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THE CAUSES OF ONE CASE OF SCHIZOPHRENIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER PSYCHOSES

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Abstract: This paper uses a case study of my own experience to explore the cause of my schizophrenia. The aetiology is presented as a particular trauma that is seen as being at the root of the problem. What is relevant is not so much that a trauma occurred, but the fact that elements were present in the traumatic experience that created an on-going division between reality and a false belief, which I have termed as ego-divisive situation. I found myself divided in my mind between two understandings of reality. The result was the formation of a false reality, which became internalised at the conscious level and the real facts of the event remained hidden in my unconscious. My hypothesis is that such a dual understanding of ‘reality’ may often be present in psychosis and that the distressing emotional components are present in the unconscious, helping to maintain the split reality. I suggest that these cognitive and emotional dual realities, ambiguous, ambivalent and traumatic can thus be the reason why a person becomes psychotic. This hypothesis is supported by a detailed description and analysis of my experience.

Introduction

To date it is not known what causes schizophrenia or psychosis in general. With the present paper, I want to give evidence that suggests what may have caused my case of schizophrenia. I will try to show how I found myself unable to trust my thinking and felt I had been divided between two realities. This was precipitated by a violent episode that led me, while I was a young woman, to split my observing ego into two parts, one conscious and the other unconscious. The violence led to the formation of a false reality, and this version of events became consciously incorporated into my reasoning, while the truth remained hidden, unconscious. The process that I have explored, I believe, may open up the possibilities for understanding other psychoses in general. I propose that the psychotic ‘symptoms’ that are

evaluated in medically led assessment processes may be misunderstood, unless they are interpreted as a symbolic language that may relate to an earlier trauma.

Within this paper I would like to try and show how a hidden and wrongly understood (and thereby wrongly internalised trauma) can be the cause of a psychosis. I hope to thus give an insight into how delusions and paranoid perceptions take form and how they are, when understood, the direct expression of the underlying, non-digested, unresolved problems. The symbolic use (value) of these symptoms can guide professionals and sufferers to the way through which to reach the underlying hidden truth and its false conscious internalisation that may so destructively lead to psychosis. If understanding can be brought to bear on what is the cause of psychosis, as in my case study, then I hope to demystify it and show how it is a natural reaction of the psyche in certain psychological conditions and not some particular weakness of the brain or personality fault in the individual. I am not denying the possibility of a genetic or biological factor playing a part in the development of this illness (schizophrenia), it is not my focus of interest to try to resolve the nature/nurture debate related to establishing the aetiology of this condition, but rather to show how hidden trauma is, or can be, behind psychosis.

Recently I was pleased to listen to Dr Robin Murray (Murray 2012) on BBC Radio4 (*The Life Scientific*) talking about schizophrenia and how, in his view, the debate about the possible environmental and genetic causes behind psychosis has been more of a hindrance (in trying to understand the condition) than a help. I was also glad to hear that he considers that social and environmental factors do also play a part in the formation of the problem. I consider that some of the thinking about trauma in this paper may open up the possibility of understanding how it is that immigrants are more likely, statistically, (as Murray states [2012]), to develop schizophrenia.

Brief Background to the Aetiology of Schizophrenia

The debate which had lasted for a long time about the possible environmental and genetic causes of psychosis seems now generally to be more directed towards a consensus that multi-factorial explanations are needed (Broome et al, 2005; Cantor-Grace, 2007; Mind, 2011; Rethink Mental Illness, 2011). Genes, brain injury, early obstetric problems, drug-abuse, stressful life experiences, social isolation, immigration, urban environment all can be factors leading to a vulnerability to psychosis. Drawing from the evidence so far, researchers suggest

that many of the above factors will interact together to develop psychosis. In a review of the work of others, Garety et al (in Broome et al 2005) consider how cognitive biases may lead to wrong attributions of a negative event. They explore the work of Morrison, who looks at how experience guides the way we understand an intrusion and how experiences like bullying, victimisation, racism and alienation from culture are likely to lead to the wrong appraisal and thus to the likelihood of psychosis. They highlight that several groups consider social isolation another contributing factor, i.e. not being part of a social network that would help to normalise experience. In general, they consider that neuroscience, social psychiatry and cognitive psychology are the disciplines that will together provide an answer to the causes of the onset of psychosis. Morrison et al. (2003) look at how trauma can be at the root of psychosis but they argue that, so far, the evidence is from single case studies and therefore not sufficient to be conclusive. Cantor-Grace (2007) looks at how the aetiology of schizophrenia is probably due to an integration of biological and social factors. All these studies are as yet inconclusive as more evidence is needed. I believe that what I am presenting here allows for a clearer understanding of the type of factors likely to be at the root of the 'wrong' (e.g. delusional) thinking that happens in psychosis.

In my entire journey of recovery from mental illness, it has been of considerable influence and help to have undertaken the study of Freud's work while at University. I developed an in-depth understanding of how the mind works with its conscious and unconscious processes. The understanding of Jung's work was instrumental in making me face certain aspects of my condition as I became less frightened by being able to see invasions from the collective unconscious for what they were, thus being able to make sense of them. The analysis I underwent with a Jungian analyst eventually gave me the tools through which to be able to do my own self-analysis which has been the way for me to discover what I present in this paper.

This paper is based on the single case study of my experience. I have a diagnosis of Paranoid Schizophrenia which has also been called Chronic Schizophrenia. I have had five psychotic episodes, each one ended through compulsory hospitalisation and being forced to take medication. The first hospitalisation occurred in 1981 and the last in 2005. I have given the narrative and analysis of what caused my condition and I will use it to illustrate the factors that allowed for the formation of my psychosis.

One cannot separate any part of experience from other parts when analysing the elements forming a psychological condition (be it a mental illness or any psychological

complex). So while I know that the event that I have narrated is the direct cause of my psychosis, I acknowledge that many other factors had contributed to it. My entire life history, the reason why I was in that situation, my feelings and situation on the day, all these played a part and could not possibly be left out, unexplored or not dealt with. The focus of this paper, however, is on the pivotal, central point that triggered the schizophrenia. In order to provide a clear picture of how the psychological split in me occurred, I will narrate the causal event as it happened, and I will try to show what my thought processes have been as a response.

Backwards and Towards

I will give now an overview of the whole period from the start of my psychotic symptoms, mentioning the trauma at the root of them. I will indicate how my mind had been trying to deal and understand my disrupted thoughts and emotions, and how I gradually became more and more psychotic. I will show how eventually, after several hospitalisations, I started to understand where my problems were originating.

I started having my first paranoid perceptions, i.e. 'ideas of reference' where I thought others were talking about me, in March 1976 while visiting India. I was at the time twenty years old. The incident, which I now know to be at the source of my psychosis, had just occurred but I didn't give it significance at the time. I remember when it happened my thinking 'I've been raped', and then at my not feeling any pain, coming to the conclusion that I was obviously very strong and not affected by it. (Nothing could have been further from the truth).

Over time, I grew more and more unstable. I started questioning everything and had a deep sense of guilt, which seemed to offer solution to the lack of feeling I had. Through guilt I could feel at least something, which felt better than having no feeling, no emotion. Guilt could also help to explain my lack of feeling as I thought it provided a way to recover feeling and emotion by making me seek what I felt to be the lost self, which had been capable of care and concern. Regarding the incident of rape, over time I convinced myself, out of what I thought to be a sense of integrity, that I had really chosen for that to happen and that I could not accuse that man of rape. I had by then only the memory of having, without an interest in the man on my part, somehow accepted to have intercourse with this man. I did not remember the violence.

I would like to add that having intercourse with someone I was not in love with, would have not been my way of thinking about how to behave at the time, despite the contemporary media coverage, literature and social changes (1970s) that often promoted casual sexual encounters with a friend as a meaningful way of being. This was really contrary to my entire upbringing, but I was nevertheless aware of these different ways of thinking. A few of my friends whom I respected and admired for their political and ideological positions had often voiced their revolutionary beliefs about such attitudes as needing change in society. This had led me to think that, while not believing in these principles of 'sexual freedom', I was nonetheless affected by them and felt that perhaps there was some truth in them.

The instability at this time (I was by now 22 years old) gradually led to a full blown psychosis, where I ended up believing (as I did in all five episodes), that I was someone special, the daughter of God, in a special sense (although not as special as Jesus) and that I had a mission to save humanity from sin and perdition. On each occasion, I cut myself off entirely from people and lived in an actively imaginary world where, not only was I in contact with God and the dead, but I was talking, in my head, to prominent figures in society or in my life. During these periods, strong hallucinatory perceptions persecuted me, typically sexual humiliations, for instance of my having a penis enter through my heart, or touching various parts of my body in an accusatory, insulting manner.

With medication, the delusion would disappear as would most of the hallucinations and paranoid perceptions, but I would remain with disturbing sexual perceptions – for instance, when talking to people, I would often have images in my mind of their sexual organs, this especially if I was feeling stressed and anxious. In general, I was experiencing a fear of most other human beings, especially of men, but I had no idea why. I also had a strong sense of inferiority, feeling I was the most despicable, horrible person compared to the people around me.

Although I had kept trying to understand what was causing my problems, I had no idea of what that was. Between 1989-90 (by then I was in my thirties) while reflecting on things, I revisited the rape/non-rape incident and came to the understanding that indeed it had been rape, as I knew it wasn't what I wanted to happen. After coming to this conclusion, the sexual images that disturbed me when talking to people immediately stopped. I felt that perhaps I was on the right track as, from my studies of Freud's work, I knew this to be a sign of having some resolution to a symptom (Freud 1915-1916).

In 1990, I entered analysis with a Jungian analyst. Unfortunately, when I told him about the rape, he commented that it wasn't rape. When I argued about it, he said that I was entitled to my opinion, thus leaving me unable to talk anymore about this. In fairness to him, I have to say that I only had a fragmented memory of the event and that, I now realise, was distorted, so that on the basis of that, it may have appeared as if I was more responsible than I was in reality. Again, I did not remember the violence, nor was I aware of the thoughts and emotions accompanying it at the time. The only reason for which to think that it had been rape was that I knew in my heart that I had not wanted that to happen and, that the knowledge I had of myself was that it did not possibly make sense for me to choose to have intercourse with him. I would have never freely chosen to do so. It is possible that my analyst's reaction was in line with his probable thinking that there might have been something delusional about my declaration and that things had to be made clear.

After over three years in analysis, about three times a week, I had another episode of psychosis that really shattered me. I had been hoping to come off the medication, in fact I had been reducing it, and now my world had fallen apart. During the analysis, most of my anger had been directed at my mother. I considered her responsible for the deep sense of guilt I had, which seemed to be at the root of my illness. I had realised that something about my guilt was as if I was guilty '*a priori*', that is, even before doing something, I felt guilty about it.

By 1995, I was hospitalised in Italy with what was by then my third episode and, soon afterwards, I started to do my own self-analysis. I immediately started work on making myself thinking about the rape and soon realised that my mind would sway from 'It was rape', to 'I was responsible for it'. The main journey of recovery from my schizophrenia has been all about straightening my perceptions and understanding of that event. Gradually, I was able to unearth the memory of what had really happened and, slowly, my true self has been emerging and the psychosis dissolving. The next section covers the trauma as it happened with the accompanying thoughts and emotions. Most of the thoughts and emotions that I can now describe have been uncovered (revealed) through my self-analysis – I was not conscious of many of them when the incident occurred.

The Trauma

At the age of twenty, I travelled away from my home in Italy and was visiting India. I was in a place called Hampi. I had travelled there with a friend, there was a Hindu festival going on.

A few visitors had settled in a shelter made by rocks. We lived there and shared meals together. Amongst the people, there were three Italian brothers from Verona whom I had met on more than one occasion before, while travelling through India. Being Italian and sharing a common language had led to my being friendly with the middle one, who seemed a kind person. One day, while he was speaking to me, his older brother shouted at him in a very offensive and humiliating manner and I remember being surprised at his non-reaction to such brutal treatment. I think that this is significant to what happened later, as it might have been one of his reasons for wanting to humiliate and even annihilate me.

One day, he (the middle brother) and I volunteered to go and get the fuel for the fire, in order to cook. We used to collect, like many local people, dried cow dung. So we went up the hillside. It was rocky there – it must have been a town of temples destroyed by an earthquake, as there were many carved rocks that had fallen down. He was walking behind me and said, at one point, how people could not understand me. I did not fully understand what he meant but it felt like a thoughtful consideration to me. I was taken aback and, although I didn't really believe that people did not understand me, I felt that perhaps there was some truth in it and I agreed with him, while feeling surprised at his consideration and care for me.

As I climbed onto a higher rock, I felt his hand grab my ankle and pull me backwards. I fell back on the rocks below. The impact was so violent – I had been at a height of about one metre – that I could not coordinate the movements of my limbs for several minutes and I couldn't get up. I was surprised that I was unhurt and alive – had I fallen differently and hit my head, I would have died as there were all rocks around and I couldn't protect myself, as I couldn't see behind me.

Since I had, up till that moment, warm feelings towards him and no reason to fear him, I thought that maybe there was an explanation for his behaviour, maybe there was a snake or something. When I finally looked at him, I realised fully how dangerous the situation was, as he was looking a little away, aware of my difficulties and not helping at all.

When finally able to get up, I tried to walk away, still having difficulty moving. He stopped me. I tried to push him off and fought him as he constrained me. He was double my size and very muscular, I realised I stood no chance. As he was fighting me, he was smiling, almost laughing, as if it was a game and he was some superior male who could treat me, a woman, as he wanted. It was as if I, as a woman, was an object of his will, mind and force and had no right, no possibility against such superior power. My anger welled up inside then

and I gave him a push with all my might to try, as I could not defeat him, to give reality to the violent situation, and stop that insulting outrageous laughter. As I pushed him, I remember trying to communicate with my gesture: 'you may kill me but you are not going to treat it as a joke'.

As I did that I began to fully realise that I was about to die, as that was what I had understood from his behaviour. I started to shake violently and I remember thinking that it was a stupid death, unexpected, meaningless.

He started to reassuringly rub my arms; all of a sudden he seemed respectful as he kept a tiny distance away, now and then touching me lightly. At my not taking his reassurance, he then started agitatedly to rub my arms in reassurance, his gesture obviously revealing that he was very worried (I was not looking into his face then). I stopped suddenly. His agitation in reassuring me had the impact of violence in my mind and thoughts. Two thoughts had appeared simultaneously (I know that now): one, the conscious one, was 'I must be wrong'; the other, the unconscious one, was more fearful, saying 'I have to listen; that's what he wants'. I had to listen although it was against all my instincts, but in order to survive, I had to take into account what he was saying with his behaviour. Here started the split in me, the 'I am wrong' and 'the fear = I have to do what he wants', although, at this point, the split had still more to do with the doubt, the lack of clarity about what was happening. In my mind, his becoming agitated in reassuring me and seeing that I would not calm down, was irreconcilable with his wanting to kill me. I think now that he was, probably, 'out of his mind' at the time – I suspect that he may have had some form of psychological disturbance, hence he was totally unpredictable.

I stopped in my tracks and looked at him and, unable to speak, begged him with my whole heart through my eyes and expression, asking 'Can I trust you?'. He seemed confused and, at first, anger appeared in his expression followed by his understanding of what I was asking and then he started nodding reassurance. As I capitulated and accepted that I was indeed wrong, thinking again that there would have been an explanation, I did have a sense, while looking in his eyes, that he was hiding something, but I had to take a decision. He respectfully kept a little distance from me. Then he touched me again, fear came up again in me. He withdrew again, then touched me again and so on for a while. I felt I was going mad, I know now that somewhere, unknown to me but unconsciously, I was thinking that he wanted me to believe him and that I had to if I wanted to survive.

Then, in my unclear mind, I decided and, with an effort of will, made myself think of how he was kind, like my father. He had always been kind up until then. I forced myself to think of him as a kind person in order to stop myself from shaking and being afraid, as he obviously didn't want me to be afraid. It was fear making me think that I had to not feel fear. (The split here becomes more marked). I was not conscious of thinking this. In my conscious mind, my thought was of trusting him as the evidence didn't say he that wanted to kill me, why should he? What was happening was actual violence in my mind, a violence forcing me to think that I was wrong in thinking that he was going to kill me. As I thought he was innocent, I then was overwhelmed by a sense of guilt, of horror at my having accused him of such heinous intentions. What I later learned was that the guilt was also unconsciously driven by fear. I had become so afraid of him that I internalised the guilt out of fear of him, out of the complex distortion that was taking shape through the two realities, the one of fear and the one that I was wrong and that he was good. Guilt would also stop me from being afraid and I would thus keep the reality he wanted me to believe.

When I finally calmed down, he then took me by the hand and made me lie on the ground. I felt unable to fight anymore. I accepted his will entirely. I was unable to face the intense emotional fight I had just been going through, I feared losing my mind entirely, I just submitted to him without being even aware of it. I understood then that he wanted to have sexual intercourse, although I was driven by fear in my conscious mind and I started thinking that I was now making love to a friend. When my heart was made, by these thoughts, to accept this unnatural reality, it felt as if it was being wrenched from my chest, so painful was the feeling.

During the act, my body was completely paralysed by what I know now to be fear, but what I felt was that I had to participate and even felt guilty for not being able to do so. I imagined myself in my mind to be participating as a way to assuage the guilt I felt, which of course, was in reality my drive for survival. I had one moment when I could see his face full of violence and rape but it immediately vanished from consciousness and was taken over by a loving sense towards him and I smiled at him and he smiled back.

When he finished, he laid his head on my chest and then the thought came into my conscious mind that now he would not kill me. The thought immediately vanished from consciousness. While we got up, I felt overwhelmed by a sense of nausea and I started retching, I remember hiding it from him for fear of offending him, so out of touch with reality was I. I started then chattering to him, I didn't know but I was trying to make sure that he

wouldn't return to wanting to kill me. He looked at me and started to smile in derision. I looked back and stopped him with my eyes knowing somewhere that there was a sense to my behaviour but not even aware that my behaviour was absurd. I had undergone the whole act in what seemed a willing manner but it hadn't been. I had been driven to believe a false reality by a sense of guilt, which was kept in place by the fear of him and the fear that, in order to survive, I had to do and believe what he wanted.

It is important to understand that the reason why such irrational thinking had been able to enter into my mind was because of the inability to trust my reasoning and judgement he had created in me by his completely irrational behaviour. I can only stress that his behaviour acted as violence to my thinking and feeling. Because of the intense fear I was undergoing, where I was expecting the blow or action that would kill me, his agitated reassurance acted like such a blow. I had been forced to question my reasoning and understanding of what was happening, while another part of me remained afraid, knowing that my original thought could not be wrong.

I had, at one point, genuinely thought that I had to be wrong as his behaviour was not, by then, that of someone intent on murder. Also, I could see no reason why he would want to kill me and anyway, he had been so kind up until then. Later, after undergoing the whole turmoil of intense fear, followed by self-doubt, followed by forcing myself to trust him, I could no more start all over again, I had no strength in me anymore. Instead, I had the fear of him which had become, had been transformed, into a fear that I had to not be, not let my thinking emerge. This fear, however, was hidden, disguised under loving and trusting feelings towards him and I was made, by the fear, to accept the sexual act while thinking that I was choosing to do so. I had ended up unable to understand and, while my mind was left unable to react, his violence could enter me unchecked by reason. The violence could then create havoc without my being even conscious of it. While in my conscious mind, I was following what seemed to be happening by denying any possible ill intention on his part, in reality I was succumbing entirely to the violence but without being even able to see it. So while consciousness had no feeling or vague loving feelings, my unconscious self was in blind terror.

Looking back and seeing how many women are in fact murdered when they are raped, I can see that with my seemingly mad reasoning and behaviour I actually gave myself the best chance of survival. To this day, I don't know whether I would be alive today if I hadn't succumbed to his will, Certainly it wasn't something I chose to do or think; it was the

reaction to all the violence I was experiencing, with the psychological violence having the most devastating effect. My instinct to survive made me fall in with this.

Analysis of the Event

As a consequence of this trauma. I remained with what feels like a 'lie' as my reality. The feelings, thoughts and emotions that I internalised in those moments remained in me, forming a new me a 'false self' (Winnicott 1960), which I hated as it was so against what I believed in. I found myself having thoughts and feelings of which I didn't approve. I know now that they were from the constellation of thinking and feeling that the unresolved complex was still forcing me to have. Inside of me had remained a whole structure that was still driven by the underlying fear, where I continued to be forced to follow the constraints as created in the trauma. I believed myself to be this person, and the only way to resolve this monstrous being I felt myself to be was to chastise myself in order to try to get rid of those horrible feelings and thoughts. The guilt that had formed and remained inside of me as a result of the trauma was making me follow this type of thinking.

Another way to describe this 'false self' could be 'being possessed'. I am not here talking about a real demonic possession of which I have no clear understanding. What I mean is that in my journey of recovery, during my fight against these imposed ways of thinking and feeling, I often experienced myself as though I was fighting something that was possessing me and that was forcing me to think and feel what it wanted. At times, I felt as if someone was in my bed next to me at night, trying to possess me. What I could eventually clearly see was that as he (the rapist) had forced me into total obedience and as that had remained entirely unconscious, his violence, never resolved, manifested itself in me as, once again, my being forced into total obedience to this dark force. This being existed in such a fantastic manner because, to repeat, my rational mind had never processed what had occurred, so that what had happened had continued to exist in a manner of thinking that was rather primitive or not elaborated. The person next to me in my bed at night, trying to possess me in both mind and body, can clearly be seen as a representation of the event of the trauma expressed in the symbolic form of a dark being trying to possess me.

I have given this analogy of possession in order to try, at one level, to clarify the old misunderstanding about schizophrenia and its frequent interpretation as entailing having different personalities. Schizophrenia is about a split mind (Bleuler 1911/1950) not about a

split personality. My mind was split between the two realities and one of the realities was opposed to my real being because I had succumbed to an entirely distorted understanding and to its inherent violence. This understanding was forced on me as opposed to being another part of me. While undoubtedly unconscious instinctual impulses of the real self were present in both ways of thinking, the psychotic part was a result of violence, a violence that had never been understood and that still acts in me.

The other reason for mentioning the possession analogy is also to try to give an indication of meanings and links that can be made with other ways of understanding what we now call schizophrenia (Irmak 2012). The biblical interpretation of possessions as in the Gospels of the New Testament may or may not have relevance here. I am here suggesting that some forms of possession are indeed non-understood conflicting forms of reality presenting as psychoses.

To continue with the analysis of the event, my previous religious and parental education, where I had acquired high moral principles and the value of seeking amendment for my wrongdoings, contributed by making me choose penance as a solution to my feelings, as I understood them at the time. This I did initially by constantly reinforcing feelings of remorse, by seeking mortification of my body i.e. through fasting or other ways and in general trying to correct these. Eventually these behaviours and thoughts and the underlying trauma all resulted in my feeling that I didn't exist anymore. I was left with no sense of myself, nor a sense of having an identity.

To reiterate, the consequences of the false self formation were, for a long time, the cause of more guilt in me as well as producing a sense that there was really a nasty side to me which I had to destroy and overcome. This, of course, had more deleterious consequences, as I started to actively work on the wrong track, thus weakening my ego even further. Later, I learned to ignore its voice and, in order to function, used my mind to counteract it. To give more understanding, its voice would be an emotion or thought exactly contrary to my real one, for instance, a sense of not caring about how I would have appeared when talking in public, or of not feeling concern or care for someone close who had died, or sexual desires and thoughts towards someone who would previously have been not the least interesting to me. The fact that from an instinctual aspect these thoughts and feelings could all appear as belonging to the id (Freud 1923-1925/1961) only complicates matters as, while the instinctual selfish forces did play a part, the real problem was, firstly, the inability of the real self to

express itself, and secondly, the false self that had formed from the trauma was permitting thoughts that were alien to my real being.

Two dominant thoughts in particular, amongst others, seemed to torment me for a long time after the trauma. One was the question ‘To be or not to be?’, and the other was the sense that there was another reality, a reality that was something different than I thought. I haven’t read Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* but the ‘To be or not to be’ was to do with the real choice I had to make that day. I had ended up not being – my reality, my ego had been entirely denied, destroyed. The sense of another reality is equally obviously related to that experience where reality was other than I thought.

In my own analysis, I eventually saw with clarity how my anger at my mother had been one way to defend myself from the imposed guilt I had internalised that day. By assuming this guilt, I was thus able to have some sort of reality, whereas after the trauma, I had been left with no truthful reality in me, certainly not in psychodynamic, meaningful terms. Accusing my mother meant that someone could then take the responsibility and I was thus also able to give vent to feelings of being a victim as opposed to only being guilty. Although I certainly have had many difficulties with my mother, she remained the first carer, the first love and it was to her that I was giving my pain to deal with as I did as a baby. Somewhere, deep down, was my belief and an inner certainty of her love for me, which helped to maintain some sanity. I have wondered how the blame that has often been put on parents, especially mothers, has to do with this type of dynamic.

To overcome the fear and the psychological violence, which forced on me an entire distortion of perception, has been my main work. The two can be so powerful that they force my mind to think irrationally or to think in a different reality. The whole distortion of thought that takes place in psychosis can clearly be seen in my case. At one level, there was intense fear, which was coupled to, at another level, being made unable to trust my reasoning and being forced to take in a reality other than one my rational consciousness could comprehend. I had been made to believe, in other words, that he was not harming me but was, rather, innocent and I had been made to feel guilty for thinking otherwise. By being driven by fear, this guilt had then turned into a means by which I was able to explain reality in such distorted manner. I was thus left with a psychological complex (with all that a complex entails) that kept interfering with my rational mind.

When elements in my life brought this complex into action, I would find myself unable to reason logically. For example, when examining an action, I would clearly see my

having been guilty of unjust or unkind behaviour towards someone, whereas in reality I would or could have been the victim myself of an unjust or unkind behaviour. It is this force that distorts thoughts that played an instrumental part in my psychosis (and I believe in other psychoses). The pattern of thought that a psychotic episode would take had, however, a meaning that belonged to the trauma complex and the reality behind it. I now understand that the grandiose ideas to which I was prey were the result of the compensating aspects of the psyche, as postulated by Jung who wrote ‘...the principal function of the unconscious is to effect compensation and produce a balance’ (1914/1960: 205). My psyche was trying not only to resolve the dilemma inside me, but it was also trying to resolve the intense inferiority that I felt as a result of such extreme guilt, which had been internalised as my own after an enormous act of violence.

Thus the complex created by the trauma can clearly be explained and its actions were visible. For instance, during the traumatic event, I understood that I couldn’t accuse him firstly because he would have killed me and, secondly, because I was wrong. As a result, his violence was inside me, like an invisible force to which total obedience and trust had to be given, a force that had total power. In short, it had become a god. The god I obeyed in my psychosis is the opposite of the God I believe in, as the god of my psychosis was a cruel and punitive god. I would rather be destroyed than trust such a god.

Equally, the hallucinations represented a repeated attempt by reality to emerge again. The whole delusional world was an attempt by my psyche to resolve the trauma, but without an understanding of reality I couldn’t do it, and its reality was kept hidden from me by a sense of this punishing god or inner fear which was stopping me from thinking from my ‘real’ self’s point of view.

Sometimes, though, the strength of the complex would also make me act in a manner different from what my real being would have chosen. On many occasions, I did wonder, after a breakdown, about my behaviour. Several times I did things, for instance, appearing in all my madness to the people in front of whom I would have felt most shame about showing myself this way, as if on purpose trying to humiliate and ridicule myself. I can now see with clarity how the drive in me (to not be) and the sense of having to punish myself was making me do these things. This particular point may explain, at least in part, the terrible behaviour that is so often portrayed in the media about psychotic and particularly schizophrenia sufferers (Wahl 1996; Chopra and Doody, 2007).

I had identified with this ‘false self’ and for a long time I was unable to even attempt to resolve my psychosis. It was impossible to separate myself from the unconscious thoughts emerging from the trauma and I was unable to analyse them as I was not even aware of the trauma having occurred. It was only when I started being able to resolve the dual reality that things started to not only make sense but gradually stopped having such a powerful effect on me. Now I have reached a point where the false self no longer exists. In its place there are the feelings that I perceive as coming from the trauma, not as an imposition anymore. Instead of a god to obey, my thoughts were replaced with the real fear that came with the trauma. Having reduced all those thoughts to their original source, having undone the distortion through an acknowledgement of the terrifying event, I am now trying to understand and cope with those traumatic feelings. The distorting psychological violence is still present in my psyche, but I perceive it as a fear and that tries to distort my thinking. As such, I am more able to overcome by it. Instead of a false-self, I can clearly perceive an original trauma that needs dealing with.

The next section is an overview of what I had to consider in my journey towards recovery and the following part is an exploration of the implications of this journey for therapists and people with a psychotic condition.

Overview of my Journey

Looking at my guilt, I had to resolve certain issues from my past prior to the trauma, i.e. with my religious, cultural and family upbringing. It was onto this that I had to add the imposed guilt of the trauma. I can only give a glimpse of the other aspect of my guilt, which comes from having committed a sexual act with the person who was doing violence to me. Never would have I agreed consciously and out of choice. I felt like a sexual monster as a woman with no moral sense (although I had very little recollection of the trauma at the time). All this was occurring while I was having loving feelings towards this kind man, feelings that were an entire fabrication out of that trauma – something that had been forced on me and that was an entire distortion, along with all the rest. It was a lie inside me, which I’ve had to fight ever since.

The trauma has remained inside me all these years, creating an entire world of destruction. To undo its work over the distance of time has been very difficult. Had I started when the violence first happened, so much less damage would have occurred. All wounds

need healing whether they are physical or psychological. In my case. I had inside, unknown to me, a serious trauma, with all the strong emotions that a trauma can create; it contained splitting elements, which by never being dealt with led me more and more into a split (dual) mind, schizophrenia. Guilt and fear were there hidden behind a false calmness and tranquillity. Instead of healing, more and more destruction occurred.

Considerations for Therapists and for Sufferers of Psychosis

I would argue that, in many forms of psychosis, there may be a situation that makes the mind doubt itself and that leads to the splitting of reality – hence the split of the ego (in schizophrenia) as such a condition necessarily carries with it heavy leaden emotions and meanings that divide the person. It would have to be a condition that forces the ego to take in a reality other than what is true to the self. Knowing how many people with a diagnosis of some form or other of psychosis have had serious traumatic experiences in their life, I think that a particular trauma is probably often at the cause of psychosis. Often, it is death-facing trauma. What one brings to the trauma is crucial to understanding the strengths or weaknesses one has to deal with, but the trauma should remain a central focus.

I would suggest that the extent of the splitting of what is understood as ‘reality’ may be crucial in determining the form of psychosis that can result. Where in schizophrenia the ego becomes split, as Melanie Klein (1946/1988) indicated is central in this condition, in conditions like bipolar disorder, the extent of the division is less great so that the ego remains intact but consciousness is unable to resolve the trauma as the reality is not understood. The psyche would then be caught in the dual struggle between depression – where the subject is unable to mourn adequately as there is no awareness of the real, distressing element – and the manic psychosis – where, as in schizophrenia, the psyche is attempting to solve the problem and reach understanding but is unable to do so.

In order to deal with my trauma, I’ve needed to resolve many issues in my relationships, especially with my mother, but also with my father, including the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus Complex is based on Freud’s theory that a child will have deep unconscious desires towards the parent of the opposite sex (Freud 1927/1961). It was by being clear about these unconscious wishes that I could look for clarity in the trauma. With regard to the Oedipus Complex and my father, I can only briefly mention that I experienced persecutory hallucinations as if perpetrated by my father during my psychotic episodes, and

now attribute this to the realisation that I had, at one point in the midst of my trauma, forced myself to believe that the rapist was as good as my father. It has been arduous and painful work to learn to distinguish between sexual and persecutory aspects that were the distorted production of my mind coming from the trauma, from the actual real loving feelings and deep, unconscious, incestuous thoughts. These last two were real as opposed to delusional. My father had at one stage become the means through which I could let some reality emerge, however distorted. By having him as my persecutor also with sexual elements, the real event tried to find light. In reality it was very distressing to me. As with my mother, my certainty about my father's love for me made him a safer vessel wherein to put my terrible feelings.

As my case shows, a trauma can be hidden, and in fact will be hidden, not just by repression, as Freud made us well aware, but also by an internalised distorted perception and understanding of the event that no simple memory could resolve. Eventually, I did reach a cognitive, clear understanding of what had happened but I still found that the distortion had a lot of power in the emotions that remained fixed to the original perceptions. A hidden trauma so powerfully distorted required a complex and lengthy psychological work to be resolved.

Some extended psychological considerations

I here would like to address some issues surrounding psychosis. Firstly, I will explore the feared aspect of the unpredictability of psychosis. Secondly, I have re-visited the idea of 'schizophrenia', in particular, being about having a Jekyll and Hyde personality, i.e. a dual personality. I will do this by referring to work by Dianne C. Lefevre (2002).

In her paper, Lefevre (2002) refers to psychosis as a 'Jack in the box' (117). She defines it so because of its always potentially being able to appear suddenly as a threat of suicide, or as assault/murder, or just as a full blown psychosis. It is my opinion that, however many coping strategies and healthy fulfilling elements an individual may have developed in his/her life, the risk of the 'Jack in the box' appearing remains as long as there is an underlying unresolved reality. At any time, something may activate the complex belonging to that splitting of reality; the psychosis can potentially be made to appear.

Another aspect of Lefevre's paper stresses the importance of distinguishing between the psychotic and the non-psychotic personality (2002: 119) and how it is useful to reinforce the non-psychotic one therapeutically to help the individual to try to resolve the psychosis. I would certainly agree with this last point, and I think that to be able to distinguish the healthy

part from the non-healthy (the psychotic) is useful. I have here referred to what she terms the 'psychotic personality' as the false-self.

It can however be misleading to use terms such as 'two personalities', in fact even my use of the false-self and real self can be misinterpreted and therefore misleading. That is because the personality remains, in my opinion, just one as the true self is just one. When the real significance of the trauma is established, it becomes evident that there are not two personalities, but rather a personality that had been forced to internalise a distorting element.

The same can be said for the false self. By using the term 'false self' it is intended that the psyche is complying to external factors (the trauma) and is unable to allow the real being (self) to express itself. If the use of terms such as 'dual' or 'two personalities' is intended to invoke the idea of a different self, as if a different personality, I would argue that, while it seems to be so, it is not so in reality. This is because it is the individual's psyche being forced to act and think under the constraints of the trauma, as my own experience gives evinces.

Future Considerations: Theory and Experience

As to the possible genetic causes of the various psychotic conditions, I would like to argue that genes may not be a consideration in predicting psychosis, at least not in all cases. It still remains relevant to focus on a possible traumatic aspect that has caused a division in the sense of reality. In my experience, it was this aspect that needed to be worked through to bring about therapeutic change.

To look at Murray's (2012) recent comments, regarding a greater incidence of schizophrenia amongst immigrants, a possible explanation may have to do with the different culture one finds oneself in. In the circumstances of an immigrant, it would be more difficult to integrate one's difficult or traumatic experience with the original understanding and the now different culture's understanding and supportive structure. There would be necessarily more difficulties to come to terms with an experience (i.e. it may lend itself, for whatever reason, to being wrongly understood), as the understanding one has of reality is always also conditioned by culture. Furthermore, a person would be less able to find support when surrounded by people with whom little is in common (without even considering issues of prejudice or racism (Jarvis, 2007)). Thus this could lead to a further inability to integrate understanding and therefore to a splitting of the mind and ego. It is possible to see, how

similar psychological dynamics may be taking place in urban environments, where the cultural cohesion may be less likely and social support more fragmented.

The emphasis that has been given in recent times to the importance of narrating one's experience, to aid in the recovery from psychosis (Thornhill, Clare & May 2004) is, I feel, not fully understood in its implications. In order to narrate an experience, a person needs to face the split in the ego, the ambivalence, ambiguity, lack of clarity and confusion; i.e. all those things that create the psychosis. To narrate with clarity the conflicts that need resolving, or at least, facing up to, that can bring about coherence and reality, is no simple matter. It is the actual making sense of one's experience and validating it, also by being taken seriously when telling it, that allow for the healing.

I find it a dangerous concept, in post-modern philosophy, that reality has multiple explanations, at least where psychosis is concerned. In terms of resolving psychosis, one needs to understand with clarity what is *real* as distinguished from what *is not*. When I started trying to explore my rape, the confusion I had led some therapists to suggest that what I felt was not necessarily what that man (the rapist) meant or what had really happened. While this may be significant at times, I know that the reality that I was raped cannot be made subject of relativistic arguments – doing so was painfully dangerous to me. If from a subjective point of view a truth appears different from that of an observer or another participant, there is a reason for it and the reason must be faced and dealt with, leaving no possible secondary meanings.

My schizophrenia was, I know, caused by the impact that trauma had on me. I had been put under an extreme condition of fear where I was fighting for my own survival. I had been faced with a contradictory reality, where one reality was irreconcilable with the other. I was thus left having to listen to one version of the reality because of the violence I was under, and having to genuinely question whether I was wrong. The need to survive and the whole impact of the violence – physical, psychological and sexual – forced me in the end to accept and live a reality that was a lie. This I did, not only in order to survive, but because I had, at one point, been unable to understand, to resolve the existential puzzle I had been put under. Later the pressure had led me to accept the false truth that was by then maintained as a reality through my fear. Feelings had thus ended up being distorted and fear would disguise itself as calmness and tranquillity. In my opinion, this is a truth that may belong to all psychoses, and to recognise the hidden truth would begin the process/task of resolving them.

There were other factors that contributed to my psychosis. The personality traits that I had developed in growing up made me more vulnerable to an external authority, especially where I felt called to respond to my seemingly unjust accusation. At the time when the incident happened, I was surrounded by acquaintances and strangers, no close friend or relative was with me. I was in a foreign country where I could barely communicate through language. Following the trauma, I then moved to a big foreign city where, once again, I had limited knowledge of the language and was living in a culture different from my own. I consider that all these aspects made me less able to cope with what had happened to me, thus compounding my inability to communicate and therefore try to understand what had happened. However, none of these factors were primary determinants of my psychosis. The direct cause of why my thinking, my reasoning, became so distorted can clearly be seen as the outcome of the divisive, unresolved trauma.

Conclusion

I wrote this paper to try to provide a little more understanding of the possible causes of psychosis. I hope that both professionals and people suffering from psychosis can get some benefit from my narrative and analysis. It may be of great value for individuals and/or therapists to search for those elements in one's psyche that force an individual mind to think and internalise a distorted reality. I have suggested, as in my case, that the distorting factors are likely to be very powerful emotionally, whether they come from a pre-existing psychological formation that precipitates a wrong interpretation, or whether they are formed by strong splitting elements in a particular situation. If my case is similar to other cases, then something present in an original conflict would contain those splitting elements as were present in mine. I believe that once an understanding of the cause of the condition is identified, the whole complex of symptoms and symbols would begin to make sense and thus the way to recovery would become less arduous and more possible.

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