifestyle*. I mean their concerns and their issues were very secondary if ....if of any consequence at all, you know. They just seemed to be just adjuncts to our ..... our comfort. It sounds a bit harsh, but I think that's the truth. I think that's the way that we wanted it" (own emphasis).

Dave, as it were, does the maths and reports that in his family's case she ended up "getting the short end of the stick".

"..... in her own way she gave everything she had to us, as kids. She gave her life almost. It was almost like a calling for her. ....for her she gave her life....that and that....she basically gets kicked under her arse And ...err....err I suspect she commits suicide, in a round about way, suicide.....by in a drunken stupor, knocking over the primus stove. Dying in that.....dying in that.....she was very sad thereafter, when she was fired. She tried to come back and we didn't allow her. It was like...I feel...I feel a little bit.....err a sense of grief, a sense of loss that....that she didn't stay with us. Ermm ....that she couldn't enjoy the prosperity that we.....errr just continue with that nice relationship that we had. Ja so from that broader perspective I think she lost out on the deal in a large respect because.....she gave her life to us, to us as a family, and ..... when it didn't suit us anymore we basically got rid of her. ....Betrayal. (long pause)".

#### **6.2.2.3.1 In the Servant's Quarters**

Nowhere was the allocation of position more clearly discernible than in the servant's quarters. In apportioning her the territories of this back room, the oppressiveness of her situation was manifest for all to see. This was a clearly specified site away from the main dwellings. It invariably was a backroom space, a room in the basement or back recesses of the property. Like the geography of the black township in relation to the white suburb, it was an embarrassment to be hidden. For most, the room was without running water and electricity. Even in the liberal family this was something to be ashamed of. "On very odd

occasions I must have strayed into her room. But it's an extremely vague recollection. It's just errr....almost.....almost not there.”

Whilst the setting of this room was defined by the employer, the room also attested to her other life. For the little boy there was something enigmatic, there were features of this space he could not quite grasp. The clearest sign of this incomprehension was the raised bed. This method of furniture arrangement, employed more for its functional value (providing storage space) than for any cultural significance, stands as a puzzling signifier for it was mentioned again and again. As one respondent put it:

What was this all about? I have a sense of .....trying to put my finger on it .....  
These people who served us .... Errr.....living their own lives in these very cramped quarters – actually having some kind of life of their own ..... and (long pause)

The smell of this place was conspicuous in our participants' memories. This dark, dank room with the overwhelming odour of paraffin, candles, mildew, human sweat and lack of ventilation. But it was our little boy's attitude towards this room that is most interesting for our purposes. It was as if its very existence presented him with some sort of quandary. He was curious, interested, he wanted to come inside, and yet there would have been some injunction, whether by nanny herself, or by his parents, not to enter. A good number of interviewee's fascination with this posterior space was such that they would have sneaked in when no one was looking.

#### **6.2.2.4 *Stepping Outside the Home - I live in a Racist, Exploitative Society***

With the little boy's coming of age there is a dawning awareness of a wider social context. The canonical message became increasingly distinctive. The first place of exposure to the prevailing *zeitgeist* after the family would most likely have been the school. Pupils and teachers alike would have played an instrumental role; they all shared in a fellowship of privilege. There were a variety of experiences and responses. Cliff reveals the schism that characterises his middle childhood:

*...I never used to tell them that ...what happened at home. It never was shared. I remember being angry but accepting it. My father saying there is no difference between..... Every body is the same. Everybody is equal. I remember asking him... that you mustn't look down upon somebody because of the colour, because of the race... They were equal, but at school – with my friends it was different. It left me in a ...in a space where I was very angry with them. Also at a point where I had to choose. And it was ...I think now it was a problem: at school I would live a certain way and at home I would live a different way. At school I would go along with the mocking the teasing I'd go along with the thoughts and the way we spoke about it...different races and stuff. At home I .... So it was a contradiction (own emphases).*

One has a sense of Cliff's difficulty making the transition into an unashamedly racist world. His response in the face of this was to maintain dichotomous worlds – each context having specific rules of conduct. At school he became stoical and even complicit in the prevailing bigotry, in a way that did not seem to sit easily with him.

Bert, similarly, had difficulty maintaining coherence in an anomalous situation. As an attendee at an English medium school modelled on the British public school, he soon became aware of the pervasive prejudice. Guiltily he admitted that he would usually laugh along with others' racist jokes. Bert introduced something more curious. He recalled that in and amidst the dreadful racism, there were also comments wherein schoolboys would e.g. compare peanut butter sandwiches with remarks like, "Your nanny loves you more than my nanny". Bert's reaction to the school appears to have been avoidance - "I never gave these matters much more thought". Bert, it must be borne in mind, had Beauty as an effective primary parent for most of his first 27 years. This being said, Bert noted that he was aware enough not to bring any of his experiences of school yard racism home with him.

Having been steeped in racism at home, Dave found it easier to make the adjustment to school life. He, also, though, adopted a dichotomous strategy –

*.... I went to an English school but in the class there was a clear distinction what is black and what is white and the whole idea of... of... of... of ...cultural differences. So I think it was more from peer related where .....the people were very .....Very against black people...I dunno...I dunno ...they mocking black people. The difficulty came in from at school where I was mocking the people (clears throat) and fighting black children if I'd see them. Coming home and then being 'nice'. But not nice because I have to be 'nice' (clears throat) long pause.*



Remarkably even as Dave plays the role of violent bigot easily at school he is able to imbue his nanny with a measure of sanctity.

For still others there was no other way but to tackle these competing conceptions head on. Fred found himself drawn into physical fights:

“.... and we often had....a good couple of times we had sort of um.....we’d have these confrontations with other white guys our age....err.....err....guys would see us with black kids our own age and err.... I remember my brother fighting with some Afrikaans kids.....err.....err .....because they were kind of .....um.....calling us ‘kaffirboeties’ and shit like that you know”.

Fred averred that it was not always possible to act with integrity, and that passivity and stoicism were often unavoidable.

### ***6.3 Nanny’s Continued Existence in the Present***

Almost without exception, there was some remnant of the childhood nanny to be found in the participants’ adult lives. The form of this emergence varied markedly from one person to another. There were those for whom the wish to retain the link was manifest, and those for whom this yearning was encoded. Nanny’s continued existence in the present inevitably served to establish that repression is a forever incomplete process: that, as there is repression, so there is the return of the repressed.

#### **6.3.1. As a Fond Memory**

Holding the experience of the relationship as a (usually cherished) memory was the simplest level of persistence of the relationship into the present. This of course was a prerequisite for these men to participate in this study. Some recollections in our sample go back more than 50 years, harking to the earliest periods of childhood.

Depending on their experiences, she would either be readily accessible or more remote. For some, their various nannies exist in murky, ill-defined regions of consciousness.



These participants, for example, report thinking about her often, although in a very subliminal kind of way. For others, in the course of their daily lives they would come across associative triggers that would serve to cue ‘forgotten’ times in the company of nanny. Things that might set them into this state of reverie included: particular strains of music, a smell, seeing the shape of a particular bodily physiognomy, a tone of voice or observing their own children. One subject continued to cherish a childhood toy, not simply because it was a fragment of personal memorabilia, but because it was recalled as forming part of a preferred game with nanny. Like an old security blanket, now a rag, it was imbued with a magical significance, even way past its days of use.

To perhaps state the obvious - the more involved the nanny was in a particular participant’s situation, the more inclined the individual would be to continue engage with her in his mind. Those for whom she was a primary caretaker over a sustained period, were more likely to think about her, and think about her more often, although not always in ways they themselves could always immediately understand.

### **6.3.2 As a Real Relationship**

For some participants reminiscences were not enough. These individuals have actively sought to maintain a real relationship with their beloved nanny into their adult years. I include in this group, men who continue to have a concrete relationship with their erstwhile nannies, as well as those who entertain this possibility in mind (explicitly in fantasy) and who would have taken tangible steps to try, without success, to reinitiate some contact. Amongst these latter subjects, are individuals who would have sought to find someone “just like her” for their own purposes, or as caretakers for their children. There appear to be a variety of motives for repeating the early association, for example, in attempts to redress their childhood loss, or to make reparation.

What distinguished the two participants, who continue to have an ongoing relationship with their nannies, was that both of them would have had one nanny care for them from

infancy through early adulthood. For that reason alone, maintaining the strong emotional link beyond the first twenty-odd years seemed natural. Contact took the form of correspondence, telephone calls and the occasional visit. Commonly, she would be kept apprised of important family news, especially as these related to the little boy taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. Both men report offering some form of financial recompense for what they deem to be their debt of love. For one it was about his parents' failure to make provision for her retirement.

Those who are fortunate enough to be able to maintain contact with the erstwhile nanny were a highly distinct group within the broad population of men who were looked after by nannies. For most, there was no longer the possibility of resuming the relationship. Quite simply, this is the Manichean state of affairs under apartheid. As one interviewee put it - "we did not really know who they were or where they came from". Related to this, often the relationship would have ended rather badly (her having been dismissed) whence communication was impossible.

There were some participants who as adults have actively looked for their nannies of yore. Much to their disappointment there is no communicative means of resuscitating the old link. Some participants would have gone to some lengths to re-establish contact. One man told how in his late student years he recognised the name of a public figure in the newspaper and he "just had to find out. .... I had to find out whether she was the same Agnes because she....it would be very pleasurable to find her".

For some, making contact with nanny could never be direct, and so they set about trying to find someone who resembled her, or an aspect of the caretaking experience under her aegis. These were people who concretely sought out black women, often older than themselves, who could prospectively fulfil caring, supportive roles. These more complex presentations, residing at deeper levels of the psyche, require more thoroughgoing attention than that which is possible here. Suffice it to say that a few of the symptomatic engagements will be considered in greater detail in the Discussion. More common were those who sought to duplicate their experience with their own children. Whilst the

decision to employ a black woman to care for children may well simply be persistence of class expectations across the generations, for some that is not all that it is. Participants talked of trying to employ women who presented in a similar way to what they remembered of their own nannies, be it in personality traits or the like. Along these lines, seeing one's children with their nanny also provoked longing: "Sometimes I sit down and I see my kids with their nanny now..... Errrrrm..... They, they, they keep .... A bit..... I see my children and how they interact with her and I errr ....I actually miss that sometimes. I actually miss it sometimes".

### **6.3.3 As a Symptom**

Beyond fond memories or maintaining a real relationship was a whole complex of powerful affects associated with traces of the experiences with the childhood nanny. The person of the nanny does not appear in this form as a clearly defined presence. Rather she manifests as loose remnants, apparent in the occasional rocky outcrop – a fragment of the past sticking up out of the ground in present life. What also served to obscure much of this material is that these nanny experiences reside within the bounds of sexuality. To establish the existence of a theoretical object associated with these earlier experiences is not easily made with traditional research methods.

Psychoanalysis is more amenable to conceiving such psychological entities than any other theoretical approach. Indeed, it is common cause for psychoanalysis that to define a theoretical object requires a symptomatic reading. Psychoanalysis' theoretical starting point does not take the respondent's account at face value, nor does it expect them to understand completely their own actions, motivations or feelings. Like other unconscious formations, these phenomena are overdetermined - the result of a plurality of determining factors. Often the first clue that some reference to the "obscured nanny" emerged was in spontaneous, 'unthought out', ingenuous utterance. As we started to explore these topics, informants began to make links for themselves. Applying some psychoanalytic detective work to this 'clinical material', our understanding of the nanny-little boy dyad was

deepened. Unlike the clinical consulting room, there was little opportunity for ongoing psychoanalytic clinical verification of first hypotheses<sup>59</sup>.

There were a variety of very interesting symptomatic prolongations of the early experience with nanny. Needless to say, there were a whole host of benign or less frightening symptoms which would have signified nanny's presence. There are a whole variety of what we might call symptoms. These indirect psychological traces of the earlier experience with nanny have little or no anxiety associated with them. We might describe them as "unwitting ties of love" or "silly little idiosyncrasies that they have now taken as their own". For example, for some participants there are a whole range of commodity preferences that they have - preferred ways of doing things that have now become second nature. The origins of these quirks are dimly recalled as having some link to their black childhood caretaker. These cherished aspects of experience, with particular significance in the context of early life, have been carried through into adult life. One has a sense that for some of them there is no rational foundation for the behaviour or choice, other than perhaps some vague sense of comfort or force of habit. Many of these though are related to the maternal function, albeit that it was not their mothers who did these things. This is the way in which certain foods were prepared. Or repeating the *modus operandi* of certain other household maintenance tasks as they were performed by nanny. For Dave there is Portia's magic elixir: "...She used to .....She gave me the habit of drinking vinegar....for me...for her that was an all purpose cure for everything. She used to sip it and I subsequently learned the habit. Eventually I overdid it a bit and I got err bit of an allergy to vinegar".

Symptomatic emergences, wherein the anxiety is more manifest, will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>59</sup> The process of validation to which we are referring is not the "falsification" of Karl Popper but verification along the lines of juridical procedures of legal interpretation (Riceour, 1979).

## *CHAPTER 7*

### *DISCUSSION*

#### *7.1 Chapter Outline*

The apartheid-era man's erstwhile relationship with his nanny was many things. Recollections of these experiences are described in the results. A multitude of interesting explications obtain from these findings. Opting for depth instead of breadth, I will address myself principally to the question of the multiple inter-articulations of the hegemonic and personal conceptions of the nanny experience, rather than presenting a superficial engagement with most issues.

I begin with some general observations about the data, specifically considering the two forms of remembered experience: "remembered black hands" and "kaffir se plek" narratives. The co-existence of personal and canonical nanny narratives is a thorny issue. Immediately, there is the conundrum: how it is that nanny can be imbued with so much and yet she is construed a cipher? The co-existence of these competing stories signified a rupture in the fabric of apartheid life. For many, many apartheid-era white children this was a lived, daily reality that somehow had to be psychologically appropriated. For participants, engaging with these matters was bewildering, to say the least. The relationship between the two types of experience is, nevertheless, critical. A fuller appreciation of this enables the recognition that Psychology's lapse regarding the nanny is not just simple oversight, but parapraxis. Answers to these questions, moreover, bear on the questions of psychological and political subjectivity. I consider in some detail how the (intrapsychic) relationship between personal and canonical is possible.

Kristeva's reconsideration of the diachronic relation of the Lacanian registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in the light of abjection provides a developmental framework to understand how the little boy's early intimacy can be transformed into his later assumption of his master's mantle. There is strong suggestion that in the face of

such phenomena, a characteristic attitude develops constituted in what Kristeva (1982, p. 1) ascribes to the abjected, namely a “vortex of summons and repulsion”. A simpler way of talking about these matters is the concept of intrapsychic conflict. Between the repressed and repressing forces there is the constitution of an intrapsychic compromise. I lay out what some of these compromise formations might be for our participants. Finally considering the strand - “the past in the present”, we turn our attention to some symptomatic emergences of nanny in the present lives of our participants.

### ***7.2 On “remembered black hands” and “kaffir se plek” Narratives***

In deriving common themes, some of the idiographic richness and textuality apparent in the interviews was lost. Verbatim extracts, notwithstanding, give a sense of what this richness comprised. As might be expected, there were a multitude of versions of the experience of having been looked after by a black domestic worker. The clinician would regard the material as a series of case histories that make sense in the context of the idiosyncrasies of individual lives. That is not all they were, however; they are also cultural narratives of a particular time and place. The data refuted the assumption that belonging to a particular identity cohort, white apartheid masculinity, in our instance, necessarily determined one’s response to ideology-discourse. As a cultural form, the meaning and its place or position in the cultural field of nannydom, was not inscribed inside its form.

There are other intuitive reasons why these accounts were neither singular nor monolithic. There is the truism: for any one person, his/her identities are multiple and layered, as there are many ways of experiencing. There is also the truism that a relationship always has many connotations, it has an infinite number of possibilities<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> I am in accord with the psychoanalytic mapping of relationship between the co-ordinates of love and hate. Indeed relationship is the domain par excellence where the unconscious comes to life. Psychoanalysts expatiate at length about these matters. When Freud wrote about objects they were not just the means by which instincts attained their aim (i.e. satisfaction) they were also that which relates to the whole person (as opposed to part object relation) both lovingly (and hatefully) (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1983). Relationship,

When someone is asked to characterise a relationship, it is never just one thing. Even as narrators pin it down in storied form, the information is sequenced, there is an unfolding plot and characters appear differently over time. The relationship between the white boy child and his nanny, as any other relationship, was no exception.

It is not just that there were great intersubjective differences, in spite of the regularity of hegemonic definitions of little boys and nannies, but that each person himself occupied a multitude of subject positions. The intrasubjective differences produced in the course of social relations were manifest in the research process. The ‘selves’ revealed in our interviewees’ stories articulate to a series of disparate practices within the social field. Participants were hailed as child, as being of a specific generation, as English speaking and so forth. In the research process, interviewees’ wide variety of identity positions were manifest - they could be seen to be simultaneously constructing themselves as reasonable human beings, as individuals with certain reputations and histories and as co-operative and willing research subjects.

Under the rubric **Detailing Memories**, personal and canonical narratives were presented separately. This is a conceptual distinction, but it is also a natural one for our respondents. It is the everyday, common-sense difference between being her charge, (her childcare task) and being the employer’s son (in identification with the parents). Participants spoke in discrete ways about these aspects, as though they occurred in two distinct registers. Looking upon the transcripts of white men and their nannies, it is plain that not only are personal and canonical different in source, but strikingly different in affective tone. Indeed, it was not just that the mood within which these stories were told was different, or that they had different plots - they were different in kind. Nanny personal narratives, in general terms, had a tone of tenderness, caring and love. The great preponderance of personal narratives comprised heart-warming stories of what it was to be the object of nanny’s ministrations. All accounts indicate that she had an important place in the home: be it in daily care, as an ally, a retreat, a player in the family drama.

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here, is meant in the strong sense of the term as an inter-relationship, not only a way the subject constitutes his/her objects, but also the way these objects shape his/her actions.

Even in their childhood sexuality she is ‘right in there’. Plainly these caretakers were not just doing a job comprising childcare tasks. From all accounts, what they offered was “psychological parenting” (Goldstein, Freud & Solnit, 1980). The nanny’s first task in these terms was to make emotional contact with the child as a mother might. This kind of resonant understanding has been described by many theoreticians. For Kohut (1982) this is “mirroring”, for Bion (1962) this is “reverie”, for Winnicott (1958) this is “primary relatedness”. It is the mother’s mental state of readiness, her capacity to intuit the child, to create a “continuity of being” (Winnicott, 1966) whence there is neither separateness, nor distinct identities. Interestingly, Winnicott will suggest that the mothering function supports the infant’s unwavering belief in his own omnipotence, his first sense of mastery (Rayner, 1990).

What distinguished the canonical, was its stern eye on prohibition (renouncing the affectionate aspects of the relationship) defining the parameters in which the relationship ought to exist. These were the hegemonic definitions of the day. One is situated in social space through these narratives as one is recognised and granted identity. Canonical narratives represent an ideal; they are guides for action, affording a standard against which subjects can police their own and others’ action. In its nature the canonical requires assent. Its insistence is its coercive aspect. What it requires of subjects is identification. “Identification endeavours to mould a person’s ego after the fashion of the one who has been taken as a model” (Freud, 1983/1921, p. 106). But now we are running ahead of ourselves.

In these terms, canonical aspects of their stories were an opportunity for interviewees to reflect on their subject positions: their whiteness, their masculinity, their place in the social order (both presently and) under apartheid. Given the prescriptive nature of canonical narratives, we might first consider participants’ accounts in term of complicity and resistance. Unfortunately such musings take us no further. As much as most men’s relationship with hegemonic masculinity comprises an admixture of complicity and resistance (Wetherell & Edley, 1999), so too white apartheid men’s stance towards canonical narratives was unlikely to be uniform. Of course, part of the explanation for



this is that race has come to have different imperatives over time. Participants enunciating their respective personal and canonical narratives are skewed between different ideological imperatives: for the apartheid-era white subject to admit to love for a black person was the most taboo, as it is for the post-apartheid-era white subject to admit to his racism.

Talking about these things in a personal way was difficult to be sure. Uneasiness characterised many an interviewee's admission<sup>61</sup>. Commonly, it was when simultaneously making personal assertions in both narrative forms that anxiety revealed itself, and speaking may have broken down. It is at this point that a respondent might have slipped into speaking at a higher level of generality than he would have otherwise. He might have fallen into 'politically correct' homilies, downplaying the canonical aspect, eschewing talking about prior fidelity to these obligations. There may have been an attitude of nostalgia: glorifying the past, glossing over the unpalatable aspects. There were those who might have continued in the racist speak of always. For these men, even as they spoke of love, it was more about what she did, than what they felt. Notwithstanding these defensive expressions, as a group our participants' candour was praiseworthy.

Regarding nanny memories, the value of Bruner's (1990) data analytic distinction in narrative types, is its proximity to commonsense understanding. Its primary shortcoming is that it upholds and accentuates the schism between 'the stuff' of the discursive from the personal. What is plain is that the flat description of personal and canonical nanny narratives, as given in the results, miss the crucial fact of what Frosh et al (2003) call "enjoyment" of subject position. This is the consonance between the intrapsychic and the discursive which has proven so difficult to cogently theorise.

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<sup>61</sup> Even as it was not easy to speak these things in a post-apartheid-era it was more feasible to do so now than then. The new political dispensation with a Ptolemaic world (wherein he was the centre of the universe) no longer in ascendance, probably made participants more amenable research subjects. The other side of this, of course, is that the new milieu bears on the kind of answers we get.

White men were (initially at least) happy enough telling their personal narratives - describing the innumerable instances of care. This is the nanny they hold in mind with fondness. Their discourses, however, seemed to falter. Certainly to only describe the affectionate current was half truth. Some (e.g. Kimmel & Messner, 1995) would say that the reason their accounts faltered is that men are inarticulate about their emotional life, more especially their loving feelings. Such an explanation, I believe, does not go far enough. There was the sense that as children, certainly they had wholeheartedly embraced what she offered – this, amongst other things, was the foundation for attachment. As adult - putting this together with hegemonic expectations was less easy. Attachment became less admissible. As children they seem not to have given second thought to the closeness, the intimacy between their nannies and themselves. As adults, this does not sit that easily with them. Hegemony serves as a form of retroactive interference, what Freud calls secondary revision. Under the new circumstances they cannot love a servant, a black person. For some this would have been describing her in one breath as their redemption, their saviour and yet in the next breathe dismissing her. Participants admit to love but they do not. We get the impression that she is imbued with so much, and yet she is a cipher. She was so important and yet she wasn't. *It is a thought the nanny imago exists in a kind of intrapsychic slipstream - men are happy enough to talk about her, but they will not take, or better, perhaps cannot take the implication of this to heart.* The tendency of traditional empirical approaches is to fall into ipsative logic, for example to reduce the dynamic to arguments of whether there was or was not attachment.

From the research participants' point of view, it is not that personal and canonical aspects of their stories were different ways of reading experiences (different sets of ideas) - these were different types of lived experience. Indeed at some point in his development, the little boy was required to hold two very different things in mind simultaneously. He was required to conduct himself differently on the basis of these different narratives. There is no doubt, Mrs. Verwoed is correct – black hands are remembered. Quite how they are remembered is not so straightforward. As much as I call them love stories, this does not easily accord with the participants' adult minds. Having said all of this, there is no doubt

that nanny is tied up in white men's memories, unconscious and their very sense of self.....and yet she is remote.

### ***7.3 Concerning the relation between Personal and Canonical Nanny Narratives***

#### **7.3.1 Introduction - Abjection en route from the Imaginary to the Symbolic**

On the subject of the nanny-little boy relationship, personal and canonical narratives stand in an obverse relation to one another. Within each participant these stories co-existed together, albeit in an uneasy relationship with one another. It was enormously difficult to retain a fidelity to both story forms: to be in one mode was to deplete the other. A substantive (rather than structural) reading of Lacan; focussing specifically on his theorisation of the co-relation between the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic may shed some light on these matters. Specifically Kristeva's notion of "abjection" from Powers of Horror (1982), enables us to understand how it might be feasible for our participants to simultaneously engage the personal and canonical aspects of their nanny experiences. As we shall see - the Imaginary comprised what it was to be in her charge; the Symbolic: to be in charge of her was the realm of apartheid symbolics. Abjection as a concept has been very useful in diagnosing the dynamics of oppression (on specifically patriarchal oppression see Oliver, 1993; 1998). She describes abjection as an operation of the psyche through which subjective and group identity are constituted by excluding anything that threatens one's own or one's groups borders. Inter alia, even outside the French psychoanalytic tradition 'turning one's back on' or abjection has special importance for men's psychosexual development, this is what Greenson (1968) calls "dis-identification".

The making of prejudice is an interesting social psychological topic in its own right. What happens between the little boy and the nanny, however, is much more than that. It is about managing the appropriation of experience amidst cultural anomalies, it is the making of identity, it is the about the little boy's assumption of a historical position

within the social order which preceded him. It is in the rapprochement of canonical and personal narratives that, amongst other things, political and psychological subjectivities become possible.

Figuring the developmental passage that makes the kind of relationship between these two forms of experience possible requires a series of conceptual steps. I do this under separate sub-headings.

### **7.3.2 In the Realm of the Imaginary**

In **Personal Narratives - “remembered black hands”** we observed the startling, intimacy between our participants and their nannies. When we heard of Fred’s bathing with Francina, Bert’s talking about Beauty as the one who kept him sane, Dave’s being offered small change by Precious even after even her dismissal, Amos buying John toys we were touched, amazed at the tenderness of the infatuation between the two. In the nanny’s “holding”, it was not only her physical prehension, but also her comprehension, her holding in mind, of the little boy’s selfhood, that was remarkable. In her fidelity and child-centred commitment, she was the psychological mother so well described by object-relations theorists. Like the ideal mother she was an emotional bridge between the little boy and his first introduction to the outside world. The indulgent caretaking milieu, founded in a gentleness of mood without hard edges, was a necessity at the time when the little man was so vulnerable, so beholden to her. The sense of satisfaction and coherence engendered a state of unity localised in time and space, a state of immersion into oneness. In the achievement of “psychic continuity” (Winnicott, 1971) between self and nanny, the little boy was not aware of his separateness or her otherness at the beginning. In this earliest time, nanny, so to speak, thought on his behalf. She could do this because she had his best interests at heart. What is at stake is Buber’s (1958, p.11) I-Thou - “The relation

of the Thou is direct. *No system of ideas, no foreknowledge and no fancy intervene between I and Thou*”<sup>62</sup> (own emphasis).

In the earliest phase with nanny – there was no consciousness – “consciousness collapses on its double without keeping its distance from it” (Lacan, 1977 p. 13). In this boundarilessness there was no comprehension, certainly no comprehension of things that count for so much later on. There was a perceived identity (sameness) between ego and its counterpart - the nanny caretaker. The realm of intrapsychic experience constituted by mirroring, so amply documented by the likes of Winnicott (1958; 1966; 1971; 1973) and Kohut (1977; 1982), inter alia, was what Lacan labelled the Imaginary. Lacan’s (1977) famous paper on the formation of the “I” at the mirror stage concerns coenaesthetic subjectivity in the dual relation between ego and the specular image. There is no vantage point outside the dyad. What the child first sees is his specular image as reflected in the caretaker’s eyes. For the apartheid child, in the earliest period, he could not see beyond the insularity of the relationship, specifically he could not apprehend the social world in which the relationship stood. The Imaginary corresponds to that period preceding awareness of canonical narratives for what they are. It certainly precedes the little boy’s ability to employ apartheid symbols.

### 7.3.3 Accession to the Symbolic Order

For Freud, and later Lacan, fracturing of full mirrored relatedness is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. Lacan, and indeed classical psychoanalysis, emphasised the

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<sup>62</sup> The central contention with which Buber opens *I and Thou* (1958) is that the world is “twofold” for human subjects in accordance with their “twofold attitude”: I can address other as object to be experienced and used, or a mutual relationship can be initiated. The other thus is either an object of my experience or a subject who is in communication with me. For Buber, the meeting is either constituted through objectification, or I as interlocutor am inextricably bound to the other to whom I am engaged. “I” is not a fixed substance, it is rather a relation, and is constituted in an attitude that is assumed towards the other. Buber takes the meeting of participants and the space that links them as an irreducible and primordial structure. This makes possible a special form of shared understanding, mutuality and reciprocity. He privileges human-to-human relations above other kinds.

overwhelming importance of the father's symbolic interruption<sup>63</sup>. This is Oedipus – that moment of entry into social relationship constituted in more than two. For Lacan it is in this moment that the dual mirroring relationship of mother and infant is transformed into a symbolic structure. The “*name of the father*” is a crystallisation of the moment that language and the reality principle supervene to disrupt the sensual continuum symbolised by the nursing pair (Lemaire, 1977). Father qua representative of the outside world sheds new light on what happens between the nanny and little boy, where before there was no seeing, no discrimination.

Central to Oedipus, is the presentation of a third term, a point of reference outside the inaugural unity of two – the dual relationship where one thing is the other and vice versa. The intervention of a median term introduces the notion of difference, it makes comparison possible. It has special significance for language and systems of meaning. This moment constitutes the speaking subject, experience mediated by signification, especially through language. In Lacan's (1977, p. 83) epigrammatic style: the “Word was the divider and definer of difference”. The Word enables discrimination as a conceptual-intellectual capacity; for the apartheid subject it is also the basis for discrimination as a political act.

The Symbolic concerns the installation of the subject into a social network\ and the assumptions of social identity<sup>64</sup>. It corresponds to the Oedipal and post-Oedipal periods, the time when the child acquires language and learns the society's sexual rules. It is said to be resolved when these rules are internalised or acceded to. In the history of the individual person, the Oedipal structuring of psychic life is a repetition of an epochal event, which Freud identifies with the origins of civilisation proper. Here, external

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<sup>63</sup> The father as here referred to is not the concrete male personage in the family but the purveyor of Culture. Father is to be recognised as the foundation for the Law which founds humanity. The one who first interpellates the child as “white boy”. Father, thus, is a semantic fact rather than a biological one. “It is speech alone which gives a privileged function to the father and not the recognition of his role in procreation” (Lemaire, 1977, p. 63).

<sup>64</sup> It is important to recognise that the symbolic order is not permanently fixed, but changes through history. Žižek (1997), for one, fruitfully engages Lacanianism on the issue of contestation within the ideological field.

restraint is replaced by its symbolic expression<sup>65</sup>. Oedipus and the law of the father essentially concern succession. This identificatory change requires the child to forego his desire to join with his first caretaker. Through the paternal metaphor the child named his desire and renounced it<sup>66</sup>. For his trouble, the young subject is given a Name (his surname), a place in the family constellation, an original signifier of self and subjectivity. It prompts him in his realisation of self through participation in the world of culture, language and civilisation (Lemaire, 1977 p. 79). The child thus comes to individuate itself from others and to recognise itself as an I-he. Taking up his place in the symbolic register of language and of the family represents for the young child a circumscription of his individuality within the family, and within the global society.

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<sup>65</sup> Oedipus for the likes of Lacan and Freud, is a condition of sociality. Lacan drawing upon Levi-Strauss' The Elementary Structures of Kinship will say - the "myth that Freud rewrote as the Oedipus complex epitomises man's entry into culture itself. It reflects the original exogamous incest taboo, the role of the father, the exchange of women and the consequent differences of the sexes" (Mitchell, 1974, p. 377). To restate this phylogenetic fable, Freud supposes a primitive horde, a gathering of brothers, given that women are always and only objects of exchange. These brothers desire to share the women, but without success, because their father keeps them all to himself. At first to get at the women, the brothers kill the fathers whence the desire to kill and the repetition of this killing. We are thus in a compulsion to repeat (a particularly Freudian term), linked to that death drive which agitates the brothers of the primitive horde. And then during the course of this compulsion to repeat, something new appears: the totemic meal. The father will be eaten, interiorised, and thus a symbolic pact will be orally set up; thus the paternal tyranny will cease to be a tyranny, and will become authority. The brothers recognise that there is a law. The constitution of a symbolic pact coincides with the emergence of homo sapiens. The social animal begins to identify himself no longer with the tyranny, but rather with the authority of the father and thus enters culture, brings us from acting out of the killing, to symbolisation (we represent ourselves in someone with whom we identify) whereby we become capable of thought, speech, logic, in short culture, (Kristeva, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> It was Freud who first recognised that castration is an inevitable accompaniment to Oedipus and succession. The child's development and insertion into culture is no glorious moment. It is not simply a progressive humanising process, but rather about disappointment, renunciation and the "acquiring of wounds" (Jager, 1990). Entry into the symbolic comprises a separation, a trauma, a loss, a symbolic castration. Foucault's insight, "knowledge is power", has now become a cliché. The flipside of this is Freud's insight that knowledge is pain. This essentially turns on Freud's early recognition that the symbol stands for the thing itself. In hallucinatory wish-fulfilment the idea of the need satisfying object is a substitute, one that is never completely fulfilling). Father intervened as the privative agent: he deprived the child of the object of its desire; his attitude was literally that of "spoilsport" (Lacan, 1977). The child came against the Forbidden; he encountered the Law of the father. In castration the child had to renounce the omnipotence of his desire and accept a Law of limitation.

As creatures of language we are inevitably marked and patterned by a social instrument. The wounds inflicted by culture may heal into "scars that are proudly worn as signs of distinction" (Jager, 1990 p. 169). Succession is a drama that cannot be shorn of its tragic dimensions. Fundamental laws decree the need for separation in the face of our inordinate longing for union. At once this is the law against incest, at another these are the laws of apartheid which urge "separate development". Freud's retelling of the Oedipus myth demarcates the "family as the place where the child is cut by the sword of Zeus and where he learns of his banishment from Paradise" (Jager, 1990, p. 175).



In taking over the identificatory function prescribed by society, the apartheid child's entry into the symbolic order was governed by the father's laws against incest and miscegenation. For participants, their parents were the first and primary bearers of the prohibitive message of the hegemonic. Later, when they were older, they met it again in their peers, teachers and social others. The debt that the apartheid child must pay if he was to have a place in the family, in a world of political entitlements, was the renunciation of his nanny. Within the order of succession the original unity of parent and nanny was broken as each was forced to fulfil the cultural destinies that inexorably lead to the parting of ways. He could no longer be close to her as he had been. He was compelled to accept the canonical imperatives: she was nothing, she had her own subjugated place in the social world and she could be dispensed with arbitrarily. For white apartheid men, accession to the mediation of the symbol, was learning to enunciate and employ the symbols of apartheid. Once in possession of language and the law, he could be a fully-fledged member of the apartheid world.

If the father-master was recognised by the nanny both as a man and as a representative of the Law, the subject would have access to the "name of the father" or paternal metaphor: Encouraging the child to assume the name of the father, the nanny endorsed canonical narratives, even as it was inimical to her own interests. Perhaps nowhere was this clearer than in the special deference granted the father of the household, despite the fact that mother was usually her first point of contact. Later, this was her obedience to the "little master". At this moment, the very concrete workings of power were visible for all to see - nanny's collusion was an act of "mimicry" (Bhabha, 1984)<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> In attempting to claim alterity as entirely its own, the Apartheid Subject imposes upon all others, as a condition of their subjugation, an injunction to mime alterity. The colonised are constrained to impersonate the image the coloniser offers them of themselves; they are commanded to imitate the coloniser's version of their essential differences. In recent feminist theory, mimesis is most frequently understood in opposition to the category masquerade: "mimicry" (the deliberate and playful performance of a role) is offered as a counter to "masquerade" (the unconscious assumption of an imitation of a role and parodic hyperbolization of that role – depends on the degree and readability of its excess. Postcolonial discourse understands mimicry in strikingly contrary terms, not as a tactic of dissent, but as a condition of domination. In the words of Homi Bhabha (1984, p.126) "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" mimicry subtends rather than disturbs dominant systems (difficult to discriminate between the mimicry of subversion and subjugation).



#### **7.3.4 Identification – The Call to Assume the Name of the Father**

An ostensibly masculine, paternal identification is necessary in order to have a voice in the chapter of politics and history (Leland, 1989). If the child accepts this, he identifies with the father as he who “has” the phallus. The child’s identification with the father announces the passing of Oedipus by way of “having” and no longer “being” (Lacan, 1977). By internalising the Law, the child identifies with the father, and takes him as a model. The Law now becomes an authorising force: separated from the nanny, the child is no longer beholden to nanny. What is entailed in identification is an embrace of the canonical narratives. “Identification can only be made through recognition and all recognition is itself an implicit confirmation of the ideology of the *status quo*” (Davis, 2003, p. 7). Likewise, “Identification is never outside or prior to politics, that identification is always inscribed within a certain history: identification names not only the history of the subject but the subject in history” (Fuss, 1994, p. 39). By identifying with the father, the child receives a name and a place in the family constellation, with specific rights that accrue to him; “restored to himself he discovers that he is to be made in and by a world of culture, language and civilisation” (Lemaire, 1977, p. 92).

As much as renouncing nannies was a loss, to describe identification as a welcome embrace is erroneous; for identification was always an “ambivalent process” (Davis, 2003). To the same extent, identification is never complete – it was not simply wholesale incorporation for it involved a struggle. This is a battlefield where many a man may become a casualty. Illustrative interview examples that illuminate these issues will be provided when we consider participants’ specific compromise formations.

#### **7.3.5 Abjection as the Passage from Personal Narratives to Canonical Ones**

Lacan enables us to see the means by which the hegemonic comes to be deeply rooted in the little boy’s psyche. For Lacan, this move is predestined because of culture’s coercive power. The Symbolic order is an implacable structure and the only escape is psychosis

(Kristeva, 1982). The identity options prescribed by the symbolic system are inescapable. For the little white boy, this is his submission to prevailing apartheid codes. He cannot escape the identificatory options circumscribed by hegemonic representations. There is an inevitability about becoming “baas”, albeit that the form this would take was never specified. Kristeva offers us the means to see how the passage from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is effected. Abjection enables differentiation, discovery of a wider world – it is the dynamo in the process. We come to see how canonical narratives would have our men leave their personal narratives behind.

Kristeva (1996) was asked in an interview to translate the word *l'abjection* from French into English. She responded: “It may be impossible. *L'abjection* is something that disgusts you, for example, you see something rotting and you want to vomit – it is an extremely strong feeling that is at once somatic and symbolic, which is above all a revolt against an external menace from which one wants to distance oneself, but of which one has the impression that it may menace from the inside” (Kristeva, 1996, p. 118). Filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, (to) its other side, a margin (Kristeva, 1982, p. 69). Delimitation, demarcation in this sense, is necessary to distinguish figure and ground.

For Kristeva, abjection is tied to women. The ritual abjection of the (m)other is allied to the taboo placed on incest and it is in such prohibitions, argues Kristeva, that we can see the importance “both social and symbolic of women and particularly the mother” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 70). She goes on to observe that in societies where it occurs, ritualization of defilement is accompanied by a strong concern for separating the sexes and this means giving men “rights over women”. In analysing those rituals, which come to symbolise abjection, Kristeva discerns a recurrent unconscious drive to abject the (m)other.

Abjection is the means through which the child takes up subject status within history and human affairs. In Black Sun (1989), she claims “matricide” is our vital necessity. So for

our white men, if they are to wear their master's mantles, they must have committed nanny murder. Through separation from the pre-symbolic mother, the abject confronts us with our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the 'maternal entity', even before existing outside her, "the maternal is the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species" (Elliot, 1991, p. 43). It evokes ambivalence in us. The main threat to the fledgling subject is his dependence on the maternal body (to be a "mummy's" or in our instance a "nanny's boy"). Therefore abjection is fundamentally related to the very best that nanny had to offer, her care – the maternal function.

Kristeva's theory of the abject provides a name for the unnameable "something to be scared of". For Kristeva, the "abject" is what is excluded from, and what threatens, the symbolic order and its mutually confirming subject/object-relations: bodily wastes, for example, are "unclean" and loathsome because they efface the border between Me and Not-Me: "it is . . . not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order, it does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p, 14). Thus, the abject and abjection traverse what, for the subject, is a vital if precarious boundary: that which marks the difference between inside and outside. However, as Kristeva implicitly suggests, the object is always already inside. The spasm of revulsion represents the moment when the subject abjects itself, and in doing so, temporarily redefines its clean and proper self.

In a psychoanalytic register, to fall back under the sway of nanny's power threatens the subject with fusion, undifferentiation, loss of selfhood and ultimately death. Kristeva (1982, p. 64) also quotes Bataille, who insists that the threat represented by abjection is linked to "the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding". In the world of fusion and undifferentiation, the little boy does not know black from white. It is in the symbolic that the little boy learns of his stake in the world. He learns about the separation of the sexes, about black and white, about rich and poor and about his place in the socio-political scheme of things.

### 7.3.6 A Vortex of Summons and Repulsion: a characteristic stance to such phenomena

The developing child's struggle to separate from nanny is a reluctant one, it "is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva, 1982, p 13). At the heart of the abject lie some things best forgotten - his powerlessness and his debt on account of her care. The nanny is the other who preceded and possessed him, and through such possession causes him to be. Acknowledging the structural aspects inherent in the relationship, participants were obliged to admit the tenuousness of their own childhood situation. In a voice they might well have used as children: "I am at the behest of adults – mother, fathers and nannies. I can be set aside very easily, shunted from one adult to another irrespective of my feelings on the matter. My very survival is based on nanny's contribution. My life and person depend to a great extent on her fulfilling her obligations in as best a way as she can".

Once, expelled, the abject does not remain quiescently at bay but continues to exercise its claim on the subject, leaving it in "perpetual danger" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9). This is hegemony's Achilles heel. It is also the "weak spot" in masculinity about which a whole host of writers have written (c.f. e.g. Frosh, 1994; Glasser, 1993; May, 1986; Rutherford, 1992)<sup>68</sup>. It is why white men's power was forever fragile. Here then, we can see that abjection is the underside and inner lining of the symbolic order and subjective identity respectively, and never ceases to challenge both. The boundary that separates the subject from its abject is a labile one, unstable and prone to periodic disintegration. Although radically excluded, the abject constantly returns to haunt and fascinate the subject's desire. The subject is thus caught in a "*vortex of summons and repulsion*" (Kristeva,

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<sup>68</sup> Greenson (1968) identifies a similar mechanism to abjection in men's psychosexual development. This is "disidentification". For boys there is an inherent additional developmental step which makes male selfhood more fragile. – "male's discontent with his gender identity". "The male child's ability to dis-identify will determine the success or failure of his later identifications with father. These two phenomena, dis-identifying from mother and counter-identifying with father, are interdependent and form a complementary series" (1968, p. 70). Greenson marshals evidence to suggest that men harbour intense envy of the female, particularly the mother. This is covert underneath the eternal façade of contempt. There is the fact that dread of homosexuality is more persistent in men than women, that men feel at their most masculine in the presence of men. Greenson also links the act of rejecting the female (mother) with a turning away from the weak spot within the self.

1982, p. 1) in relation to the abject but against which it must defend itself. Lacan (1977 p. 77) will have talked of the echoes of the Imaginary seeming like “a perpetual siren song”<sup>69</sup>.

For our white men, the fight against the nanny must be relentless, for “If the object settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning . . . what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982 p. 18). Nanny’s authority represents a constant problem for paternal law and its domain, the symbolic order. The danger for the subject of this never complete or total separation is clear when Kristeva (1982 p. 51) writes that “the symbolic representation of the pre-Oedipal, phallic (m)other (nanny) becomes the sight/site of considerable phobic investment” - we cannot have the valorisation of the self-possessed black woman who progressively displaces the authority of white men.

Nannydom is a social institution that reinforces but also resists a political structuring of subjectivity. And that is its subversive aspect. There were the concrete manifestations which participants described in their personal narratives: be it nanny as rescuer; as mother’s confidante or as highly significant caretaker. All of these things did not accord with the hegemonic. Having been with a nanny there is always a “weak spot” she stands to undermine symbolic-apartheid authority. Apartheid’s attitude is like that of hegemonic masculinity – you must get rid of the aspects of yourself which are within the bounds of

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<sup>69</sup> Within the Kleinian tradition, the like of Henry Rey recognise such phenomena. Elaborating Guntrip’s description of the schizoid person as a prisoner, he describes a “claustro-agoraphobic syndrome”. In the modern argot this is the borderline’s vacillations - his/her approach -avoidance towards love objects. S/he craves loves but is prevented from loving because s/he is afraid of the destructive force of his/her love so far as his/her object is concerned. S/he dares not love for fear s/he will destroy. What also characterises the schizoid phase and its mechanisms of defence is the “law of talion” and the absence of the capacity for reparation: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth (p. 203). There is an absence of forgiveness. The wish is to retain infantile omnipotence and mastery. Rey makes the pointed observation “Schizoid communication . . . often takes place at the level of ‘merchandise’, a sort of barter agreement in which the subject feels himself to be given ‘things’, made to accept ‘things’, where ‘things’ are done to him etc.” (p. 205). This is the “common attitude” the commoditisation, the objectification of her as servant, as black woman, as other. This is exaggerated in the fashion of Sartre’s “love project” – I am either the object or the subject – there is no intermediary space. Elements of thought have a concrete character. This encourages them to treat people as things. One of the essential qualities of the unconscious described by Freud, is the representation of things instead of the representation of words. Under the condition of claustro-agoraphobia, normal symbolisation is somehow precluded. The defect in the schizoid is the defect in the capacity for transformation. [See Bion (1962) who has written extensively on these matters.]

the other – the feminine, the black, the disenfranchised, and the powerless – by projection. This knot resides deep within the fabric of the white apartheid man's identity. Descriptions of the schizoid subject are apposite: "They live in an external shell or carapace but no vertebral column. They live as parasites in a shell which they seem to have borrowed or stolen and this creates a feeling of insecurity" (Rey, 1988, p. 206). We will return to "summons and repulsion" in our further considerations of intrapsychic conflict.

### **7.3.7 Becoming 'Klein Baas' – First Words in the Master's Voice**

As far as the relationship with nanny is concerned, entry into apartheid subjectivity entailed a sheer, a radical break from what had gone before. Abjecting the nanny entailed rewriting personal history, eliding nanny's contribution. Now canonical narratives were in ascendance. Abjection required the logic of Oedipus – identification (with the father) and desire (for the nanny) standing in separate places; with desire banished to the most secret locale. The Imaginary was the relationship with the nanny before (apartheid) meaning. In the state of childish innocence, political symbols were unavailable and it was just him and her.

With the intercession of apartheid discourses, what occurred inside the relationship could never quite be the same again. Nanny's position in the status hierarchy abruptly appeared inverted. The emergence of feelings of antipathy, even enmity towards nanny seemed sudden, a rupture in what had been enunciated previously. Interviewees, for the first time aware that they shared a name with their fathers, found themselves slipping into speaking in the "paternal voice". For one thing, abjection entailed the racialisation of the relationship. That child became a person who called her by a name that was not her name, that ordered her around.

The process of making the transition from personal to canonical narratives was both subtle and obvious. One form of this was the transformation of love into peership. Let's hear Harry on these matters

H: I would come home and I....we would chat. "Ja – my mate...Ja..."

SG: It's interesting you say "my mate" – you describe a sense of peership

H: Ja, for sure

SG: (interrupts) But she is a woman who is much older than you

H: Oh no. Oh no. I don't think you can measure things like that. I don't think you can measure things like that.

My comments sit very uncomfortably with Harry, prompting a diatribe that seemed to deny contractual aspects completely.

There was another (initially heart warming situation): this was Amos, the houseboy, playing marbles on the bedroom floor with the young John. This was something they did often. Sitting together seemed thoroughly enjoyable for both players. As the little boy sat alongside his houseboy on the floor something else had been happening. From this vantage point for the child, Amos, alongside him, did not seem so big, almost as though sitting here, he was between two worlds: his physical stature made him of the world of adults but his posture seemed to disconfirm this, suggesting that he was of the children. When John looked again, Amos was a peer. The affilial link they came to share became one of equality and peership. Just behind the touching scene was not simply John's forgetfulness about the contractual basis to the relationship, but also the elimination of generational differences.

It seems that when the child had made the transformation from caretaker to peer, there was another realisation – nanny's love could be exploited. Unlike the other adults, she was unable to refuse his requests. En-route to defining these new aspects of the relationship were other demonstrations. They began innocently enough, in such things as teasing her by scaring her with the rubber snake. This sort of 'playfulness' appears to have been quite common. Where Freud's "fort-da game" (1912/1920) was about mastering the parents' absence and presence, these games were about mastery per se. It was the child who repeatedly dropped the bottle, in the knowledge that the nanny must



and would pick it up. In no time at all, repeatedly seeing her at his beck and call, she had become his skivvy. The transformation I describe was given concrete referents by John:

We used to play marbles for hours ..... and never ever be frustrated or irritated. ....  
*He never... I cannot remember one thing that he refused me. ....* And he always did what we wanted him to do. I'd ask for custard and he would make me custard and that type of thing so .... He actually spoilt me, spoilt me rotten. ....he always did what we wanted him to do..... "He was there to look after me; he was there to take care of me. *I could actually manipulate him if I wanted to*" (own emphasis).

Eric described how almost unthinkingly he slipped into being tidied up after.

E: (pause) I have strong recollections of my of how irritated and angry she got with me for leaving a mess and not cleaning up after myself. If she had cleaned the kitchen – coming in and making more of a mess up. Quite a strong recollection. But as I say – this goes back to the teenage years. Mid ..... 18 years.....ja

SG: Yes. (pause) what would that have been about? If you think about it now – do you think that you were being excessively messy?

E: I think it had to do with two things: number 1 – me totally inconsiderate (laughs), and oblivious to the effect that I was having on her and number 2 – an extreme readiness on her part to voice her displeasure with me. There was no holding back at all ..... No serious intention of changing my behaviour whatsoever. I might this was my right. This was my house. I had a right to be messy in it ..... erm .....no sense of remorse. I suppose a slight sense of guilt as well. Agnes..... Elisabeth seemed to be the only one who ever rapped me over the knuckles for leaving a mess and leaving a mess over what she had just cleaned. It didn't seem to come from anyone else.

Others too would go out of their way to have her do things for them. This was Gavin describing how he would specifically leave things out that needed to be put away. "And then I would just leave the knife there and I would just leave bread out, and he would say to me – "what do you I think I must clean up after you?" and I would say, "Yes". You know the ..... But ..... Err.... that was the odd occasion". Cliff, likewise, reported specifically leaving a mess in the knowledge that she would tidy up after him. When mother proscribed this behaviour, he felt somehow affronted that it should be he, and not her, who should do the dirty work. As he put it - "it was her duty, not mine". Apparently, to ensure that he had had the last word, Cliff insisted that she go and buy cigarettes for him at the local shops which were at a great distance from the house.

For some white children, with the loss of childhood innocence, there was the assumption of racist, derogatory attitudes. The facility to use these varied from participant to participant, depending on parental values, their own reading of socio-political life and the like. In the interviews, participants were unlikely to directly give expression to their prejudices vis-à-vis the nanny. They might have talked of teasing her, or of misplacing their frustrations on her. Interestingly, some informants when reporting on how, for example, a particular nanny was derelict or in her duties, seemed to slip into assuming a parental voice. Of course we know that mimesis is the precursor to identification<sup>70</sup>.

Amidst these phenomena, these were nanny's terms of address which served to name the little boy in the social hierarchy. Here is Cliff telling us about it:

She always referred to me as "klein baas". But I never saw myself as the klein baas. Mmmmm no I never saw myself as klein baas. (quickly). I never .... I did..... I never actually told her what she must or mustn't do. .I dunno....I felt a bit uncomfortable but I accepted it. I've become used to it...

For Dave, Portia's deference was not simply addressing him as Mr. Smit, but her behaviour: "... she used to listen attentively when I used to speak. She'd put down everything and would look at you and listen".

Without intending to be either snide or cynical, Harry unwittingly blurted out his "theory". What Harry offered us was an abbreviated and rather politically incorrect account of the making of the little baas.

SG: what do you think that you have taken from that relationship? Do you have any sense...?

H: (interrupts) I...friends of mine have expressed a theory. He is a friend and he is an immediate colleague – it's the same thing.....which I ascribe to which is that – South Africans tend to be very good managers because we grew up as manager – somebody did our dirty work (laughs).....from a very young age. I am a (pause)...in strategic.....in strategic.....my business I do what is called turn arounds – I am involved in strategic decisions and I will retrench people and I will that if that is necessary to keep a business afloat. But in one to one relationship....and that's not something I'm proud of....it's just what has to be done. It's my life, it's my job

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<sup>70</sup> Bhabha (1984) and Fuss (1994) amongst others, talk at length about the political effects of mimesis. Fuss (1994, p. 25) observes that "imitation repeatedly veers into identification". Indeed, psychoanalytic theories of identification seem to agree that incorporation is implicit in imitation.

The change in meaning from personal to canonical narrative was stark: the little boy had to acquaint himself with a whole symbolic armamentarium which defined her in alterity. Race, inferiority and the like were seen for the first time as servitude which became the most manifest reality. For a good number of respondents, blackness previously had had the connotation of warmth, fecundity and succour, whereas whiteness was associated with remoteness. Cliff had spent most of his daytime hours with Gladys. Now he was obliged to make a sharp distinction between nanny and mother.

“So it was in a sense, that’s where the boundaries stick. That’s where the boundaries were....that this is mom and this is not mom....based on colour. And then also at an age, at a later age, you know and me realising that people have specific roles. So I don’t want to say that’s mom-like thinking back now. When I was there in primary school I didn’t say ‘mom’ because I had my mom...it sound weird”.

Notice the slippage as he talked about her as mother then abruptly she was other:

“You know...she was...she wasn’t my mother. My mom is my mother...I think at that stage I started differentiating what it was, what does it mean to be black, what does it mean to be white um. Maybe feeling guilty about the way that I felt towards her

The paradox in Bert’s case was having just described Beauty as his rescuer from the parents, her position still remained tenuous: she was held in mind as the “servant” in spite of all that she had done for them.

B: Well ummmm. If I had a row with my parents – which for some reason seemed to occur fairly often ummmm – she would be person....the first person that I would end up talking to

SG: Yes? (pause) And she would comfort you?

B: Ja. She would say something like (said in a supposed black accent): “Ooooh my da’ling. Don worry.”

SG: (laughs) Yes.

B: And ummmm – “Everything is gonna be fine”. And then she would say: “Doo doo doo doo” (unclear) (laughs).

SG: Uh huh

B: And she would put her arm around me or pat me on the shoulder or something like that.

SG: And that felt very comforting?

R: Errrm. At times I think it was comforting. At times it was a bit irritating.

SG: Yes?

R: (pause)

SG: Why so?

R: I think because .....aaahhh..... I think sometimes I regarded it as an imposition. And I think I felt that she was interfering in my family aff.....problems

SG: Yes?

R: And errrm I mean I think.... I think I had a classic case of regarding her as inferior because she was a servant

SG: Yes?

R: Yes, sad to admit it but ..... I think it was true

### **7.3.8 Compromise Formations – Intrapsychic Articulations between Canonical and Personal Narratives**

Given the coercive power of the symbolic it would seem that imitation, speaking with father's voice, was the end of it. Society had produced the permissible stories of how lives should be lived within the culture and these canonical narratives set the parameters for identity options. As it were, as much as heterosexuality was compulsory (Connel, 1995) for the apartheid white man, so too was racism. Entry into society required submission to prevailing apartheid codes. In the context of canonical narratives there was an obligation to accept that nanny's personhood counted for nothing, that she was dispensable and that she had a distinct, lesser place in the social order. All informants were aware that there were expectations that accrued to them. They knew that to speak back to the father was to provoke sanction. Identification occurred in the public space and dissent was not abided.

What if the child did not accede to the cultural demands? How might it have been to have inhabited a place outside of discursive practices? Lacan is clear in this respect: a child who remained fixed in this state of affairs would be incapable of situating himself and others in their respective places, that is, he would not have at his disposal the symbolic ground through which any human relationship passed. In the same terms apartheid symbolics would not be available to the little boy who privileged his affinity with his nanny. The child's who was audacious enough to cling to personal narratives would have been met with disinheritance: he would have stood to lose his middle-class, white birthright with its attendant privileges. He would not only have forfeited economic advantages but, inasmuch as apartheid worked in part by policing the boundaries of cultural intelligibility, legislating and regulating which identities attained full cultural

signification and which did not (Fuss, 1994). He would have given up certain prerogatives which were not available to the black man – freedom of movement both psychological and social. For the black man was disenfranchised of his very subjectivity. Indeed to continue to be nanny's baby would have been inconceivable. This was the obverse of the Happy Sindane story<sup>71</sup>. South African law certainly makes no provision for a *de facto* (psychological) parent having rights over a *de jure* (biological) one.

Our participants' memories demonstrated that the effacement of their personal narratives by the discursive-symbolic was not complete. Despite the prohibitions, there were possibilities of loosening the hold of hegemonic representations, there remained room for contestation. Of course to dissent was to provoke some very powerful repressive forces, be it at home, at school or even intrapsychically. As our participants were hailed, instructed in apartheid ways, they did find ways of talking back in their own voices.

### *7.3.8.1 Intrapsychic Conflict, Cognitive Dissonance and Compromise Formations*

Participants were readily able to affirm the care, intimacy and love of their childhood relationship with their nanny. Within the bounds of their associations with their nannies, there were clearly specified apartheid requirements. Putting these two aspects (what has been distinguished as personal and canonical narratives) together, however, was less easy. It was not just that the dual nature of the nanny's position was difficult to stomach. It was, in fact, the dual nature of their own positions that provoked a fair measure of discomfort. This is the "summons and repulsion" to which Kristeva (1982) refers. This relationship, unlike most others, had referents underpinning it, that made normal ambivalence untenable. It was not just that these were competing stories, evoking

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<sup>71</sup> Happy Sindane (or Abbey Mzayiya as he is presently known) is a true apartheid South Africa tale. Initial press reports claimed that as an infant he was stolen from his white biological parents by his erstwhile nanny. The desire to return to his biological origins implicit in such a narrative is founded on the assumption that biological mother *really* loved him, as contrasted with a nanny who callously stole him for her own ends. There is another story of course that is all too common: this is the biological mother who does not give a second thought to what it might be for the child to be passed on to a surrogate. The truth behind Happy Sindane's story is interesting enough – Happy's father, purportedly, was also his domestic worker's mother's employer.

different responses in the audience, but that they were primary protagonists in both these stories, obliged to speak with master's voice, and yet retain something of the delicate feeling it provoked. Quite simply these very different experiences implicated very different selves. McClintock (1995, p. 16) reduces this to its fundamentals: "The doubled contradiction of class (race) and gender mark the boy's relation with nanny between women who are identified by their labour and those who are not, between erotic arousal and erotic inadequacy, between (white) men who are socially empowered to look upon women with disdain (the logic of racism), and nannies who are socially empowered to gaze upon half-clothed little boys".

Within each participant, competing experiences somehow needed to be accounted for, for living with selves in opposition was not tenable. What was at stake was psychological conflict - contradictory internal requirements in contradistinction to one another, placing the sense of self-integrity, of self in jeopardy, giving rise to anxiety. Multiple positions, or at least in our instance, two distinct positions, exerted significant pressure upon one another. It was not easy to maintain both personae amidst significant internal strain. Social psychologists discuss such phenomena in the language of cognitions. Festinger's (1957) theory of "cognitive dissonance", the most famous, talks about how we are motivated to achieve harmony, balance or consistency amongst components of our cognitive systems. It contends that when a person holds two contradictory or inconsistent cognitions, they will experience an aversive internal state and will be motivated to restore consonance by various means. If it is relevant to a person's self-concept, as was the case with our men, there are even greater levels of compulsion to restore balance (Aronson, 1992). In order to manage the sense of disquiet (dissonance) and simplify matters, participants did, in fact, employ a range of psychological manoeuvres. Specifically, they constructed a series of discourses, effectively compromise formations, which stood as psychic concessions that enabled them to satisfy competing demands, or at least hold the tensions at some distance. Not only might this have been the result of a motivational imperative to harmony - between repressed and repressing forces, but it also perhaps, even fulfilled personal exculpatory functions vis-à-vis their positions as apartheid subjects.

*7.3.8.2 The Options: Some of the Compromise Formations available to White Apartheid Men*

For our participants the simplest psychological formation was to maintain fidelity to only one narrative form. Such variants are not compromises in the true sense of the term but rather entail splitting – the erasure of one reality (one body of information) in the face of ambiguity.

**7.3.8.2.1. Allegiance to the Canonical Narrative**

Splitting was apparent in the assertion of the primacy of cultural requirements at the exclusion of personal narratives. In practice, doing this was difficult and often required an appeal to one or other form of ‘theory’. One form of this was to assert the blood link that was deemed to supersede any other tie. Such an argument was not far from the eugenicist valorisation of races. Perhaps if the present research were to have been conducted in the years of apartheid, such a discourse would have been the predominant mode. In John’s account, we see his conservative background somehow come to the fore. We have just spoken at length about how crucial Amos the houseboy was to his survival and how he loves Amos; this is in contradistinction to an absent father who played a barely meaningful role in his life.

“I knew who my father was but also know who he was ....you see.....I knew who my father was but I also.....he was more of a friend to me than anything” And he continues “They were ....my family was first, very clearly. I think culturally we are different and because of that I don’t think you’ll ever get that bond .....where it’s really family, family. You know that ‘blood’ bond – because obviously we are different and that will....will have an impact on the relationship. Because we do things differently.....”.

At one point he is talking about his closeness to Amos and becomes defensive.....at another almost in his father’s defence John is unwittingly being racist. In these terms he asserts the blood tie over the relational tie between his two fathers.

Gavin offers a more sophisticated account for the familial having precedence



.... Around me.....in the garden...when we were playing cricket, in the house, in the morning, as anybody who lives with you. But the impact on my life of all of the servants we had – it seems to me – to be minimal and I see that now. That no matter what I could be in myself – it was a dehumanising thing where they couldn't affect my mind. My parents did. They couldn't. They didn't (pause). I tried to relate it in later life when I grew up and I was jailed a number of times, pulled in a number of times my feelings for them are .... “Them” bad word are as my feelings would be for you or any of my friends ..... as I was brought up so I feel very close to them ..... as I do to anybody, but not at that early age you know...placed in a role of a servant.....(pause) which seems peculiar.....because time-wise they probably spent more active time with me than my parents did. (Quickly) Of course as you get older they don't. They see the lunch on the table and you go and play games and they don't figure. Your parents figure – yes – when they come home. With your mom and dad you go on holiday. You ...you .....You ....You never confuse roles.

I was the little boy boss. We were never brought up to be little boy bosses, ever. Very different. I ...you ... you not getting a typical, right interview which you probably do want. This is slightly different. Nevertheless it was there – they were working for us. They had to do their job. That was it. They got blasted when they didn't do the job. They were loved and we were brought up on principle.....there shouldn't, they shouldn't be in that position. I would say that is the ambiguity or the contradiction. And somehow we all lived with it.

Albert, like Gavin, did not have to tolerate discomfort for very long. He also was very clear about his nanny's place. His clarity was founded, not on a biological foundation, but rather by giving precedence to the contractual aspects of the relationship.

I think there was quite a lot of care on her part towards Chloe and I ....but in a kind of a (long pause) I'm struggling for the word; I say maybe a muted way. Or in a way that I wasn't particularly sensitive to at the time. It was just after all just a woman who made the beds, who cleaned the toilets, did the dishes, you know – did really menial, fairly thankless tasks.

#### **7.3.8.2.2. It was Only Ever a 'Love Story'**

There was another type of gross simplification – this was to privilege the relationship, the personal narrative, as the only reality. In the face of overwhelming, everyday evidence the contention that the relationship was timeless and sublime, uncontaminated by the wider social order, did not easily hold. To survive, this cocoon concept left out a harsh world, both exterior and interior, and promised a fullness of being that has little

resemblance to the prevailing chronicles, even the most optimistic ones, of life in their times. Those who are singularly nostalgic about the relationship were somehow able to suppress vast regions of the experience in order to avow the relational field.

“I don’t have memories of her looking after me. I have memories of time spent with a friend. Errm.....it wasn’t this.....it wasn’t like a job description which she was fulfilling. It wasn’t that at all. I don’t ever remember it as that. .... I don’t have that memory. She was way too much. She was too personable. The connection was very strong. She was just really.....she was my second mother. *We were spending time together.* That’s what we were doing. I don’t think it was a burden for her. For me it wasn’t...it certainly wasn’t....there wasn’t...it didn’t feel like it was.....errmm.....*I never felt a master-servant relationship with her.....* she could never have been somebody’s servant.....you know she was so much more.....I don’t see her as a servant.....maybe that’s cos I don’t want to see it that way...could very well be..... I could never call her the maid. I used to call her the lady who works with us. That’s what she was always known as. I even.... She was just so much..... the word never came out of my mouth.....I don’t think that..... I think that she brought me up to see her and treat her as not the lady who worked in the house. She .....just not that. And she never was. She really wasn’t to me. She wa.....we were friends”.

Harry seemed very clear about his nanny’s place. He singularly refused to admit the contractual basis of the relationship. To do so would oblige him to recognise the exploitative underpinnings of the affiliation. Through the duration of the interview he would not be drawn on these aspects. We were left with sense that he would only allow us to inspect the relationship through rosy-tinted spectacles. Harry’s sense making had the ring of the young child still ensconced in her care. Harry, though, was distinct: his declaration of childhood love and continuing adult love for his nanny appeared authentic: he continues to have a relationship with her into his adult life.

#### **7.3.8.2.3 “Our family was different”**

Some of our interviewee’s families were only too acutely aware of the wider oppressive context in which their nannies lived their lives. The parents in these families sought to create an island, an enclave free of the exploitative aspects operant in the wider society. Harry’s parents, for example, were exemplary (as compared to the other employers) in

their attempts to improve their nanny's basic conditions of employment. Others, like Gavin's parents, sought to remediate some of the oppressive-exploitative aspects through their own actions by promoting a relationship based on regard:

“I suppose a lot of left-wing Jews who worked lived with the ambiguity. Although they shouldn't have, they needed to work. I think the idea was – no exploitation. That they never did. They never shouted or did anything, anything (emphasized) to make the relationship seem to be a master-servant one. There were these very strict guidelines about what you can and what you can't do”.

#### 7.3.8.2.4 Asserting a Deracinated Individualism

Like the discourse of having a different family, some participants contended that as individuals they themselves, as distinct from the parents, could somehow stand outside history and the call of the symbolic. Perhaps, even as they heard its call, it was a matter of will; that they could choose otherwise. Fred's way of asserting this was “I am different from my parents' generation”:

You know...those were the years of apartheid and racialism...um racism was in its heyday. Those were the days of Verwoed and it was extremely powerful so...you know luckily there was neither my mom there nor my dad there to sort of, luckily in a way you know. Um...what you miss on the swings you gain on the roundabouts. So just from our own natural devices we were erm....able....we had to work things out for ourselves. From a complete connection and feeling point of view – I mean Francina was....she was an incredibly powerful force in my life

S: “Luckily” is a very interesting choice of word. What do you mean? They would have contaminated it?

F: Ja, absolutely. I do mean “lucky” because it's all those like ..... Like myself and my brother who ....we didn't really have anyone telling us what to do or how to do it. You know – up until today we've got terrible difficulty with discipline. You know we are both very, very undisciplined people. We're both still single guys – you know. He's 40 years old, my brother – 41 and I suppose the reason that I say lucky is that they didn't imprint the mould that they had, sort of as seen from, the mould that they were.....they didn't kind of imprint it on us. So we were kind of

S: What are you talking about – a bigoted, a racist mould?

F: No. I'm talking about racist – a – but I am talking about all kinds of moulds. Social kind of indoctrination which every single child goes through. We ...we.....we were kind of free in a way. We were sort of left to our own devices you know. Erm by the time we...ja .....so ....erm....so because we had this really open upbringing.....my mom wasn't particularly present because she was busy doing her own thing. My dad wasn't there because he was in the Free State, somewhere or something – at some

shop, somewhere....erm...we kind of...we weren't moulded in any kind of way.....except there were a couple of little minor episodes that I remember in my life and Francina – this big black mama – she was one incredibly powerful figure in my life.

#### 7.3.8.2.5 Abjecting the Self

There are those for whom there is no solace in a compromise formation. To live between personal and canonical narratives was to live in a fraught, indefensible position. These subjects, as they heaped scorn upon themselves, gave expression to the contradiction: anxiety and distress was apparent for all to see. As Kristeva (1982) explains: “In the symptom, the abject permeates me. I become abject. Through sublimation I keep it under control”. There were elements of this when some spoke with regret of their own racism and bigotry suggesting that they should have known better. In abjecting the self there was disquiet, even remorse. Novelist Reza de Wet's comments in an interview captures these sentiments: “the black woman is for me the representative of unconditional loving and a nurturing source. But she also represents for me all that we have betrayed and repressed, and that which could have had such a positive, saving influence” (in Coetzee, 2001, p. 690)<sup>72</sup>.

Each one of these concessionary discourses might have been employed singly or to varying degrees together by different respondents. What is clear - these are incomplete solutions since compromise formations are forever unstable structures, always threatening to topple over in a defensive obsessionality or emotional outpouring.

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<sup>72</sup> There was another mode of abjecting the self that somehow lacked insight having rather more exculpatory intentions. Dikeni (in Coetzee, 2001 p. 690) satirically puts it “white guilt for white consumption - The Europeans love it. It pushes the moral high ground back to white people, forces me to accept that they're not entirely bad. They feel sorry man. We'll kill you if you don't forgive. They'll hug me to death and you don't have an option”.

### **7.3.9 Repression, Screen Memories and Eclipsing as a Means of Accession to Political Subjectivity**

It is the most perplexing thing – why ‘nanny matters’ have not made their way into psychological annals; why nobody has taken up these issues before. I believe that part of the answer, at least, can be found in the present data set. Men are happy enough to talk about her, but they will not take, or perhaps better, cannot take the implication of this to heart.

We were surprised at our men as they made their disclosures, candidly telling their nanny experiences of childhood. We were grateful for, amongst other things, being granted privileged access to moments of extraordinary intimacy. Having heard the stories we are, nevertheless left with the feeling that somehow they do not grant her the kind of psychological importance she deserved. Even as they told these things, there was a certain dispassionate curiosity. Certainly there were no obvious tears in their eyes, or choking back of feelings. Her existence in their minds resembled an eventful excursion, an interesting person, even an old love affair – events that barely cause ripples on the surface of their demeanour. For those who would have had a succession of women passing through the home, for whom attachment was not possible, their detachment was not surprising. It was astonishing, though, for those who had had a substantial relationship with her, for whom there was a deep bond. The best proof of her insignificance was the nigh universal declaration that, emotionally speaking, she did not have a patch on the biological parents. Such an affirmation was puzzling in the instance of Fred who had her, and only her, for the first seven years of his life, it was puzzling for John’s Amos, who was more involved in his care than his own father, it was puzzling for Eric, for whom servants Elizabeth and Philemon were so “uncomplicated” and affirming next to his own parents, it was puzzling for Bert who was kept” sane” by Beauty and so we could go on. In these cases, there was no doubt that the paid childminders were more involved, both instrumentally and emotionally, than the flesh and blood, legal parents. The fact of the matter was that the parents’ abandonment (even neglect) was time after

time seen through exculpatory eyes<sup>73</sup>. Not simply this, but for most participants their biological parents continued to be idealised. In part, this may simply be that one does not bite the hand that feeds one. Quite simply, the parents continued to be around long after nanny had gone. When parents continued to sit by the little boy's side - how could he dare to still be angry with them?

There are other reasons why these feelings could not easily attach themselves to their source. Parents would not hear of their children's resentment and despair at nanny's leaving. For the parents such feelings were absurd – it was improbable that a mere nanny could be anything more for their sons than she was for them: she was after all only an employee. We understand that parents may have had their own grounds for dismissing nanny's psychological significance. For the little boy, however, there may be reasons beyond expedience, explaining why he could not broach these matters with his parents. There was another trauma around which the need to forget coalesced: this was the matter of abandonment. This was the loved nanny's abandonment followed by the repeated abandonments by a string of nannies who passed through the home. Long before that, perhaps the unkindest cut of all, was the first caretaker's leaving him. The psychological literature is unanimous - abandonment (or simply separation) by the first love object is a veritable disaster for the child<sup>74</sup>. The terrible narcissistic injury that must be sustained is that "I can be put out of mind", "I can be set aside", "I am not all-important".

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<sup>73</sup> Dave's is an apt example. His inner wrangling takes a particular form. Despite spending his entire daily hours and early evening hours in Portia's care he has a most forgiving attitude towards his biological mother.

D: "Err.... ja. It's a sense of ja....I suppose that is what I should look at sadness. That was something to do with the circumstances of the time....what I was saying about the American Dream....it wasn't really.

SG: (interrupts) – your parents pursuing money rather than paying that attention to their kids.

D: Ja but I had no resentment towards them....whoa...I just see it – that's the way it was. I always felt...I know for a fact....that my mom was doing the best she could. I always had this feeling and err .....so I was quite happy....but just sad and alone. Ja. ..

SG: What I think is so interesting about your story is that such a large proportion of you life, your early life was spent with Portia

D: (interrupts) it is – most critical ..... for you hard drive a most critical time of your life...

<sup>74</sup> Separation has become a nodal concept of latter day psychological (particularly psychoanalytic) nosology. (c.f. e.g. Masterson's (1985; 1995) concept of "abandonment depression" or Rinsley (1982).

As with Hardin's (1988a; 1988b) analyses, so with our informants - nanny occupied a position screened behind the parents, she was eclipsed by mother/father. Mother and/or father came to be imbued with qualities (unwarranted receptacles) that more rightly belonged with nanny. They served as a projective screen for what more aptly was deserved by the nanny. As an old love story it was perhaps best forgotten. She must exist screened behind parental imagos - certainly one's present loves do not want to hear about past yearnings. The little boy's erstwhile nanny does not simply reside at the recesses of awareness because it was so long ago, or because the parents were of all-consuming psychological importance, or indeed, because she was not psychologically important. As Freud (1899/1979 p. 83) informs us, "the indifferent memories of childhood owe their existence to a process of displacement: they are substitutes in mnemonic production, for other impressions which are really significant". This is screen memory.

There are other good reasons why nanny occupies a position at the rear of our men's memory and is so readily overlooked. Her position in our men's psyches was a psychological fact rooted in specific political and historical conditions. Lacan, Kristeva and, before them, Freud, assist us to understand why screen memories are as commonplace as they are for nanny's charge. They tell us how the child must repress the Imaginary, the maternal aspect, in order to gain entry into history and cultural affairs. Abjecting her was somehow necessary for our little white boy. Parental attributes (whiteness) must be idealised, and nanny's maternal function must be repressed if a child was to have access to the cultural reality principle at all. To retain fidelity to her was to foreclose entry into the realm of white masculine culture and history.

There is more to this - nanny's mere presence signifies a weak spot, she confirms that his power as man and apartheid subject was an illusion. She knew secrets of another me, susceptible to her whims, vulnerable to her choosing to acknowledge me or not. Abjection was necessary, things must be inverted. Before, it was nannies who were entitled to look upon needy, half naked little boys. Now it had become men who were entitled to look upon needy black women. In the first instance, what was crucial was the little boy's desperate need of his nanny's emotional and physical care. This became



nanny's desperate need of her employer's money. His need of her and the embarrassment was best forgotten. He was now in possession of the phallus (power, the means to satisfy desire) where before it was she who possessed it. Ultimately nanny must continue to exist as, what Freeman (1993) calls "primal scenes of selfhood". These are the "texts of our past...regions of secrecy, whose meanings are never wholly to be discovered" (p. 149)<sup>75</sup>

Of course there is no genuine mastery over the abject. Nanny returns to haunt our little boys. Under an apartheid dispensation this was the "swart gevaar" (the 'black peril') – what urban legend described as "the enemy within". She does not represent the most subversive for nothing. The threat she symbolises is the return of the repressed, that is a reawakening of the child at his most vulnerable. In all of this we see that there may be much more to Psychology's omission of the nanny than first met the eye. To begin to investigate further, is to unpick a knot in the fabric of what constitutes our conception of the middle-class family.

#### ***7.4. Nanny's Continued Existence in the Present as a Symptom***

As with their memories, so "present symptoms" seem to organise themselves in and around the dichotomous way in which the relationship existed in the child's mind. How they related to these women, now "internal objects", to use a Kleinianism, was not ambivalently, but rather, moving between two very separate, distinct modes. The internal representation of nanny is neither all-of-a-piece nor consonant. These depictions are steeped in both loving and hating, without there ever being an intermediate space where these separate pockets of feeling could meet.

There were a variety of very interesting symptomatic prolongations of the early experience with nanny. Limitations of space permit a more thoroughgoing exploration of only two participant's stories. Nanny had become saturated with overdetermined

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<sup>75</sup> Fascinatingly it is the Wolf-man in the care of nursemaids that alerts Freud (1979/1914) to the notion of a primal scene. In fact more specifically it is the beloved nursemaid's rebuffs that constitute the narcissistic injury around which Wolf-man's obsessive symptoms coalesce.

signification. Our participants' psychological productions were very personal, flesh and blood stories. They were also about selves engaged with the socio-political realities of the day. She existed within vectors of power. If we are to make any sense of these productions we are required for a moment to step into our participants' phantasy lives and recognise that these productions have been mapped onto the landscape of social conventions they were intended to negotiate (Noyes, 1998). This is indeed the interface of the apartheid culture and the individual's unconscious. As participants spoke, at one moment they were considering nannies, at another they were considering sexual identity, and at another, they were articulating their appropriation of the apartheid discursive formation.

Cliff grants us access to the mire that comprises his internal world. Cliff's story concerns unrequited love, dabbling in trans-racial sexuality and flirting with miscegenation. Race, in Cliff's psychological context is a crucial referent, inundated with meaning<sup>76</sup>. His preoccupations concern the eroticisation of socially coded power relationships - Reik's (1975) conception of the fetish. Sexuality is thus taken well beyond the realms of the intrapsychic. McClintock's (1992, p. 71-72) insights assist us here: "by reducing fetishism however, to a single male poetics of the flesh and a privileged Western narrative of origins, the traditional psychoanalytic theory of fetishism does not admit either race or class as formative categories crucial to the aetiology of fetishism". She continues – "Far from being a purely sexual icon, fetishism is a memorial to the contradictions in social value that can take a number of historical guises. The fetish stands at the crossroads of a crisis in historical value, as the symbolic displacement and the embodiment in one object of incompatible codes in social meaning, which the individual cannot resolve at a personal level" (McClintock, 1992 p. 72). Our men's nanny symptoms exist somewhere in this anterior world, beyond simple psychological realities.

Cliff reported having very favourable experiences with the various black women who worked as nanny in his parents' home. More than this, other than his mother, it is his

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<sup>76</sup> Inevitably the question arises - is the juxtaposition, interest in trans-racial relationship and my early relationship with nanny, spurious? In other words, are we simply considering the difficulties race conscious men have engaging in trans-racial relationship. The available evidence would suggest not.

nanny, Gladys, that stands as a formative reference of the female body. It was amidst his talking about his prurient adolescent interest in a semi-naked bathing Gladys that we observed him caught in the motor of abjection, what Kristeva (1992, p. 68) calls the “vortex of summons and repulsion”. Again, with Gladys’ daughter, there were the furtive looks as she bent over, in her low cut top, only to quickly turn away. Then there was pornography:

C: “You know but I didn’t. I remember but now also when we’re speaking about nakedness there um you know in the past when I bought Hustler magazines and things like that – they sometimes have black people ..... And I would just page through it and not look properly....

SG: Oh really

C: Ja so that is ...speaking about it is also interesting for me. Just page the page....not even have a decent look.

SG: You saying you avert your gaze....how do you understand that?

C: I dunno ... I thought about that now so.....

SG: Do you think you would have found black bodies interesting or you shouldn’t find it interesting.

C: No I found it interesting .....Nah I would (stumbles now quietly) um ooh.... I can’t explain at this point in time why I paged the page. It never crossed my mind in the past. It didn’t cross my mind to think twice if I can look ...I just paged but thinking about it now I dunno....um? I feel silly in a way speaking about it – why didn’t I look? And I maybe I should know the answer. I’m trying to rationalise it now

That race constitutes a primary referent in his unconscious process becomes clearer as we listen further. This time he was talking about his interest in a black university colleague: “I’ve just remembered that there was a girl in my university class who was an Indian girl that I found out...that broke up with her girlfriend, ag boyfriend, and I actually wanted to uh er.....that was the first relationship that I thought OK - let me try something”. He goes on to describe that they had spent many hours together on the telephone, “lots of physical interaction”, playful “testing of boundaries”, physical contact that was arousing but was not explicitly sexual. This is said to have felt comfortable. Clifford concludes this discussion with “My brother, he actually kissed a black girl. But he was drunk and it was um....more of a dare”. As if to explain his interest, Clifford goes on with: “....the thing that attracted me to African women is that they’re very domesticated ...in a sense....they look after the children, they look after the needs of the husband. I see them as extremely supportive. .... very strong women (emphatic). As I see it, black women have extreme power in the family ....um... but then again the man is also allowed to be the man”. We

see in this line of reasoning that he is very directly engaging stereotypes, but he is also talking about his childhood Gladys.

In the black body, for the likes of Clifford, there is something tantalising that is also taboo. His fascination with the abject exists as “an itch to scratch”. Gallop (1982, p. 147) using French feminist Cixious’ reading of Freud’s Dora case, calls attention to the ambiguity of the nanny’s place. She is the one who is to be *foutue à la porte* (fucked at the door). As a threatening representative of the economic underclass, the extra-familial, and the oppressed black majority, the maid must be both seduced (assimilated) and abandoned (expelled). The nanny is desirable: her alterity is a stimulus, a tension, a disturbing itch in the composure of the family. But the desire for her is murderous. Sexual seduction (ritual homogenising assimilation) is not sufficient to reduce the stimulus tension. Her alterity is not just her femininity, not even her not belonging to the family; it is her not belonging to the same economic class. It is not enough to seduce her; she must be expelled from the family”. I believe that we get close to the real problem inherent in the relationship with the profound splitting entailed in wanting to have (possess) her, and at another, wanting to expel (dismiss) her. From experience he knows he can get close, even intimate, but there remains some insurmountable barrier. For the little boy to have genuine contact with the nanny there was not simply an incest taboo that was operant (specifically in the form that it is illicit to breach generational boundaries), but even as the child becomes close to this woman he is aware that this closeness is proscribed. Indeed, real contact would ensure that his biological parents have become redundant<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> For the white child, the problem is that entitlement and prohibition stand in the same place.

The ‘little man’ growing up under apartheid had an exaggerated sense of what was permissible. Nanny’s political and social inferiorization gave rise to an inflated sense of what he could demand of this woman. It is not simply that he discerned prevailing social morés in his parents’ attitudes and the world at large, but that he had an experience wherein he was aggrandised. Indeed there were probably times when he possessed her as no other before could possess her. The domestic worker was both much more present, and much more amenable to his wishes, than the biological parents were. For him, it was not just that he had the prerogative to dictate in ways that were not the case with his biological mother, but he could have of her much more than he could have his mother, she was his and his alone. In many respects he could do with her as he pleased. In no time at all, the “little baas” recognised that he could insist and she must listen. He came to know that should she fail to heed his requirements of her, she puts herself at the risk of his parents’ sanction. To the extent that the child deemed himself to have propriety rights over his caretaker, she was

Clifford provided more evidence to the effect that the black woman was not allowed to provoke real feelings in him. To use his words: “she is not allowed to stimulate”. This time we see more clearly how his natural yearning to look must be averted. The incident to which he referred was certainly an unusual one. As a student, in order to supplement his allowance, Clifford agreed to model for art students. In this particular situation to which he referred he was modelling together with a black woman for a drawing class subject comprising only white students. Both models had on only their underwear. He talked about his enormous struggle for he was “keen to have a peep”, “to have a decent look” at his fellow model, but declared there were dangers - “if I was stimulated it would be quite embarrassing”. Given the evocative nature of such a situation, arguably the wish to “peep” was quite ordinary. It was the inner turmoil that this engendered that is notable. One has the suspicion that if it had been a white woman standing next to him, his dilemma would somehow have been less fraught.

There is another strand to all of this for Clifford, and this concerns his childhood flirting with the idea of miscegenation. On this occasion he was reflecting on a friendship with a married, black university colleague. He reported his closeness to this woman as causing him some disquiet. Initially he was unable to account for this. He then digressed to talking about the fact that she had mentioned that she fell pregnant that year and that this exacerbated feelings of self-consciousness. He reported that people were more inclined to stare at them. The reason for this, he assumes, was that “everyone thought it was my baby”. Let us pick up the conversation here:

SG: were you romantically involved?

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like the indentured serf or the ever faithful slave of yore. Like the incestuous child, he relished in the illusion of being this mother’s sole object of desire.

One class of developmental phenomena in particular affected by this relationship are Oedipal ones (in the sense of positive Oedipus – desiring the mother, identifying with father). In the transmutation of the Oedipus into its South African variant, certain issues are thrown into relief, coming into a much sharper focus than they otherwise might be. In the nature of the Oedipal drama the child finds himself in the very contradictory position - “he can have the mother but he really cannot have her”. This contradiction in context of the indigenous relationship is ever more stark: not only is he *more entitled* to her than he is say to his mother, but he is subject to a prohibition that is now *doubly proscriptive*. Apartheid children paradoxically *both* had a more marked sense that they could have this woman and they really could not have her, than say their European or American counterparts.

C: (quickly) No. (quietly) I think ...I knew...I picked up a lot of jealousy when I got a girlfriend. But maybe that was my own thing. She's...she was married. So there wasn't....the thought did cross my mind. Put it that way. It did cross my mind...but never anything more than a hug or a kiss.

SG: the thought did cross your mind – meaning you were interested?

C: Ja. The thought did cross my mind that that the possibility exists for a relationship. It was....and strange enough. I'm talking about relationships. When I was in Standard 7, standard 6 or 7. I went through a phase, a patch where I thought I was going to marry a black lady. I really, really believed I was going to marry a black lady

SG: what do you think that is? It is such an interesting thought

C: (sigh) I dunno...I'm gonna have work it out....to ponder on it (laughs)

After some pondering he offers: "I struggled to form significant relationships with white ladies...um in the sense that the girlfriends that I had were very superficial (quickly) but then I think at that age a lot of them are. But also I felt very judged um ....where I would feel very uncomfortable with a person. I was teased a lot in primary school.....and I think the whole idea of not being judged, being accepted...I knew acceptance could only be seen through a black lady. That could be a possibility.

Clifford's mind wandered taking us down a most interesting path. Marrying a black woman means many things for him and has many associations. At one there are its caretaking, supportive aspects. At another it is a repository for his feelings of inadequacy, shame, self depreciation and the like. Standing on the cusp of his own blackness (adequacy) and whiteness (potency) suddenly from nowhere, he asserts lineage. Speaking thus he reported that his fiancé is Italian, but critically, she has Afrikaans blood in her. This he avers was important because "I wanted Afrikaans blood to continue in my family".

Eric is a highly articulate, thoughtful and somewhat obsessional character. He is not married, and was not involved in a long-term relationship at the time of the interviews. The discussion began with him offering some very interesting insights into his (mostly) very warm relationships with the various nannies who worked in his childhood home. As we chatted, meandering this way and that, suddenly we were on the subject of illicit sexuality, specifically his having consorted with prostitutes over many years. Arriving here certainly did not seem to have been spurious – for Eric to talk about such matters was manifestly difficult. He is very obviously an extremely private person and felt somewhere deeply ashamed by his predilections. He began explaining his conduct:



I have sexual needs and I ..... I make a lot of use of .....black prostitutes. OK? As safely as I possible....as I am able to do. And I am quite amazed at how because of their accessibility to me of them.....notwithstanding that it's a paid relationship. Errrrm ..... black women, quite generally, have become a source of great..... I appreciate their beauty in ..... in a way that I never thought possible..... Given the apartheid years....

Deliberating on these things, he averred that he has a distinct preference for black prostitutes over white ones.

It's very interesting for me – I used to take terrible risks with my prostitute seeking thing. I used to venture into Hilbrow. I used to do unthinkable things. Things I wouldn't think of doing. Driving around Hilbrow ...the streetwalkers and things. But I have the most not entirely ... but I have very .....when I was still taking these kinds of risks, I had the most extremely uncomfortable and unpleasant encounters with white prostitutes. And I have a thesis all about this that, generally speaking, 80%-90% of cases my contacts with black women have been enjoyable and ....somehow surprisingly congenial. And I mean .... I have the world of experience encountering these women as somehow extraordinary women ....even. People who are forced out of economic necessity to do this work, that they wouldn't otherwise be doing. To me there seems to be a very, very sharp ..... contrast, this is in line with the experience of – why the black women do it and why the white women do it. And this goes back a few years now because I haven't been with a white prostitute in a long time. From where I was I couldn't help thinking that there was something – some kind of psychological instability with the white women who were doing this, as opposed to the black women.

SG: Interesting

E: The black women – there seemed overwhelmingly to be socio-economic reasons why they were doing it. In the case of the women...certainly the white women, who hung around Hilbrow, they seemed solely to be, seldom without exception, addicted to drugs – have serious drug problems which there was little or no evidence of ..... and there continues to be little or no evidence of the black women (with emphasis). The contrast is absolutely fascinating. It isn't enough experience, but I have enough experience with white prostitutes to ... to eventually say “no – no more of this I am sticking to black women” (laughs). And that – that contrast and as I say .... the .... the....the ....well enough explained. (pause) So for what it's worth – if there is any connection between my early years and this ..... there .....there are black, white males in my experience and don't ..... and don't associate with black prostitutes so you know

At some point I drew Eric's attention to the context in which he begins to discuss these matters with me. He continued to make the link with his erstwhile nanny Elizabeth:

E: Notwithstanding all the things that I have said of somebody like Elizabeth (the erstwhile nanny). Like Elizabeth ..... that's errr .....Maybe a very long shot but maybe there is some kind of very thin strand between the good feelings that I've expressed and this thing (pause) ..... That is the way.....but I can't help thinking that



there is a ..... there might just be a very thin strand between my early experiences and this. (Quickly) Not only .....

SG: (interrupts) That's an amazing link

E: (quickly) I wouldn't over do it because I think the primary thing that...that has led to this for me is my inability to ..... or my refusal ..... or whatever it is to form any kind of decent relationships. I accept myself fully. I am quite comfortable with it.

And it's the way it is. (pause)

Talking in this fashion Eric was plainly cagey. The connection he made becomes much more meaningful if we juxtapose these illicit engagements with a few facts of his personal life that preceded this discussion. We must appreciate that Eric's relationship with nannies was very different from those with his parents. Indeed Eric holds deep feelings of enmity towards both his parents. His mother was described as a highly critical woman married to a very remote father. It is this context, that as a child he found himself entertaining the fantasy of surrogate black parents:

I have a sense that there might have been a .... a few months when Elizabeth and Philemon sort of overlapped with each other. And ...and I have some ill-formed image in my mind, at the time. A feeling or sense that ..... now these are two really good people, you know. This is the way things must stay.....They were two impeccably comfortable people – like at no other time, in my upbringing or in any of the years – we had two wonderfully warm presences. And why does it have to change? You know, it's so ..... that was the sense when like all the other ones they had to go at their expected time. (in a wistful tone) It didn't seem like they were around for a terribly long time, you know. Maybe two or three years .....that brief period of time when Philemon and Agnes were in place they were like (pause) almost images of what my parents could have been or the feelings that my parents might have generated had they been the sort of parents that I needed them to be, kind of thing.....I.... there was such uncomplicated feelings of love, affection, fondness for these two people which I mean..... I couldn't ..... no not at all. My whole relationship with my parents for the duration of my life which ..... a complex mix of anger and ambivalence and ..... difference and rebellion and ..... It's amazing I turned out not so bad after all (laughs)

With this in mind, Eric's racial preferences of prostitutes begins to make more sense.

Here is Eric's insight:

But the .... the psychological, the drug addiction problems posed by them quickly diverted me to a preference for black women. So that..... the clearness of that to me diverts my attention away from the possibility of the link in any way in any case of the lack of an ambivalence of someone like Elizabeth

SG: (interrupts) Could we not.....

D: You see what I mean how...how *this more surface thing diverts my attention away from what indeed may be a more ....a more fundamental issue.*

SG: Ja.

(own emphasis)

There is a very clear repetition which Eric himself affirmed. As in his early years, he is able to have a meaningful relationship with a black woman where his relationship with a white woman is overshadowed by “complication” - her excessive self-preoccupation. In the interview, he spelled out his reservations about these white women (both mother and white prostitutes) - “I don’t want to have to deal with all this shit..... it’s too much, it’s got nothing to do with me”. Just behind this avowal, the fragility of Eric’s position *vis-à-vis* women in general (qua those whom he might love) is plain: As it were - women hold all the cards – they have their own free will, they can pick and choose whether they want to be with him or not. He was susceptible to the vagaries of their whims. Indeed, he bears the psychological scars of these facts sustained early in his life – his mother’s capricious temperament, her abandoning him to nannies in the first instance, and an acutely exacerbated feeling of his dispensability when his various nannies left him. Early in the interview, Eric impressed upon the interviewer his vulnerability to these women telling of a particular nanny who seemed to take delight in repeatedly shaming him by exploiting his insect phobia.

The logical question occurs – why Eric is not involved in a full-blown relationship with a black woman rather than one which is at its outset forbidden - is met with some telling answers. He answered taking recourse to what he refers to as dispositional tendencies comprising: “wilfulness”, “unreadiness to compromise”, “I don’t want to be accountable to anyone. So the .....the contemplating of a relationship on a daily basis is almost unthinkable”. What he asserts was ultimately only partially true. He cannot have a full-blown relationship with a black woman because that would put things on an equal footing, leaving him open to her wishes. Keeping things just the way they were all those years ago is a guarantee of some form of possession and safety. Turning things on their head in this way, is of course not new. This is the act of keeping the nanny at the door, half-heartedly embracing, whilst keeping her prospective ejection in mind which Gallop (1982) and Cixious discern in Freud’s Dora. Indeed, the relationship cannot be mutual for

to do so would be to disrupt the recursivity of power; as he knows from experience, things can become “complicated”. He knows that there is no legal protection for the prostitute, as there was none for the nanny all those years ago – he can do with her what he will. Having lost (both mother and nannies) he is ever vigilant about losing again. Jealously and greedily he guards the kind of access he has; she is his possession; he will not lose her again. He must continue to be in charge. As a sexual object she is called upon to fulfil a restricted and rigidly controlled role. Turning the represented figure itself into a fetish, it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (Mulvey, 1975). The tragedy in all of this is that as stuck as he is in the repetition; the possibilities for a more fully loving relationship are limited.

Once again Eric’s most important relationships with women are contractual ones - he can call the shots, whence he is able to maintain the illusion of autonomy. “The moment of paying a prostitute is structured around a paradox. The client touches the prostitute’s hand in a fleeting moment of intimacy in the exchange of cash, a ritual exchange that confirms and guarantees each time the man’s economic mastery over the woman’s sexuality, power and time. At the same time, however, the moment of paying confirms precisely the opposite: the man’s dependence on the woman’s dual power and skill” (McClintock, 1992, p.72).

A few participants extended some of the themes raised by the cases of Clifford and Eric. Common for some participants was the schism that whiteness was deemed attractive (imbued with eroticism) whilst blackness represented caring/loving. For these, the partition between idealised, all-beautiful white doll (his mother) and a flesh and blood black woman who was at hand whom he could not avail himself of, had profound consequences for their personal relationships. There is a great deal more that could be elaborated from these stories, as I am sure there are many others in the broader population of white men who were cared for by nannies that are similarly interesting.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

As much as psychology stands guilty of ignoring the constitutive significance of history and culture, so there has long been a tendency amongst the likes of Marxism and Liberal Rationalism to reduce the psychological aspects of social life to some other reality, for example maintaining capitalism, class interests and so forth. Such simple appropriations of the brute data of life, I would suggest, lead to two types of conclusions: excessively optimistic or excessively pessimistic ones.

On the issue of the little white boy's relationship with his nanny, the optimists are those who pare matters down to attachment, whence they are inclined to exalt "remembered black hands" and sing paeans to this forgotten love story. Such psychologism is perhaps best illustrated by novelist Reza de Wet's yearning to return to the lineage of the benevolent black mother whom she imagines welcoming her back<sup>78</sup>. Of course the trouble with such a stance is that there is no attempt to "imagine the position of the good black mother or of the potentially displaced black siblings" (Coetzee, 2001, p. 693). The excessive pessimists, by contrast, are given to a sociologism - white men are simply bearers of an oppressive political formation. The fact of "remembered black hands", if it is even acknowledged, is merely sappy sentimentality.

The point to all of this is that these are complex matters. In my consideration of the data, it is the variegated and multifarious articulations between the discursive and the psychological that I sought to illuminate. It is not just that these social practices have psychological aspects to them, but that the hegemonic is deeply rooted in our psyche. Such a complex view allows us talk of oppression as a psychological structure as much as a material one, grounded in cultural and historically-specific institutions and practices. It was Fanon (1982) who possibly first made the point that the psychical operates precisely

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<sup>78</sup> To restate her declaration: "the black woman is for me the representative of unconditional loving and a nurturing source. But she also represents for me all that we have betrayed and repressed, and that which could have had such a positive, saving influence".

as a political formation, that experience is an embattled site of historical struggles and social contestation as much as it is a private domain. Perhaps Foucault (in Probyn, 1993, p. 169) says it best: “being occupied with oneself and political activities are linked”.

The home itself is an overdetermined site, a place tasked with manifold (even competing) projects. As the cliché tells us: it is a critical interface between the personal and the political. It is the epicentre of personal history and the psychological; it is also a site of reproduction that prepares subjects to take their positions in social space. It is at this intersection that the social form of non-household members’ paid reproductive labour arises. Indeed, the institution of nanny occurs at a meeting of the cross currents, wherein issue of subjectivity and subjection arise. It is amidst these rival forces that richly textured life narratives unfold. These complex articulations take us a long way from the exaggerated optimism and pessimism of psychologism and sociologism. What is patent in the present study is that the practice of employing a nanny, as much as it is a buttress of the *status quo*; also has distinctly subversive aspects to it. We know that it is through living and being alongside her that he learns to wear what society will accord him as a white man. In contradistinction, it was also the most intimate childhood contact he would have with an adult outside the immediate family. Nanny is a social institution that reinforces but also resists political structuring of subjectivity. Indeed it is this institution that has the voice to disperse the univocity of the paternal signifier. This is the omnipresent threat of the return of the repressed; the object’s capacity to haunt forever threatening to undo the order of things.

The present research has distinct limitations. There is the political charge that I write from the inexorably privileged position of whiteness. It might be said that insofar as we (my participants and I) speak on behalf of the absent (the nanny) we commit an act of violence towards her. My rejoinder to such an accusation is that while white apartheid-era men were my focal point, it is that very seat of privilege that was scrutinised. There is no doubt, nevertheless, that that these problematics could be more fully elaborated by talking to erstwhile nannies. To do so, however, raises different questions to those asked. To boot, I have unfortunately already gone beyond bounds of a mini-thesis, the requirement

for degree purposes. There is the more scholarly charge that this work lacks rigour, raising more questions than it answers. In this regard I make a plea for leniency. In my defence I would say I aver that this study was a methodologically systematic attempt, a first to address lacunae in the literature. Indeed, I must concede that this is a first reading of fragments of memory, an interpretation of the data that is far from exhausted. As the wisdom of both the consulting room and hermeneuticists tell us - a narrative is never concluded, it is always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation and that such engagements with the past are important steps towards deepening understanding.

I would hope that this first foray is an impetus to further exploration. The implications of such research might be significant at a number of levels. It certainly informs debates on masculinity, even on the likes of the psychology of oppression. Without wishing to overstate the ramifications of this research, I would suggest that what is at stake transcends idle psychological theorizing. As much as these questions are interesting, there are distinct clinical implications. We are obliged to begin to rethink the psychology of the childminding situation, to ask how subjectivity would be produced or changed, having had the experience of being brought up or nannied by a black woman. Nanny occupies an important place in her charge's mind, however obscured this may be. She certainly is a screen for split off/abjected aspects of self and world (most often the parents). She is the receptacle for psychological fragments, both loving and hateful. It is clear we have gone well beyond talking about attachment versus disruption of attachment. Perhaps, in due course, we might even begin to theorize a unique, indigenous developmental psychology that gives credence to nanny's contribution.

There is the bigger picture beyond the consulting room. Focusing on white men in the apartheid-era as I did, inevitably brings into sharp focus the fact that, in general, white men were the beneficiaries of racist, economic and patriarchal oppression. As much as it is the responsibility of governments to broach the past en route to considering the future, (in our local instance this includes the likes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), so too is this a job for individual subjects to self consciousness about "everyday

imperialism”<sup>79</sup>. Themes of remembering for understanding emerge as a central problematic in all kinds of representation generally, but also in the lives of ordinary South Africans striving to come to terms with what was done to them or done in their name. Memory work attendant on a new political dispensation is akin to the therapeutic task – in order to most comfortably live the present and the future, we must find a way to speak (represent) the past. Antjie Krog addresses questions of refiguring post-apartheid whiteness in the Country of my Skull (1998). It is founded on the view that the antidote to racial essentialism is certainly not erasure: “.....after so many years I feel an uneasiness with what is mine, with what is me. It is not about a yearning to be black but the yearning to qualify (to be heard and acknowledged) for a black audience” (p. vi). As an erstwhile beneficiary she feels herself barred as a South African on account of her whiteness, on account of the name of her father. Krog’s self consciousness is not simply about a narcissistic and exhibitionistic search for absolution. Attendant on such forms of reflexivity is a high degree of self-doubt, a suggestion that a new identity for white South Africans may be possible, uneasily and provisionally at certain moments. This is a genuine quandary for those who will not immigrate to the Sydney’s, Melbourne’s, or Wellingtons of the world, and consider themselves citizens under a new dispensation<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> Without becoming overly polemical, the transition to a post-apartheid era amounts to more than merely the seizure of state power; it amounts to the transformation of everyday relations, values, practices and civil institutions of society. This is part of the refiguring where we move beyond the “public transcript”. It is of the realm of memory work where the dominant order (as it is acted out and lived) is unhinged from its stability and contested, re-interpreted and re-appropriated. For an interesting treatment of these ethical dilemmas see Foucault’s introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti Oedipus* (1984).– Foucault talks of ridding our speech and acts, our hearts of our “pleasures of fascism”, “fascism ingrained in our behaviour”. This is “not just a political fascism but a fascism which causes us to desire our own domination” (p. xiii).

<sup>80</sup> Coetzee’s (2001) reading of the Krog’s (1998) text is most insightful: (Country of my Skull) “... is a powerful statement about discontinuity, about the inability to continue with life as it was before” (p.687). Towards this end, she employs Shoshona Feldman’s considerations on translation: “....the question of how to continue when the past is precisely not allowed any continuance. Translation is the metaphor of a new relation to the past, a relation that cannot resemble, furthermore, any past relation to the past but that consists essentially, in the historical performance of radical discontinuity.....” (p. 688).



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**APPENDIX I**

**ADVERT PLACED IN MAIL AND GUARDIAN 28 JUNE TO 4 JULY 2002  
and on UNIVERSITY NOTICE BOARDS in order to recruit participants**

**Were you cared for by a nanny?** I would like to talk to white men who were looked after by a domestic worker (nanny) for significant period/s of their childhood. I am a doctoral student doing research in the area. All conversations will be treated with the strictest confidence. If you are willing to assist please call/leave a message at 011 648-0218 (Sarron)

## APPENDIX II

### INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

#### ◆ *Rationale*

Throughout the interviews the participants were encouraged to employ a narrative style in accounting for their lives. To facilitate the act of story telling, questions and comments were presented in an everyday, conversational style. If you will, the key principle of fieldwork was to maintain the “analytic attitude”, that is, to strive for a participant-centred process. As free as possible of the interviewer’s interventions, the interviewees were encouraged to take the lead regarding the direction and pace of the interviews. The questions that follow are simply a broad framework (guidelines), an aide-mémoire, to assist in reminding the interviewer what sort of questions he would like to address. In developing a list of questions the intention was not to standardise each interview by presenting the exact questions and order in which the interviewer would ask them. In fact how the interviews proceeded depended on the sort of responses the interviewee gave. How much time or thought was spent over each question or indeed area varied from participant to participant. If there was an active intention on the researcher’s part this was to focus loosely on four broad thematic areas.

#### ◆ *Aide-mémoire*

##### **1. Introduction**

Take me back to your early years – who care of you as a child? Why were you left in the care of a nanny? Do you remember much of her (of them)? Were there other children also looked after by your nanny, for example, brothers and sisters? Briefly tell me a little bit about yourself and your family. How did nanny fit into the family context?

## **2. Memories of Nanny**

**Mapping a Time Line** As a point of entry into this area the participant was invited, as best as he could, to draw up a graphic representation of his childhood by year, noting the name of the domestic worker who looked after him/the children and for how long (gaps in memory whether it be names, periods etc. were also noted.)

Do you have any thoughts or comments about your “nanny time line”? Lets try and flesh out your graphic description. For each childminder represented the participant was asked: What do you remember of 1.Nanny X, Who was she to you, then? Who was she in your family, then? Is there anything noteworthy about Nanny X that you can remember? Tell me about your being looked after by a nanny.

## **3. The Interpretative Step – Her Emotional Significance**

Is your nanny/nannies someone whom you have given a second thought since your childhood? If so, what would some have those reflections involved? If you think back to her now, what sort of significance does she have for you? Now that you are thinking about her, what sort of feelings does that evoke for you?

## **4. Symptomatic Phenomena**

Since your childhood have you had any significant relationships with a black person? Do you presently have any significant relationship with a black person?

Have you ever been intimate or romantically involved with a person of colour?

Have you had any dreams, memories, fantasies, idle thought involving a black person?



*APPENDIX III*

**TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS EMPLOYED IN THE PRESENT STUDY**

**(derived from Parker, 1992, p. 124-125)**

1. When there are doubts about the accuracy of material it will be put in round brackets (like this).
2. When material has been omitted from the transcript, it will be signalled by putting a pair of empty square brackets, thus [ ].
3. When there is a need to clarify something, the explanation is put in square brackets, like so [to help the reader].
4. When there are noises, words of assent and so on, this is put in slashes /hmm/, like this/yes/.
5. The absence of a gap between one speaker and another is indicated with = marks at the end of one and the beginning of the next utterance.
6. Pauses in the speech with the amount of seconds in round brackets e.g. (2) for two seconds and a full stop for small pauses less than a second (.).
7. Extended sounds indicated with colon marks – ye;;s.
8. Emphasis in speech indicated by underlining those parts of the text.
9. An intake of breath apparent in the placement of a full stop before a word - .aah.

*APPENDIX IV*

*AFRIKAAANS ABSTRACT*

*UITTREKSEL*

Die gewoonte om vir nie-huishoudelike lede te betaal vir die voortbregende arbeid om die kinders op te pas, het 'n lang geskiedenis. Die kinderoppasser verskynsel is nou verbonde aan kolonialisme, waar bediendes gebruik was om aan die behoeftes van die heersende klas te voldoen. In Suid Afrika was kinderoppassers dikwels swart, arbeiders klas, stemreg-ontneemde vrouens. Om te begin met Freud se eie analitiese oorweginge van sy *kinderfraü*, die na-oorlogse beskouing van die Britte van “objekte-betrekkinge”, akademiese oorwegings en latere empiriese navorsing, was op sy beste verborge of *en passant*. Die huidige studie handel spesifiek oor wit, apartheids-era mans se herinneringe en die daaropvolgende gevolge van die ervaring om opgepas te wees deur 'n swart kinderoppasser. Daar is 'n teoretiese tuiste tussen verhaal en psigoanalise, dit het begin in die veronderstelling dat sodra daar diepgewortelde onwetende motiewe en worstellinge is, wit apartheids-era mans identiteit strategië sal demonstreer wat intens plaaslik (betrekend besef) en globaal (afhanklik van breër omstandighede van verstaanbaarheid) is. Diepgaande onderhoude met nege navorsing deelnemers het Frosh et al (2002), Hollway (1989) en Hollway en Jefferson (1977; 2000; 2001) se “free association narrative technique” uitgebrei. Die data was in tematiese en verhaal aspekte geanaliseer. Resultate onthul dat herinneringe aangaande kinderoppassers in twee bepaalde verhaal klasse ingedeel kan word nl. “onthou swarthande” en “kaffer se plek”. In “onthou swarthande” was herinneringe deurtrek met teerheid, liefde en besorgdheid; hierdie was hartroerende stories aangaande die betekenis om die voorwerp van 'n kinderoppasser se versorging te wees. In hierdie verklarings het hulle die belangrikheid van die oppasser se plek in die huis bevestig; was sy 'n daaglikse versorger, 'n bondgenoot, 'n skuilplek, 'n speler in die familie drama, was selfs oorvleulend in hulle kinderjare seksualiteit. In “kaffer se plek” verhale was die protagonis in maatskaplike ruimte gelee, herken en identiteit vergun. Daar is gesaghebbend aanvaar dat die kinderoppasser as persoon vir

niks geld nie, gereken dat sy misbaar was en dat sy 'n definitiewe, mindere plek in die samelewing beklee. Die naasbestaan van die mededingende stories dui haar posisie aan as 'n skeur in die fabriek van die apartheids lewe. Deelnemers se oplossing vir die afwyking behels ooreenkomstige vormings, die spesifiek vorms wat in aanmerking geneem was. Kristeva se oorweging van die diachronic met betrekking tot die Lacanian registers Imaginary and die Symbolic in die lig van veragtelikheid het 'n ontwikkelings raamwerk verskaf om te verstaan hoe die klein seun se vroeë intiemheid getransformeer kon word om later sy meester se mantel op te neem. Waar die bestaande literatuur bereid is om die kinderoppasser se bestaan te erken is dit beskerm agter ouerlik afbeeldinge. Die huidige ondersoek neem dit egter verder en stel voor dat onderdrukking, skerm herinninge en "eclipsing" (Hardin, 1985) 'n onvermydelike manier is om by te dra tot politieke aanvaarding. Resultate stel voor dat vir die persone wat opgepas was deur 'n kinderoppasser, spore van ervaring gelaat het in herinneringe, die onderbewuste en hulle besef van die self. Die kinderoppasser se volgehoue bestaan in die bewuste van haar charge neem verskeie vorms aan as :(gewoonlik geliefde) herinneringe, 'n egte verhouding of 'n simptoem.