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## Cultivating a Troubled Consciousness:

Compulsory sound-mindedness and complicity in oppression

C. Chapman

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## Abstract

Implicating oneself in oppression provokes uncertainty, shame and anxiety, and identity destabilizations. Yet anti-oppressive texts often denigrate these experiences, participating in forces I call "compulsory sound-mindedness." Narratives of three women confronting their complicity illustrate the workings of compulsory sound-mindedness: a white Canadian recognizing the racism in her development work and both a white woman and a racialized Muslim reflecting on their complicity in ongoing Canadian colonization. The three narratives devalue affect, uncertainty, and destabilized identity. They also reveal these denigrated experiences as fundamental to personal-is-political ethical transformation. Compulsory sound-mindedness cannot consistently prevent people from journeying with pain, uncertainty, and coming undone. But when people undertake such journeys, compulsory sound-mindedness frames pain, identity destabilization, and uncertainty as regrettable and without value. I advocate that people cultivate a "troubled consciousness" by journeying with internalized accountability narratives, uncertainties, painful feelings, and destabilizations of a straightforwardly moral self.

**Keywords:** *complicity; personal-is-political ethics; accountability; performativity; double-consciousness; Mad Studies*

# Cultivating a Troubled Consciousness:

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## I. Introduction

Acknowledging complicity in oppression provokes uncertainty, painful feelings, and a destabilization of identity. However difficult such experiences are, they are essential to politicized ethicality and accountability. I advocate that people journey with pain, uncertainty, and identity destabilization when implicating themselves in oppression, to cultivate a “troubled consciousness.” This phrase intersects DuBois’ (2007) double-consciousness with Butler’s (1990) troubling of identity. Implicating oneself in oppression requires measuring oneself by one’s impact on oppressed peoples<sup>1</sup>. This causes uncertainty and pain, and destabilizes one’s sense of oneself as coherently moral.

However, a discursive force I call “compulsory sound-mindedness” steers people away from these ethical and political experiences that are fundamental to politicized ethicality and accountability; compulsory sound-mindedness facilitates people’s participation in oppressive legacies and systems. It parallels, interlocks, and complements the forces Ahmed traces in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). According to Ahmed, happiness scripts are an integral component of governance and normalizing morality, which steer subjugated groups away from resisting injustice. Only happiness achieved through interlocking normative orders of heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and whiteness are normatively held as morally valuable. Ahmed therefore intervenes in this normative order to valorize the inevitable unhappinesses that come with living subjugated and resistant lives. She doesn’t celebrate or advocate these unhappinesses, but she traces their ubiquity and political significance. I too trace how forms of unhappiness are normatively devalued and how this shapes people’s self-governance in relation to systemic

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<sup>1</sup> Although crucial, this is inherently problematic: it requires people to imagine what others experience, which is impossible to accurately do (Ahmed, 2004). However problematic, the inability to know how another thinks or feels is a limitation of being human, and it is ethically crucial to acknowledge this. If one is grounded in a commitment to ongoing uncertainty (rather than mastery), this may mitigate the danger inherent in imagining how others may be impacted. The practice of internalizing others’ stories about oppression and about one’s actions should never trump or replace actual practices of accountability that respond to what others say about what one has done. Such direct practices of accountability cumulatively contribute to one’s internalized sense of one’s potential impact. Even then, this is further complicated because accountability to one person may not translate to accountability to others who share that person’s subject position. Titchkosky (2003) illustrates this when her accountability to one blind person guides her to ethically trespass against another blind person (p. 205).

oppression. However, my project here differs from Ahmed's in two principal respects. Rather than exploring these forces in the lives of subjugated peoples, I trace how they impact the self-governance of dominant groups. Also, following Mad provocations (Aubrecht, 2010; Fabris, 2011; Fabris and Aubrecht, forthcoming; Howell and Voronka, 2012; LeFrançois, 2013), I position happiness scripts within a force that morally denigrates, pathologizes, and discourages diverse experiences that fall outside of contentment, alongside those that fall outside of reason and the parameters of liberal individualism. It is this governing force that I call compulsory sound-mindedness.

Below, I read anti-oppressive texts to explore how compulsory sound-mindedness, interlocking with heteropatriarchy and whiteness, shapes recommendations for implicating oneself in oppression. I also read three narratives of women confronting their complicity in colonization, and trace their contradictory ethical navigations of compulsory sound-mindedness. Each narrative features the normative denigration of affect, uncertainty, and destabilized identity that I call compulsory sound-mindedness. They also reveal these denigrated experiences as fundamental to "political journeys" of "becoming ethical" (Jenkins, 2009). Compulsory sound-mindedness does not have total hold over people. It cannot always prevent journeying with pain, uncertainty, and coming undone when implicating oneself in oppression.

When compulsory sound-mindedness fails in this respect, as it does, it nevertheless persists in shaping perception of this 'failure'. As a result, in recollections of resistance to compulsory sound-mindedness, experiences of pain, coming undone, and not-knowing (which are fundamental parts of personal-is-political transformation) are framed as personal inadequacies that should be overcome.

Compulsory sound-mindedness can be resisted by cultivating a "troubled consciousness". This is the political and ethical practice of journeying with internalized accountability narratives and the resultant feelings, uncertainties, and destabilizations of a straightforwardly moral self. These experiences do – and should – accompany implicating oneself in oppression.

## II. A Personal-is-Political Ethics

To implicate oneself in oppression is to consider how one perpetuates and perpetrates particular oppressions in specific ways. Considering one's complicity in oppression politicizes the apparently personal practices by which one governs oneself and one's relationships. Even where oppression is acknowledged to exist, it is normative in the contemporary Global North for people to position themselves as relatively innocent of its operations (Chapman, Hoque and Utting, 2013; Heron, 2007; Razack, 1999). A personal-is-political ethics requires people to seriously consider their participation in oppression.

My personal experience of my first social services job included gratitude for the opportunity, insecurity about my capabilities, and gradually coming to perceive myself as a competent professional. It also involved other feelings and identity reformulations surrounding confining, restraining, and disciplining predominantly Indigenous children (Chapman 2010, 2012). This violence was justified and rendered apparently non-colonial through disablement, which individualized systemic violence into pathology (Chrisjohn and Young, 2006). This was unsettling, as it should have been, and yet I came to accept my role as necessary and even benevolent. My self-governance was steered toward feeling happy about my professional competence and success. How might things have been different if I had ethically journeyed with my misgivings, rather than working to overcome them? How might things be different more broadly if doing so was more widespread and valued?

LeFrançois (2013) writes a resonant account of her participation in First Nations genocide<sup>2</sup>, using her work in child protection to illustrate how psychiatrization and colonization interlock. A strong theme in LeFrançois' narrative is her misgivings and how other professionals policed her responses. Such misgivings are normatively psychologized and potentially pathologized, but they are ethical and political experiences which are fundamental to being human. I call the force that denigrates these ordinary and important aspects of being human "compulsory sound-mindedness."

### **Compulsory sound-mindedness**

Foucault's ethics (2006) explore "subjectification" – processes through which people become "subjects" who are both shaped by social forces and agents of social forces. Studying texts from Ancient Greece and Rome, he noted the frequent use of "navigation" to describe people's efforts to live an ethical or just life (2006, pp. 248–249, p. 404). As in the ever-changing conditions of sea faring, people "navigate" relationships and social worlds in complex journeys contingent on particular and shifting circumstances.

Mahmood (2005) highlights that ethical navigation is highly contingent on particular "authoritative discursive traditions". These traditions contingently inform what it is to be human, to be good, to have integrity, etc. People govern themselves within such historically and culturally contingent discursive traditions. And, as Ahmed (2010) discusses, European thought has long equated class-privileged, white, and heteropatriarchal norms of self-governance as key to achieving "true happiness."

In the contemporary Global North, one authoritative discursive tradition through which subjectification occurs divides reason from madness or "unreason." In contrast to the purposive "navigation" of rational ethical practices of directed self-governance, Foucault notes that in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, madness was described through the metaphor of a small boat cast out to sea "amid the unreason of the world – a craft at the mercy of the sea's great madness" (1988, p. 12). In contrast to its subsequent framing as devoid of value and efficacy, at that time unreason represented a different kind of voyage, an uncertain and perhaps very distressing one, but a voyage nonetheless.

Foucault suggests that Shakespeare's portrayals of madness mark the end of an era. In Shakespeare, unreason is chaotic and painful, but is also an alternate means of ethical interrogation. For example, Lear follows his fool's example of wisdom through folly and ultimately reaches moral clarity about his actions through madness. And Lady Macbeth would lose all significance if read through psychiatrization. Feeling guilty for her part in Duncan's murder, she can't wash his blood off her hands. There's no literal blood, but her delusion or hallucination is not error; it's a moral reckoning. Foucault suggests that this then-widespread understanding of unreason – and its relationship to ethics – has ended. Europe and white settler colonies now feature a distinct "moral experience of Unreason" (1988, p. 31) dominated by "ethical values [...] linked to labour" (p. 64), to whether one is deemed capable of working. He writes of the unprecedented mass confinement in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, "what made it necessary was an imperative of labor. Our philanthropy prefers to recognize the signs of a benevolence toward sickness where there is only a condemnation of idleness" (p. 46). This new conflation of unreason with idleness lives on today. Unreason is no longer an alternate "real world" (p. 32) that may have something important to offer, as with Lear and Lady Macbeth. Madness now offers and accomplishes nothing. "Behold it moored now [...] No longer a ship but a hospital" (p. 35). Unreason is no longer an alternative way of navigating the world. It is "error" (p. 33), "the empty negativity of reason; [...] nothingness" (p. 116).

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<sup>2</sup> See Chrisjohn and Young (2006) on the legal applicability of this term.

“Unreason” below refers to four arenas of human experience outside of rational liberal individualism. Unreason will refer to such experiences, which are normatively psychologized and framed as useless, immobilizing, and best avoided. This obscures their part in ethical and political journeys. For my purposes, unreason includes: unhappy emotional experiences including anxiety and guilt; not-knowing or uncertainty; an unmoored sense of self, particularly when questioning one’s morality; and a sense of self that incorporates others’ presence.

Something happens to people and through people so that unreason is normatively ‘worked through’ or avoided, fostering subjectivities that sustain oppression. This subjectification depends on compulsory sound-mindedness. Like compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory sound-mindedness “functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there actually is no choice [...] It functions as a disciplinary formation seemingly emanating from everywhere and nowhere” (McRuer, 2006, p. 8). People might feel that they’re making the obvious choice to ‘resolve’ difficult feelings, and it may seem self-evident that it’s preferable to avoid unhappiness or destabilization (Ahmed, 2010). But such experiences are politically and ethically important. Compulsory sound-mindedness regulates the normative subjectification by which people are produced to be subjects acting in the service of ruling political forces. This steers people away from misgivings such as those LeFrançois and I experienced while perpetrating colonial and disablist violence. It prevented us from feeling our way (Ahmed, 2004) toward accountability and ethicality.

### **Disability as useless and draining**

Today, madness<sup>3</sup> is one subdivision of the vast multiplicity of human variation called disability, and compulsory sound-mindedness is consistent with normative devaluations of disability in the contemporary Global North. According to Disability Studies (Michalko, 2002; Titchkosky, 2003; Withers, 2012), normative portrayals of disabled people situate disability as worthless, doing nothing, excessive or draining, and best avoided or eradicated.

Disablist language often features in writing about complicity in oppression, however inadvertently. Spivak hopes her readers might find a “constructive rather than disabling complicity” (1999, pp. 3-4); Jenkins advocates that men face their shame for their abuse, but distinguishes productive shame from “disabling” shame (2009, p. iii). This divisibility of productive versus disabling shame is disablist in that it perpetuates disability’s conflation with inaction, lack, excess, and worthlessness (Michalko, 2002). The discursive tradition in which it makes sense to call non-productive shame disabling is that in which one type of person is imagined to be “productive” and another not – through the “ethical values [...] linked to labour” (Foucault, 1988, p. 64) discussed above. People deemed non-productive in contemporary capitalist economies, for many different reasons, are often called disabled. The words I discuss here and below – disabling, crippling, and paralyzing – all have authoritatively correct usages about things other than people. Nevertheless, these words evoke people. One cannot say ‘gay’ today and simply signify ‘happy;’ and one cannot say ‘disabling’ without evoking disabled people. Evoking disabled people in ways that reinforce normative devaluing framings of disability is disablist – again, however inadvertently.

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<sup>3</sup> This term follows Mad activists and scholars who politically reclaim it, as queer, crip, and other terms have been reclaimed. It refuses contemporary biomedical framings of alternative ways of being as “illness” (Fabris, 2011; Fabris and Aubrecht, forthcoming; Tam, 2010).

### III. Unhappiness and “Happy Performatives”

Bishop (2002) provides an example of the normative denigration of unreason. She suggests white participants’ responses to anti-racist education falls into three categories: the allies, the backlashes, and the guilty. The guilty, she says, “personalize the issue and become defensive and paralyzed [...] They are crushed, unable to move” (pp. 109-110). She writes, “Coming to understand one’s identities as an oppressor [...] involves accepting your inheritance of a shameful and evil past. There is guilt, that useless and draining non-emotion” (p. 113).

Paralyzed, unable to move, useless, and draining – Bishop uses these words to describe guilt when implicating oneself in oppression. These are descriptors normatively used about disabled people. If it’s ‘known’ that guilt is useless, draining, and immobilizing, perhaps this ‘knowledge’ enables a practice of self-surveillance and self-governance by which people steer themselves away from it and other pathologizable experiences discursively associated with disability.

Ahmed (2006a) distinguishes between what she calls “happy performatives” and “unhappy performatives.” A happy performative is one in which a commitment aligns with material effects. Bishop would consider white guilt an unhappy performative. The guilty aren’t moving toward an efficacious moral reckoning of white supremacy. I would suggest that this is shaped by compulsory sound-mindedness and that unhappinesses such as guilt may in fact produce “happy performatives” more so than white anti-racisms constrained by rationality and contentment.

It’s curious to imagine someone accepting their inheritance of what Bishop calls “a shameful and evil past” without feeling shame or some other unhappiness. Ahmed (2004) worries about national apologies for injustices converting shame about racism to multicultural pride, often with no accompanying social change. Is there a danger that some practices of becoming an ally might involve conceptualizing oneself as innocent of oppression? Is it also possible that Bishop’s allies might have become allies through difficult periods during which she might have categorized them among the guilty? Would it be ‘good’ to come to consciousness about one’s implication without feeling shame or guilt? If others are harmed by practices and legacies in which one actively participates, would it be preferable to recognize this through the confines of reason or happiness?

#### **The curiously unintelligible agency of unreason**

Pain and other experiences of unreason are simply part of people implicating themselves in oppression, but it’s curious how this get taken up. As one example, Heron (2007) worked for over ten years in Zambia before returning to Canada where she confronted her implication in what she calls “colonial continuities.” She then interviewed other white Canadian women who had worked across Africa. Below she discusses the interview with “Kris”:

Moral certainty [...] that she should not have been a development worker [...] deeply torments Kris’s view of self [...]. Kris faces a paralysis in her *rapport à soi* [relationship with her self] [...] ‘I remain like not knowing what I think of anything to do with it. I’ve been thinking of it in so many different ways that [...] I don’t have a conclusion. I don’t know. I don’t know.’ [‘Not knowing’ is what Heron calls paralysis.] [...] ‘I have gone through [...] almost three years of feeling increasingly that I really made a mess of my life [...] I *shouldn’t have* gone there. I *shouldn’t have* done that [...] So crippling is this narrative, particularly in combination with her ‘I don’t know’ refrain, that the loss of image of self here [...] [suggests] a forfeiture of her ‘humanity’ [...] producing a fragmentation, even a dissolution, of self-image or identity (pp. 138-139).

I follow Heron’s analysis closely, but it’s curious that she describes Kris as crippled and paralyzed. What is compelling about these terms – denoting immobility as per their dictionary definitions – is that this was not a

stagnant process. Commenting on Kris' experience, Heron characterizes this period of not-knowing, pain, and identity fragmentation untransformative, but she describes its effects very differently: Kris is said to have "reached a new view of self [...] a more tentative and accountable self [...] She reframes the meaning of [her work] in terms of her impact on African peoples" (p. 140). Anguish, not knowing, and identity-dissolution dominated Kris' coming to consciousness about her complicity in global white supremacy. Her "new view of self" continues to feature uncertainty and a heightened sense of the harm she's done and will always have the potential to do. This tentativeness and accountability to African peoples emerged through unreason. It was not a stagnant stage from which she is only later "moving forward" (p. 140) as Heron frames it. She moves forward from the intensity of pain perhaps, but much of the substance of her unreason remains in her new view of self. What's called crippling and paralysis was vital and dynamic ethical transformation.

It seems, then, that when unreason produces concrete results in preferred ethical and political directions, compulsory sound-mindedness prevents the attribution of these results to unreason. This, again, is consistent with broader discourses of disablement.

A non-disablist account of loss of muscle function (paralysis) might in some ways resonate with Kris' experience. If I were to lose mobility in my legs, my life would not stop, but I would be fundamentally changed in ways impossible to anticipate. Only disablement situates loss of muscle function as immobility in every aspect of life. Perhaps three years of reconceptualizing one's life as having been about colonial domination could be compared to the kind of transformation that accompanies an acquired disability, as opposed to the imagined disablist account of all growth and life stopping. Kris was never again who she had been, but her life and growth did not end. An acquired disability – like graduating from high school, losing a loved one, surviving a natural disaster, and other widespread experiences that fundamentally transform one's sense of self – puts an end to certain aspects of life, to be sure. It also marks a beginning in other aspects of life and many different kinds of change in others.

Heron describes Kris as now living more accountably and tentatively with her whiteness and geopolitical power. She also describes the process that enabled this as non-transformative. If she could do this, having lived something highly resonant with Kris' account, then the normative framing of confusing, painful, and identity fragmenting experiences as worthless and unproductive must be difficult to get outside of.

### **Politicizing Madness (versus politicizing anger)**

At times, only select emotions are politicized, suggesting how heteropatriarchy interlocks with disablement in compulsory sound-mindedness. For example, Mullaly (2010) politicizes and defends anger against psychologization (p. 283), but says guilt "makes us look at the issue from a psychological point of view rather than from a political or moral standpoint" (p. 235). He calls "feeling excessive guilt [...] a coward's way out" (p. 235) – mobilizing a word commonly used against men who don't measure up to normative masculinity. While perhaps not explicitly sexist or homophobic, this neatly aligns with heteropatriarchal discourses framing emotions other than anger as effeminacy, weakness, and insufficiency.

Mullaly's politicization of anger nevertheless resonates with Mad politicizations of a wider range of sensory and affective experiences (Aubrecht, 2010; Fabris, 2011; Fabris and Aubrecht, forthcoming; Tam, 2010). Hearing voices or feeling anxiety is not only destructive, even if they sometimes are destructive. Mad provocations hold that *how* unreason is politically and discursively taken up determines whether a pathologizable experience is predominantly destructive in a person's life.

Resonantly but selectively, Mullaly writes, "Traditionally, theoretical understandings of anger have been dominated by psychological perspectives [...] but anger is neither an inherently positive nor an inherently negative emotion and [...] just as it may be destructive, it can also be constructive. It depends on how we deal with anger and how we use it" (2010, p. 283). It is politically important to distinguish between different uses of anger, or between



feeling angry and hitting one's partner. It is just as important to mark such distinctions in relation to guilt, depression, anxiety, and so on. It frequently happens in anti-racism training that white people take up disproportionate space expressing tears, guilt, and horror upon hearing accounts of racism, thus shutting down space for people of colour. But just as the distinction between anger and hitting is important, it is important to distinguish between guilt and taking up disproportionate space. Feeling entitled to take up disproportionate space is a characteristic of whiteness and other "exalted" (Thobani, 2007) subject positions. Guilt, however, is "is neither an inherently positive nor an inherently negative emotion" as Mullaly says of anger. Guilt is a potential driving force for resisting legacies, norms, and subjectifications associated with the power, sense of entitlement, and moral exaltation (Thobani, 2007) bestowed upon people occupying dominant subject positions.

Jenkins (2009) and Heron (2007) both advocate that becoming ethical and accountable requires journeying with uncertainty, painful emotions, and identity transformation. Their surely inadvertent disablism in describing these processes is helpful in working toward more intentional navigations of them. If people actively govern themselves away from such experiences due to assumptions of their uselessness, this is significant for ethics, politics, and critical pedagogy. Heron (2007) therefore recommends that anti-racist education should challenge compulsory sound-mindedness and work toward:

A dissolution of unifying narratives of a moral self [...] Recognizing such moments for what they are, [educators should] allow them to happen, rather than attempt to 'manage' the discomfort [...] In such moments a profound and perturbing new awareness is being internalized regarding complicity in perpetuating and personally perpetrating racialized dominance [...] When we feel fragmented in anti-oppression learning [...] this is how it should be. It seems we cannot attain a place of increased accountability without such self-disintegrating reworkings of our moral narratives (p. 154).

Her use of crippling and paralysis to describe exactly such a dissolution tells us more about normative discursive traditions in the Global North today than about Heron (Mahmood, 2005, p. 32). Disability Studies commonly critiques how disability is situated outside of normal human experience (McRuer, 2006; Michalko, 2002; Titchkosky, 2003; Withers, 2012). By specifically situating pathologizable emotions, uncertainty, and identity dissolutions outside of normal human experience, we steer ourselves away from experiences that are a part of what it is to be human – rather than a part of what it is to be some specific type of human<sup>4</sup>. And like other disabilities are deemed desirable within Disability Studies, so too are pathologizable affective, cognitive, and identity experiences. This is also a major tenet of Mad Studies. According to Tam, in psychiatry:

Obsessive thoughts are irrational and arbitrary, should not be analyzed, and should be removed [...] But Mad Studies counters, "There is much in our world to be angry, anxious, and sad about" [...] People diagnosed with depression are actually an indicator species in humanity, showing us how our society is unhealthy as a whole. Madness here is understood as useful knowledge for directing social change (Tam, 2010, para. 3).

If we situate shame, guilt, obsession, anxiety, not-knowing, and identity dissolution as ethical and political, rather than psychological, perhaps they 'indicate' not only that society is unhealthy but also that people may be

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<sup>4</sup> It's not that everybody experiences all or any one of these things, but such experiences are ordinarily found within any large enough population. It's a historically and culturally contingent political intervention to draw lines dividing normal from abnormal or deviant.

struggling with their part in its unhealthiness. Journeying with, rather than working against, such ethical and political experiences may therefore be necessary to greater ethicality and political accountability. If we allow ourselves to feel the confusion, anguish, and fragmentation associated with confronting harm we do, this will impact our self-governance. This is an ethical and political journeying with unreason, rather than a psychological response that categorizes emotions, senses of self, and degrees of rational certitude as either normal and valuable or best eliminated.

Some experiences are intensely painful, to be sure. But it's curious that it is 'known' that there's nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, from embracing aspects of being human that fall within unreason. People work to avoid these experiences without having to think it through. This is the subjectifying work compulsory sound-mindedness does to people and through people. If Heron and Jenkins are right that these difficult experiences are fruitful for becoming ethical and accountable, then compulsory sound-mindedness contributes to the personal-is-political perpetuation of legacies of systemic violence.

Discussing an event in which she was complicit in colonial racism against Aboriginal Australians, Ahmed (1998) writes, "this event [...] has become a compulsion" (pp. 193-194). Her "compulsion" may bring to mind Tam's "obsessive thoughts" above, in which Mad Studies asserts madness as an "indicator" that something (other than one person's psyche) is wrong. Following the quote above, Ahmed continues to yet again re-consider the significance of this event. Such troubling events have the potential to unsettle certainties about who one is, what ethics is, and what oppression is (Chapman, Hoque and Utting, 2013), but only if one allows oneself to "feel [one's] way" (Ahmed, 2004) through disorientation (Ahmed, 2006b). This might enable such reflections to be "happy performatives" (Ahmed, 2006a) – that is, to bring about the changes in identity, behaviour, and immediate power relations that such reflections gesture toward, but frequently do not bring about.

#### IV. The Subjugated Significance of Unreason

Shaista Patel, who identifies as a "settler of colour" (Patel, 2010), allowed me to interview her about her anti-colonial solidarity work with Indigenous people in what is now called Canada. Shaista knows that unreason is politically significant. "What's really frustrating," she said, is "it's white people [...] who tell me, 'Don't talk about guilt, because guilt is immobilizing.'" Politicizing guilt, she said:

I just feel really, really shitty [about my implication in colonization on this land] [...] I use the word guilty despite knowing that – especially in whiteness studies – there is a lot of critique of this word, guilty [...] I hate it when people tell me that guilt immobilizes [...] I think we should feel bad as settlers here.

Shaista knows that feeling "shitty" or "guilty" is politically significant, that she and I should feel bad about the ongoing colonization that allows us to live the lives we live at others' expense. She knows this, but perhaps she knows it as what Foucault calls a "subjugated" or "disqualified" knowledge (2003, p. 7). It was only after significant conversation that she defended her guilt, whereas initially she mentioned feeling bad but called her understanding and operationalization of complicity in colonization "weird and twisted" several times.

I asked Shaista if I could interview her because I was interested in her transition from researching oppression against fellow Muslims to exploring non-Indigenous racialized people's presence as settlers on

Indigenous land<sup>5</sup>. A central thread of Shaista's narrative was how unsettling her process was. Reconsidering how her research on Islamophobia hadn't taken into account Canada as a colonial settler state, she said, "I really had a breakdown and a crisis [...] What does it mean for me to live on this land and talk about racism against Muslims, but never think about what was happening to Indigenous peoples? [...] I really had an identity crisis." Calling this an "identity crisis" gestures toward it as a time of identity reformulation, rather than only a time of suffering.

Devoting one's time and energy to the ways one is subjugated by racism entails different experiences of subjectification than devoting one's time and energy to the ways one is complicit in colonialism. Different senses of self are cultivated through these two endeavours, and so shifting her attention from one to the other entailed a significant change in self-perception and self-governance. She suggested this discrepancy during her interview when describing leaving Indigenous territory with fellow settler activists: "as soon as I'm out of that space and I'm driving back with white people [...] I feel more relieved [...] more secure." She's articulating that different senses of self are evoked when she is contingently positioned as racialized as opposed to when she is contingently positioned as settler. The former feels more familiar, not 'better.' She uses the word "secure" to describe being with all non-Indigenous people, suggesting that positioning herself as settler leaves her feeling 'unmoored,' in Foucault's sense described above of the historically normative European understandings of unreason that ended with Shakespeare.

I asked Shaista, "I'd be interested in hearing how that year was productive for you, and what it meant to be going through that emotional turmoil or crisis. And how you think you might have needed that [to get to where you are today in your political analysis and activism]". She replied:

It was a really difficult experience, because I grew up thinking – like most people – that I'm a good person [...] To begin to think [...] that for Indigenous people it probably doesn't matter that I'm white or a woman of colour, but I am encroaching upon their land, their dignity [...] To begin to think that I'm complicit *in very real ways* in colonization here was a really disturbing experience for me [...] I felt like everything I grew up with, I felt like my basic foundation and understanding of who I am was shattered [...] Even given my experiences of racism, I would never equate that racism with the genocide that's happening on this land as far as Indigenous peoples are concerned. I would be ashamed to equate the racism against me with that.

Shaista's subjectification process of implicating herself in colonization and genocide was not primarily characterized by gaining new rational or factual knowledge. Even though the context was graduate school, knowledge acquisition was not the most salient feature of her transformation. Her sense of herself as good, as moral, her "basic foundation and understanding of who [she is] was *shattered*."

### **Racing compulsory sound-mindedness and its resistance**

Badwall (2013) problematizes "admissions of bad practice as signs of good practice, such as of white people expressing feelings of anxiety and shame about having participated in acts of racial domination" (p. 93). Following Ahmed (2006a), Badwall's concern is that such admissions may not do the anti-racist work they appear to do. Ahmed calls such declarations and admissions "unhappy performatives," by which she means they do not bring about anti-racist personal or political change. They may, instead, secure one's sense of oneself as good and non-racist without effecting any other change.

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<sup>5</sup> It's crucial that Muslims interrogate Islamophobia, that Indigenous people interrogate colonialism, and so on. But my research explores the personal-is-political ethical practices of interrogating one's own complicity in others' oppression, which Shaista was not initially doing but is now.

Following Heron (2007), Badwall (2013) also considers how racism can be acknowledged as a problem at the same time as one can claim exceptionality in regards to its perpetration. Heron writes that this is accomplished through the maintenance of what she calls a “unitary moral self.” How can some people name their own participation in oppression without unsettling their sense of their innocence and goodness?

Is it possible that the exaltation of whiteness (Thobani, 2007), intersecting with compulsory sound-mindedness, can facilitate the ability to name one’s own participation in racism without experiencing identity dissolution? Could this be part of why normative declarations of anti-racism fail to bring about anti-racist practice or effort (Ahmed, 2006a)? Heron writes of white Canadian women who had worked in Africa: “Even those few [...] who recognize our participation in racism seem able to incorporate this acknowledgement into a narrative of a virtuous self, or to keep the awareness of our ‘own racism’ [...] from becoming overly disturbing” (2007, p. 85). She suggests that such awareness should indeed be “overly disturbing,” but that white subjectification protects white people from the identity dissolution that might enable more accountable and ethical anti-racism.

Caren Weisbart (2013) worked in solidarity with Indigenous Guatemalans for a decade and recently returned to Canada, where she is focusing increasingly on solidarity with First Nations. Her reflection on her earlier decision to work in Guatemala – rather than continuing to work in solidarity with First Nations in Canada – exposes one way that colonialism, geopolitics, and white supremacy interlock with compulsory sound-mindedness:

Although I felt strongly about these issues and was beginning to understand the nature of the dispossession and disrespect for aboriginal rights and tradition [in Canada], I felt nervous about approaching the aboriginal leaders and elders who organized the ceremonies and delegations. I felt paralyzed, not knowing how to talk to them, feeling so different and so uneducated about what was really going on in Canada. This feeling I now reflect upon as being a fear of the stranger or the other and, therefore, a product of my own racism and fear [...] In Guatemala, almost a year later, on a youth internship program, I found speaking to Mayan activists and community members to be different – perhaps less ‘threatening’ (p. 9).

Caren denigrates her hesitance to talk with Indigenous people in Canada, even though she politicizes it by attributing it to her own racism, and again she describes feeling paralyzed, by which she means immobilized. I would propose a different reading. Like most white Canadians, Caren was likely assessing the situation accurately when she felt “uneducated about what was really going on in Canada” in relation to ongoing colonization. And she was surely no less uneducated about “what was really going on” in Guatemala. This raises the question of why she was able to talk with Mayan community leaders and did not feel distressed, uneducated, or threatened by this – as perhaps one might say she should have felt. Heron (2007) writes that globalized white supremacy and gender interlock so that traveling overseas enables white Canadian women to experience the full bourgeois subjectivity normally reserved for white men in Canada – she writes that several of her interviewees describe feeling like whiteness made them into “honorary men” in Africa (p. 112). Perhaps Caren’s geopolitical power in Guatemala enabled her to sidestep journeying with her unreason.

I would also suggest that settlers’ complicity in colonization on the land on which we live is perhaps particularly difficult to face. Ahmed (2004) writes:

Knowing one’s implication in [colonial] history is about accepting the violence as a form of ‘un-housing’. The house in which I grew up, and to which I am attached through memory, is on indigenous land. To ‘feel’ differently about this land, as belonging to others [...] involves recognising that where one lived was not one’s home (p. 36).

Un-housed by her implication in the violence of Canadian colonization, Caren found her way to Guatemala, where others grew up on stolen Indigenous land but she had not. Ahmed (2006b) invites us to think carefully about how people find security when disoriented:

It is not that disorientation is always radical. Bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to reground [...] their relation to the world [...] The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but [...] what we do with such moments of disorientation (p. 158).

I would suggest that perhaps Caren regrounded herself by travelling to Guatemala, where she could effectively move on with Indigenous solidarity work without journeying with having been unsettled or un-housed by her implication in the very colonial violence, past and present, she was working against. Geopolitical forces that further exalted her in the Global South allowed her to sidestep journeying with unreason.

Yet this merely deferred Caren's personal-is-political journey with unreason. Recently, Caren has returned to Canada and is again engaging in solidarity activism with First Nations. Her earlier sense of not-knowing remains, but now as a resource for anti-colonialism. Having educated herself about racism and colonialism, Caren 'knows' racism when it occurs more so than most white Canadians. Such knowledge is important, but it's also potentially dangerous if intersected with a stable sense that one 'knows.' Caren's sense that she does not and cannot fully know is reflected in the following reflections about having challenged racism at a community meeting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (Weisbart, 2013):

An aboriginal woman spoke after me thanking me for speaking up about [a white man's racism] because she was tired of always being the one to call out racism but that she felt the same about the man's intervention. I felt uncomfortable that she thanked me as I did not want to be the hero of the situation. Nonetheless, I was relieved that my statement was supported by someone [...] This could have ended in a lot of different ways [...] Someone could have said to me, [...] 'you know, we know him really well, we're close with him and we know that we can talk about this with him at another time.' Someone could also have said that I was being unfair calling him racist and that if the community members didn't speak out, then it was not an issue that I should have mentioned (p. 21).

Caren is both acting in solidarity using her own subjective discernment of racism and also leaving open the possibility that her efforts might be unwelcome and perhaps even an instance of racism. Having earlier avoided the discomfort associated with not knowing, she now embraces it as an animating force in her efforts toward solidarity and accountability.

Shaista's current valuation of her journey seems distinct from this. Although she values her journey through unreason (albeit in a subjugated way, and alongside calling it "weird and twisted") compulsory sound-mindedness nevertheless devalues her understanding in comparison with an imagined clear explanation of what complicity means. Shaista suggests her guilt, identity shattering, and internalizations of how Indigenous people might perceive her is less valuable than certain and precise rational understanding. Late in our conversation, she says my research will help her understand, even though she has been articulating aspects of complicity that I believe require no rationalist explication. She said:

Where I'm really, really lost, and where I think your [research] will help me is, [...] how can we make sense of our complicity in ways that make sense? Because I say I'm complicit, but I still don't understand. I know I'm complicit, but I don't know *how* exactly. Especially as a first generation [immigrant], as someone who hasn't been on this land for 300 years [...] I don't understand it, so that's why I feel guilty and I'm sort of doing what I think I can do and should do, but it doesn't make sense to me. And despite you thinking you really need to interview me because you think I can articulate complicity, I really can't. I really can't.

Shaista's uncertain, disturbing, and identity-shattering sense of complicity drives her solidarity activism. If any marker of sufficient understanding of oppression would "make sense," surely it would be one's involvement in struggles against injustice. And yet Shaista positions her understanding of complicity as insufficient because she cannot articulate it as rationally as she would like. This has nothing to do with any deficit in Shaista; it rather provides another glimpse of "authoritative discursive traditions whose logic and power far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 32). It exposes again the work of compulsory sound-mindedness. It also suggests one way that compulsory sound-mindedness and white supremacy interlock.

Ahmed (2004) writes, "Whilst we cannot assume that [...] differences are essential, or determined 'only' by the subject's relation to power, we also cannot treat differences as incidental, and as separated from relations of power" (p. 33). Is it possible that whiteness plays some part in Shaista thinking she's weird and twisted or that my research will help her to understand something she understands very well? In a chapter on the psychiatrization of detained Muslim "terror suspects" (Patel, forthcoming), Shaista traces how Orientalist discourse has framed Muslims using tropes of unreason for centuries. What I'd like to consider is whether this history might result in the stakes being different for Shaista to embrace her unreason than they are for Kris, Caren, or me.

This resonates with Jasbir Puar's (2012) challenge to Disability Studies. Puar describes the devastating effects of living with illness or impairment when these interlock with poverty, racism, colonization, or geopolitical oppression. She challenges Disability Studies' celebrations of disability as valuable, suggesting this needs to be tempered with recognition that sometimes the diverse experiences called disability are incredibly debilitating and are a direct consequence of oppression and violence. Puar suggests that perhaps whiteness, class mobility, and geopolitical power contribute to disability pride and individual disabled people's successes. Her challenge is not 'against' disability pride; but it is an invitation to reconsider the multiple contexts in which abstractly shared but materially divergent experiences of disability emerge. If my suggestions in this paper can be said to advocate something akin to Mad Pride (Abbas and Voronka, forthcoming), then Puar's challenge invites me to consider how dangerous such advocacy might be. Caren challenges racism, but leaves open the possibility that her challenge might enact racism. I wish to raise a resonant concern about what I'm offering.

Heron comes to recommend identity fragmentation and tentativeness; Caren finds her way to a solidarity that both intervenes in racism and leaves open the possibility that its interventions might themselves be racist. Both white women appear to have achieved an anti-racism that is decisive and action-oriented, and yet uncertain and open-ended. But is it possible that such a practice, which I would tend to posit as a good one for personal-is-political ethics, is partly enabled through the exaltation of whiteness? Is it possible that nonnormative enactments against compulsory sound-mindedness are more dangerous or debilitating for subjects whose exaltation in interlocking oppression is more precarious than Caren's, Heron's, or mine (Badwall, 2013; Chapman, Hoque, and Utting, 2013)?

Meekosha (2013) and Soldatic (2013) both relay that Aboriginal Australians do not relate to the framing of "disability" that dominates Disability Studies. Although I find it hard to accept Disability Pride as other than emancipatory, there is no justifiable reason to imagine that white settler or European theory or practice will resonate for Indigenous peoples and other oppressed peoples. I can't be assured that my theories will fit for everyone.

Furthermore, following Badwall's (2013) tracing of how the stated value of critical reflexivity can discipline racialized people, I also can't be assured that my theories will not serve as a tool of whiteness. Before moving on to the final section of this paper, then, I've wanted to consider the dangers in any proposed 'shoulds.' I advocate that people journey with unreason, that this is a useful framework when implicating oneself in interlocking oppression. I would also suggest that defensiveness to my proposal might indicate that compulsory sound-mindedness is preventing people from considering their implications. But I also wish to raise the very real possibility that – like so many other theoretical and moral frameworks – what I'm calling compulsory sound-mindedness and troubled consciousness could be used to discipline or denigrate colonized, racialized, and otherwise oppressed peoples.

## V. Troubled Consciousness

W.E.B. Dubois noted over a century ago that denigrated subjects under white supremacy develop a "double-consciousness" to survive, which he describes as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2007, p. 8). Double-consciousness enables Black people to more safely navigate racism. It "allow[s] a deeper or redoubled comprehension of the complexities" of living in a racist world (Edwards, 2007, p. xiv).

White people, and others exalted by their subject positions, need not develop such redoubled comprehension in order to survive. But if "exalted subjects" (Thobani, 2007) wish to work against their own participation in oppression, we too must redouble our comprehension. Through this distinct but structurally resonant doubling-over, exalted subjects anticipate how others might experience them and measure themselves by the tape of normatively denigrated worlds.

In the job I mention above, many of the children I worked with would have developed something akin to DuBois' double-consciousness – they would have learned to mitigate our violence by measuring themselves by our standards. More fundamental staff resistance would have required something structurally similar but in the opposite direction. It would have required us to measure ourselves by the experiences of the children – not their 'outcomes' or compliance, but their narratives about what we were doing to them. Such doubling-over destabilizes exalted subjects' compulsory sound-mindedness, and is operative in all three complicity narratives I've explored.

Shaista notes, "for Indigenous people it probably doesn't matter that I'm white or a woman of colour, but I am encroaching upon their land, their dignity." Imagining how an Indigenous person might understand her presence in Canada, she measures herself by that tape. Heron (2007) writes that Kris now measures herself "in terms of her impact on African peoples" (p. 140). Caren challenges racism but leaves it up to Indigenous people to evaluate what she's done. Her anti-colonial intentions are not the tape she uses to measure her actions. In all three narratives, accountability and ethicality involve a doubling-over of consciousness constantly reminding them that others might experience them as oppressors. This is distinct from DuBois' double-consciousness, but it shares a common structure of consciousness doubled over by an imagined account of someone else's experience of oneself.

This doubling-over destabilizes one's sense of self. It also destabilizes liberal individualist boundaries between self and others. Clear boundaries between self and other are taken for granted in liberal individualist notions of personhood, but these boundaries are indeterminate in many non-liberal traditions of what it is to be human (Spivak, 1999, p. 429). Of one such tradition, White (2007) writes:

Identity is founded upon an ‘association of life’ rather than on a core self. This association of life has a membership composed of the significant figures and identities of a person’s past, present, and projected future, whose voices are influential with regard to the construction of the person’s identity (p. 129).

The unsettling of one’s stable identity through encounters with others happens all the time (Butler, 2005). Each time, it has the potential to trouble what Heron (2007) calls the “unitary moral self”. However ubiquitous though, these experiences do not always lead to fundamental transformation, greater accountability, or identity dissolution.

Exalted subjects must allow themselves to be unsettled by the knowledge that they might enact oppression at any moment. Denigrated subjects are already aware of this danger, which is why double-consciousness is adaptive. The doubling-over of exalted subjects’ consciousness – allowing oneself to be ‘troubled’ by orientations of political accountability – is what I’m calling “troubled consciousness.” It is the “ethical practice” (Mahmood, 2005) by which people allow themselves to be troubled – to feel the uncertainty, pathologizable affect, and identity destabilization associated with knowing that no effort or expertise will guarantee that I will not actively perpetrate injustice.

Butler writes, “trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it” (1990, p. ix). How can one best be in trouble? How can one embrace the troubling of self-consciousness and identity to become more tentative and accountable? Using the term “compulsion” to describe the “performativity” of identity, Butler (1990) writes:

The subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification [...] takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition [...] There is no self that is prior to [repetition] or who maintains ‘integrity’ (p. 145).

Butler’s performativity maintains that compulsory heterosexuality is always already troubled, and that agency therefore entails more purposefully troubling gender norms. Because there’s no self prior to either normative or troubling repetition, agency lies in how we repeat, how we perform, how to best make trouble or be in trouble. But trouble is there, regardless of what we do with it – as Ahmed says above of disorientation. However vigorously compulsory sound-mindedness denigrates unreason, it remains a persistent feature of humanity. Butler continues from above, articulating the relationship between agency and the persistence of queerness, however subjugated and devalued: “There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there” (Ibid.)

Pathologizable emotions, not-knowing, destabilizations of identity, and internalized memberships or “associations of life” are “lying there,” part of being human, available for the take up. Unreason is part of human experience and part of the specific ethical experience of implicating oneself in oppression. The question is, how best to be in unreason, how best to live it.

## VI. Conclusion

I have been long troubled by my complicity in oppression, and it will continue to trouble me. It unsettles my sense of who I am, through the doubling-over of consciousness by which I come to recognize myself beyond my intentions and rationalizations, and by which I come to recognize myself as someone who represents and actively



perpetrates things I find abhorrent. It is incredibly destabilizing to have my identity troubled in this way. This cannot and should not be avoided.

In this paper, I have situated such difficult and transformative experiences as ethical and political, and have invited exalted subjects to cultivate a “troubled consciousness.” I have advocated this as a means of working against “compulsory sound-mindedness,” which normatively steers people away from politicized ethicality and accountability by constraining them within the confines of reason, liberal individualism, and contentment.

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