Mothering, Caring and Educating-Learning from experience and psychosocial pedagogy

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Abstract

The article takes its starting point from aspects of the author's biography and her experiences of supervising students who have in common shared experiences of being so called 'parental' or 'parentified' children. Bion's work and biography is used to understand how working autobiographically on difficult experiences can offer containment based on learning from experience and how these efforts link to key aspects and practices of psychosocial studies. Experience, theory and practice are presented as intertwined. The premature development of parental children, with its gains and losses, provides a thread through the article that also leads to aspects of psychosocial pedagogy as a relational practice. Ethics of care are seen as providing a facilitating environment where autobiographical writing and reflexive practice add depth to learning and development. Winnicott and Benjamin's work contribute to outline a relational pedagogy suited to psychosocial studies, which brings external circumstances in relation to the internal world of both learner and educators, both in terms of theory, ethics and practice. (163 words)

Keywords: mother, parental, learning from experience, psychosocial pedagogy, care-ethics

Introduction

Starting from an autobiographical vignette, this article tracks some of the learning derived from personal experience and how this has led to a particular theoretical and educational practice orientation. The experiences of being parental children are shared with some of the other authors in the special issue and feature in the article as a point of triangulation between our subjective experiences. Bion's own biographical trajectory is introduced to offer an illustration of how learning from experience was central to his work and offers a model for psychosocial academic practice and also tools for understanding the positive contribution that autobiographical/autoethnographic based on non-narcissistic reflexive practice can make to self and theoretical development. The focus is on bringing out the best in students, framing the relationship between educator and student as one of interdependence within a wider social and institutional context. This is where the psychosocial lens offers a binocular vision and the notion of thirdness comes into view as a crucial element to further analyse more specifically in relation to ethics. The final section is then focused on relational ethics and examples on how this can be formulated in particular aspects of relational practices.

What I learnt from being a mother, daughter and sister

'A six-year-old sits quietly watching stray cats eating leftovers that people in the neighbourhood put out for them. She has been waiting patiently to make friends with the cats, getting them used to her being close, to know she won't harm them, to know she

would like to stroke them, not hit them, and that she'll wait as long as it takes for them to trust her. Her mother doesn't know that's what she does when she is supposed to be playing with the other children in the neighbourhood. The girl has never told her that the other children have been horrible to her because they say her baby sister is a sick monster baby with an illness they might catch from her. Of course, that isn't true, but the fun of taunting and excluding is too much and their parents' malignant gossip has given them a good excuse to enjoy some bullying. The girl won't tell her mother though. Her mother has enough to worry about, she is not fully recovered from a difficult childbirth and the baby is Downs and frail, her father is away for work and her grandparents, who are supposedly there to help, are very distraught and ashamed of the new arrival. So when it is customary to go out to play, she goes out to befriend the local cats, who know nothing about her sister and won't judge her for it.

This is the first scene in the history of feeling responsible for my mother's and my sister's wellbeing. I learned to help with my sister's care, because her frail health and the fact there were just the three of us in the house meant much of the time my mum or I had to stay home with her. As she grew older the special needs kindergarten was too far for my mum to come home before she had to pick her up again and so I stayed at home alone or went to neighbours' houses in the frequent periods of her hospitalisation. When my sister died aged 8 my mum had a breakdown and I became her mental health nurse under the supervision of a psychiatrist, whose daughter had become a close school friend.

I was a parental child for much of my growing up. This has given me strengths and disadvantages both. As a young person I was prone to over-responsibility, a bit of control freakery to put it in less positive terms, alongside a rebellious streak that my mother had tried to tame, but had not quite managed. Having had to take on a parenting role for her, I was hardly likely to obey her blindly. The rebellious streak made me stubbornly independent and to some extent also meant I was tough, able to manage high levels of intensity and work commitment, which is also where the over-responsibility found good application

Having been used to managing myself in a family too needy and too small for responsibility to be solely located in the one parent, my mother, who was there all the time, made me into a close observer of needs and moods. My mother was strong and creative, but also vain. While she needed to rely on me, she also could not bear not to be Queen Bee. She could fly into rages and get into very black moods. I had to learn to manage her as well as myself in our relationship. This gave me some capacity to manage difficult characters and a level of hypervigilance that comes in handy in observing enough to be able at times to be ahead of unfolding events. But it took several other knocks in adult life that I could do nothing about, to realise that control freakery was a defence and that my over-responsible tendencies were taking away freedom from others, that they had a right to make their own mistakes and that I couldn't save people from themselves.

What I have learned about myself has mostly come from introspection in relation to life's events. While I have learned the value of psychoanalytic concepts in explaining not only individual but also group and social dynamics, I have not been in analysis as such. Two

experiences with Kleinian psychotherapists were extremely disappointing. It seemed they were not able to relate to me, their interpretations just seemed to miss the mark. The couch did not work for me and the blankness of affect gave me too little to relate to. I felt that as my failure at the time, and they were dark times when I first approached a therapist. There must have been something so wrong with me, that nobody could help. I was on my own again. Maybe this was the blind spot on the therapist's side. The second therapist kept on trying to make me believe I was having a transference to her as my mother, rather than sensing and empathising with my loneliness. She failed to see that my mother was either too absent, or too present in a persecutory way, she couldn't speak to that. I felt like saying that I had not lost my mind to the extent of seeing my mother in her, when she was nothing like her. I now realise that whatever might have been and still may be wrong with me, whatever my defended self, they did not have whatever it took to help me feel heard. With the first therapist I stopped the sessions after a couple of months. I didn't have much money, so I couldn't afford to prolong something that drained resources and gave little in return. The second time I was better off financially, so gave it two years before giving up. Maybe they were just not very good therapists and I have had good experience of therapy too, but my hunch now is that the experience of parental children is sufficiently different to require special attention.

One of the aspects that I believe parental children develop early on is an awareness of the interdependence of human life. This takes on a more intense quality of survival when the parent cannot be reliably depended on. Making sure that a looking after role is fulfilled, whoever does it, becomes essential to the survival of both. Winnicott's idea that there is no child without a mother is absolutely real to parental children, but also to their mothers. My mother had not read Winnicott but had that idea, even if in her version it became far more complex: for instance, on my birthday she would remind me that this was a joint celebration, it was the day I came into the world, but also the day her status changed and my arrival had made her a mother and specifically my mother. This in a sense tracks onto Winnicott's idea that the child thinks they have created the parent, she was speaking to it without knowing. Thinking back, this spoke a truth, but also took up some of my space on a day that for most children is about them. I was given something, a role in creating a new identity for her, an important insight into interdependence, while something was also taken away by not being allowed to be the sole centre of attention. Her narcissism could not bear it, but I wonder if her guilt and insecurity about her parental role had something to do with it too. She needed to remind me of our attachment, but also that she was <u>the</u> mother and I was the child. My own narcissism was being both nurtured and diminished at the same time and my parentified position was unacknowledged and knocked back.

No mother without a child, no academic supervisor without a student

Nothing is simple about human lives. It seems to me that it is the more extreme circumstances that shed most light on the human condition, by amplifying what is latent or less visible in less extreme ones. What this means for academic supervisory relations is what this article aims to explore. Winnicott's idea that there is no baby without a mother can be transferred and paraphrased in academic terms as 'there is no supervisor without

student'. This set of papers in fact comes directly from the recognition that the four of us have biographical experiences in common in spite of our differences: the overcoming of obstacles, our relation to the maternal and the commitment to a psychosocial reflexive autobiographical/autoethnographic way of working, but also other aspects that our joint working has brought to the fore that relate to parental children.

There is not much written in psychoanalytic terms specifically about parental children, or as the psychologists prefer, 'parentified', which I dislike and will not use because of its medicalised diagnostic connotation, which brackets out the contextual factors that may have been crucial to the child having to assume the parental role. Within the supervisory relationship with mostly postgraduate students, particularly Leslie Thompson and Sophie Savage, whose work is part of this special issue and is autobiographical, something started to come into focus. Sophie tells me it was one of my articles that linked my mother's transition to old age-related disability and working with disabled students (Crociani-Windland, 2013a) that offered her a way of working autobiographically and reflexively about her own experiences. As Sophie, Leslie and I worked together we could recognise patterns in ourselves that fit some of what I have just said: a precocious and heightened containing capacity with its corollary consequences of resilience and a toned-down muted expression of affect in relation to painful experiences.

In spite of our different respective contexts and circumstances we could recount our perceived need to protect our mothers from the impact of our own suffering, which I guess has something to do with a 'sottovoce' tone about not only psychological, but also physical distress. My belly hurts or I have a pain in my lower abdomen is definitely an understatement for a near ruptured appendix. Telling a story of extreme physical or psychological suffering in a factual tone is in my view both part of a habitual strategy of containment designed not to load others, not to revisit its affective impact on us, but also not to be made into an object of pity. The trouble is it perpetuates the problem of not being seen or heard. The register is too low for most people to hear, when they are used to louder distress calls. The flattened affect in the communication can be mistaken for an unfeeling nature, when it actually may be a habit of affective self-containment. In some extreme instances, this could have to do with an experience of privation in a Winnicottian sense. Privation is not about having had an experience and then losing it, it's about not having had the experience at all. The privation of parental children could result from a lack of an experience of attention that might offer ways to understand the actual level of one's own suffering. In other words this could be a result of not having had recognition of its impact by another. Compared to the suffering and need of others, one's own can just get lost. A part of me recognises this in some of my own difficulties, and yet my experience is that this is not a global development deficit, but a partial one, where only some aspects of experience have not been able to be spoken to, acknowledged, made conscious or contained. As I read back this sentence I am struck by what I have written: 'a part of me', my observer self, recognises aspects of myself where some dissonance occurs as I hear, listen and watch others' different ways of responding to hardships that feel alien and I wonder about those differences. This brings me to the role of thinking and reflexivity as

offering containment and working through, particularly in relation to experiences where survival is at stake.

Bion's metapsychology traumatic roots and reflexivity

Dorit Szykierski (2010) argues that the origin of Bion's metapsychology can be tracked back to his war experiences. Szykierski maps Bion's autobiographical writing in relation to the development of his theoretical work. As I read her article the following sentence (Szykierski, 2010: 942) struck me as consonant with my previous self-observation:

> In 1972, after reading the typescript of his "Diary" written in 1919, Bion wrote the "Commentary" in the form of a dialogue between MYSELF (that is, Bion at the time of writing the Commentary) and BION (Bion at the time of writing the Diary).

We have a similar practice in Psychosocial Studies methodology that includes keeping a research journal and then reflecting on it as part of the research process and findings. This is similar to Bion's own practice and it is particularly notable in autoethnographic and autobiographical work that writing acts as a method of inquiry in itself (Richardson, 2000). While not thinking psychoanalytically, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) also speak to the therapeutic value of writing. However, writing in itself is not enough without it being accompanied by a questioning attitude and even then, just like Bion (1997: 201), we might be moved to turn to psychoanalysis to begin to unravel the complexity of subjective experience and psychic reality, so that such inquiry may produce knowledge useful to others and not just to oneself.

Much of Szykierski (2010) article is focused on Bion's experiences of war and his endeavour to work through his feeling haunted by them. While the parental child's experience is not the same as that of war survivors, there are common features: many soldiers are very young and their development and maturation can be damaged by the experience, making them old before their time. This can be true of parental children also. The normal ruthlessness of childhood and youth is a luxury, when survival depends on the survival of others and caring has to be reciprocal at best and in more extreme cases from child to adult with little scope or expectation for reciprocation in kind. This aspect links in turn to the awareness of interdependence. It is hard to care for a hated other, one has to contain the tendency to split and project in order to ensure mutual survival. Blaming can become dangerous as a defence. I would imagine this could be a quandary in war too, when one has to kill one's enemies, but also witness the death of one's friends by people very much like oneself. In war the defence, as Bion (1982) tells us, is prepared in advance by training soldiers to obey without questioning and thus defending them from reality. This learnt avoidance of thinking is also an abrogation of responsibility. I could imagine that this is the kind of damage that a parental child might also suffer in some circumstances where the parent is authoritarian, while needy, and that it might lead to a more delinquent tendency in the child.

The link between external circumstances and the internal world is something Bion was clearly concerned with in his own learning from experience. And indeed, that was the title of one of his key books (1962). Bion's (1962) idea of containment links to his other ideas of thinking as digestion and experiential learning: I have noticed that all of the authors in this

special issue have unusually good reflexive capacity. When Sophie was about to start work on her Masters dissertation, for example, she was hit with one of the most toxic processes related to disability benefit entitlement. It was clear it would take time and emotional resilience to revisit her medical history and experiences of growing up, but she took the bull by the horns to write an auto-ethnography of going through that process. Leslie likewise is using her learning from experience to research how people with acquired blindness might be helped through psychotherapy to accept their changed circumstances and learn to live with their disability. This speaks of a deep commitment to learning from experience (Bion, 1962), and an acquired capacity to process affective load and toxic material, where the process of thinking in itself is a way to manage and contain them. This work is profoundly subjective, but uses subjectivity in a reflexive non-narcissistic and reparative frame to produce understanding in the service of others. The reflexive focus is also able to be a self-development tool, that may serve to offset the element of unfreedom that can drive an excess of over-responsibility, hidden fragility and hypervigilance without denying the usefulness of already-learnt capacities for resilience.

Parental children, relational ethics and psychosocial pedagogy

There are indeed gains as well as losses to being parental children. Gregory Jurkovic (2014, p.xiii) summarises the gains with reference to other literature:

> As a result of enacting a parental role, youngsters may learn invaluable lessons in responsibility and giving, which can contribute to healthy identity formation and self-esteem. They also gain trustworthiness and satisfy their need to express caring and affection. In addition to allowing parents and children to meet outside the confines of their conventionally defined positions, the occasional reversal of their roles provides youngsters with an opportunity to master socialization skills and to rehearse future role activities (see Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967).'

I have added the capacity for reflexivity to the gains referred to in this quote. According to Jurkovic, the psychoanalytic frame may be too narrow to explain how some people may be very damaged by being in a parental role early in life or develop resilience (not without a price).   This led him to what I see as more psychosocial systemic frameworks, such as the ecopsychology of Bronfenbrenner, and Minuchin in family therapy. I want to extract one finding from the work of Jurkovic that made a lot of sense to me and that may account for the difference. He pointed to the ethical dimensions of justice and trust as being especially important for parental children, going as far as to say: 'whether or not parentification assumes destructive proportions turns on qualities at an ethical level' (Jurkovic, 2014: XVIII). To this day and from early on I was painfully aware that my mother was as much a victim of circumstances beyond our control as I was: genetics, illness, a father with a job that meant he was away most of the time. I knew my mother had a strong sense of justice and could trust her to do the right thing in extreme circumstances, even if she was less reliable in an everyday context. She was able to love my Down's syndrome sister for who she was, for example, and fight for her right to education at a time when that was not a given. In spite of her authoritarian and narcissistic nature she was also a very good problem solver with a cool

head in a crisis. Creative and ingenious, very intelligent and intuitive, she could be empathic, but also a pitiless judge of character. I think I learnt early on when I could trust her and when I couldn't. I think I also started to appreciate the difference between assessment and judgement, which I will return to below. In a sense my appreciation of her complex character and the complexity of circumstances could be seen as engendering an early development of the depressive position (Klein, 1975), also linked to what I said earlier about blaming being a dangerous defence. Klein's is a fundamentally two-person psychoanalytic model, that views the depressive position as a developmental achievement. Bion (1963) on the other hand regards it as an unstable achievement, with the paranoid-schizoid position always also available depending on context. For Bion the paranoid-schizoid position is not altogether a negative state of mind. It may be triggered by new affective disturbance that, by provoking a fragmentation of previous understanding, opens the way for change. The capacity to tolerate uncertainty and to reflect is key. It relates to learning in O (Bion, 1970) and the valuing and centrality of experiences of breakdown and break through. What makes the difference between breakdown and break through is the capacity for containment or the start of container-contained relationships, but also developing the capacity to sustain vulnerability in relation to experiences that were and or are traumatic, conflictual and hence defended against. My own experience suggests that the depressive position is more of a contextually acquired inclination in some parental children, as already touched on. It took me a while as an adult to appreciate Klein's ideas of projection and to become aware of envious dynamics; my own doctoral journey really helped with that. I believe that at an early stage of development I had seen the dangerous, unrealistic and unfair potential of splitting and projecting, which to some extent explains the failure of the experiences with Kleinian therapists I reported earlier. It also explains my interest in broadening the frame to a relational psychosocial transdisciplinary approach and my theoretical orientation. And as I write this I am learning more about my own academic and life trajectory.

There is more to explore in relation to the above and to working with academic supervision/mentoring. Such work is by necessity embedded in a larger socio-cultural and institutional context requiring awareness of principles of necessity and fairness that are larger than the individual/s and that need to be kept in mind. Keeping them in mind creates thirdness in its own right and is what Benjamin (2004: 26) refers to as the moral third in relational terms. The awareness of external conditions as a third element in relationships creates a way out of what Benjamin terms as 'the complementarity of twoness', its 'doer and done to mentality', the complementarity being 'no done to without a doer', a similar situation to 'no baby without a mother' but in a negative version, which is where the paranoid-schizoid projective dynamics typically arise (Benjamin, 2004, 2018). Connected to bringing in thirdness and relational ethics, there are three further aspects to map when thinking about mothers and daughters, parental children and academic pedagogy. The first is the intimacy and boundary setting of an intersubjective relational perspective, related to learning from experience and use of reflexivity in earlier sections; the second has to do with fairness and ethical values appropriate to a psychosocial approach, and the third has to do with what is the moral third equivalent in the supervisory relationship.

An intersubjective relational stance in supervision does not shy away from the use of learning from and sharing of personal experience with one's students. Its usefulness is manifold. It can aid recognition (Benjamin, 2018) whereby aspects of shared experience may foster empathy and attunement between supervisor and supervisee (in Benjamin's terms create 'the one in the third'). These aspects are indeed often perceived at a non-verbal level in any case, but are only available for reflection once brought into consciousness. This allows students to be less shrouded within what is traditionally seen as a hierarchically-constructed professional relation based on keeping personal and professional identities separate. My first excursion into the idea of a psychosocial pedagogy (Crociani-Windland, 2013b) focused on some key ideas from social pedagogy, a particular approach for both education and care practiced mostly in Northern European countries and with roots in German idealist philosophy. For present purposes the key concept I wish to take up again relates to the useful distinction in social pedagogy between the professional, the personal and the private, known as the three Ps for short. This distinction goes beyond the usual binary of professional and personal: there is a difference between what is personal experience that may usefully be shared to aid relatedness as well as aid learning and development, and aspects to be kept private and that it would be inappropriate to share. Knowing the difference is of course not always easy, but important to engage with. The intimacy that we are speaking of in the title of this special issue is not about the sharing of private matters, but about the sharing of learning from experience and human vulnerability. Such an approach requires the experiences that brought that learning about to be shared, so that learning can be given context. This brings a level of intimacy in the relation. It can also be a way of role modelling the approach and the courage required to be vulnerably transparent and accountable, without losing a sense of agency.

The second aspect relates to a specific ethical orientation in psychosocial studies that is based on an intersubjective understanding of ethics of care (Hollway, 2006). According to Banks (2004) there are two basic orientations to ethical concerns, partial and impartial. The first concerns an emotionally engaged and contextually grounded moral reasoning and is generally regarded as an ethic of care. The latter is based on universal values of justice and rights. It is known as impartial because it is based on judgments that are detached and do not favour personal attachments. Philosophically it is a Kantian, rationalist orientation (Kohlberg, 1976) critiqued by feminists such as Carol Gilligan (1982) as a male form of moral reasoning as opposed to a predominantly female care orientation. There is empirical quantitative research testing those arguments (Kuhse et al., 1997) that shows no gender or role correlations among the 300 doctors and nurses who took part in the study. The research shows that context and attachment matter more than role or gender. What is at stake and whether survival is part of the picture really matters to whether a rational impartial or a care-ethic partialist approach is appropriate. In the context of the care professions, life and death ethical dilemmas are crucially encountered more often than in teaching and learning contexts. However, depending on how the relationships are framed academic life can be extremely bruising. This is where the distinction between caring for (the impartialist professional, practice aspect) and caring about (the emotional, care aspect), implicit in the different scenarios, is important and can make a difference. It could

be said that caring for student learning is what any decent educator does, but caring about is what makes some educators stand out. We all have memories of significant figures in our educational biographies that made a difference, usually because they were not just good at their subject knowledge, but because they cared enough about us. As Hollway (2006: 11) puts it:

> A theory of subjectivity premised on the dynamic unconscious intersubjective flow of affect, identification and recognition between people means that care is the psychological equivalent to our need to breathe unpolluted air. We can survive, perhaps for a long time, in polluted air but it damages our vitality, we have to make do and adapt to less. Moreover, good-enough care, like good-enough air, is inside and outside us – inevitably – all the time, whether in its presence or lack.

While the maternal aspect symbolically stands for caring, a good enough parent, educator or other professional hopefully tries to care for and about those relying on them. This entails responsibility and the willingness to learn from experience, to be aware of the non-rational, affective realities of human relations; to be cognisant of subtle but important differences between harm and distress. The autobiographical work included in this special issue was not easy to present, revisiting painful aspects of experience can be distressing, but the process can be productive of learning and that can be healing in itself, as the previous sections have tried to illustrate at the hand of Bion's own journaling and intellectual journey.

The third and final aspect to be examined is how the moral third can operate in academic supervision and how to be critical without being judgemental. The task of the educator, supervisor or mentor can be constructed differently: one position is to identify with the role of examiner, who judges the worth of the work and by extension its author. This construction of the role sees the task as one of criticism and is often constructed within a hierarchical detached stance, seen as synonymous with professionalism. It can feel antagonistic in a way that mirrors the traditional idea that a doctoral thesis has to be defended and in some countries such a defence forms part of a public ritual that can end in public humiliation or exultation. The humiliation or exultation are predicated on identification between student and academic product, which collapses the thirdness of supervisor, student and thesis. Where the thesis is itself a third in the relation between student and supervisor, representing a joint investment in the relationship, the relation can be reach to a more benign notion of supervisor as critical friend or guide. The relationship does not need to be symmetrical, differentials of power and levels can be sustained. Within such a stance authorship is retained by the student, while authority and responsibility for care belong to the supervisor given their role and experience. The element of critique and assessment of course is necessary, but the role of the supervisor is to assess the work, rather than judge the student, to identify what is required for this level of study and to do their best to help the student achieve that standard. Assessment should be understood as a different concept to the notion of judgement. Assessment is key, both as to what needs to be done, but also how one might work towards it. The moral third and impartial ethics lie in the standards and processes that both student and supervisor have to abide by, it is the

lawful envelope that is larger than both individuals in the supervisory relation and that the thesis or other assignment linking student and supervisor is subject to. The identification of student (or even supervisors) with their output can make the experience very stressful, but the worth of the person does not have to and should not be judged or internalised as purely resting on that one creation. All of us have strengths and weaknesses. We share the imperfection of being human as well as its creativity and ingeniousness.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article started with a scene from my own childhood to arrive at my present-day occupation and preoccupation with educational practice and an allegiance to a psychosocial and transdisciplinary orientation, where psychoanalysis has much to offer, but is not the end of the story. The social context does matter and, in a sense, the reality around us can help mitigate our human need to control, even in the form peculiar to those of us with difficult developmental circumstances that have made us liable to 'control freakery' and hypervigilance. Learning from experience and reflexivity have been outlined as key to both deep-learning healing and self-development. In this article the autobiographical aspect has been particularly focused on mothers and daughters, leading from self-exploration to how to think psychosocially about educator and student relations. The term educator comes from the Latin e-duco, it is about drawing out, leading out and this seems very apt to an approach that goes beyond thinking of ourselves as purely rational, but is interested in bringing out the less rational and more vulnerable aspects of ourselves. The term pedagogy goes even further back to ancient Greek and literally means 'child leader', in my mind it translates as: leading people on a learning path. A caring leadership that brings out the best in others giving them the benefit of our own emotional and professional experience, while acknowledging our own limitations and holding responsibility for them, could be a way of encapsulating what I have tried to set out. How well we can live up to such ethical values and aspirations is also subject to external forces. Increased workloads in professional settings, such as education, health and care establishments, and neoliberal practices that privilege rational ethics can militate against the capacity to care and the care ethics that I believe should belong to a psychosocial pedagogy. But this should not make us desist from trying to do our best to be good enough educators.

Finally, as befitting a psychosocial approach, the world of dreams came to my aid as I was finishing the writing. In my dream a number of overlapping boxes and then people were superimposed by an image that came forward and revealed itself as the Holy Mary. There she stood above all this in her traditional white and blue garments with the sacred heart showing on her breast, smiling, and holding the gesture of benediction, a female rendition of the sacred heart of Christ image that most people brought up in Catholic countries will be familiar with. What was striking was the smile that went with the blessing. I searched the internet for images of a smiling Mother Mary and they are really rare. While I am not a practising Catholic, I am happy to have made Mary smile.

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