

Ghosts at the Scene of the Crime: Loss, trauma and abandonment in the histories of young people in trouble

Rachel Wingfield

(Backdrop: Picture of Etem Celebi pretending to shoot from his blog)

On 16th November, while I was preparing what I was going to say to you, I heard the news that 17-year old Etem Celebi had been shot and killed on the Smalley Close Estate in Stoke Newington. He was a student at nearby Stoke Newington School. This is a recent picture of Etem, taken from his own website. This news was particularly poignant for me, as the first thing I was preparing to talk about was my work as a school psychotherapist with boys in distress and trouble at Stoke Newington School, Etem's school. The boys I am going to talk to you about were contemporaries of Etem's. I wanted this photo of Etem to help us keep in mind the real human being and families we are talking about today, and the immediate and pressing nature of these tragedies - these are issues we have to do something about, like right now.

I will also be using as a backdrop today, some pictures by Tracey Emin, who like Etem is the daughter of a Turkish immigrant, and who has spent much of her life in London's East End, close to where Etem grew up and also to the Bowlby Centre, the organization of which I'm Chair.

Etem's murder marked the 23rd killing of a teenager in London in the last 11 months. Etem Celebi was shot by other teenagers. Thought to be Gang members from Stamford Hill they thought someone from the Smalley Close estate had stabbed their friend, and had come down to Stoke Newington looking for retaliation. They came upon Etem and his friends, sitting talking, and asked 'Are you from this Estate?' When Etem said yes, the boys started firing - in all they fired 9 shots, and didn't care who they hit. Etem tried to run and hid crouching behind a nearby car, but he was shot in the lower back and died hours later. A 17-year-old boy has now been arrested for his killing, as well as 3 other teenagers.

The press coverage of Etem's death has been very focused around the issue of whether Etem himself was a gang member. There have been reports that he was involved in drug dealing and the sale of arms. The subtext of this is the question: was Etem an 'innocent' victim? One newspaper report read 'We should all be concerned about this killing, because these acts of violence are starting to involve the rest of us, who have no involvement in gang warfare'. It seems that society has developed a new form of social stratification for young people- normal people, innocent people whose life and deaths matter, and a group of second class citizens - throw away young people, who won't really be missed, whose lives are cheap.

I wanted to ask the question of how the death of one of our young people ends up being dismissed in such a way. I also wanted to think about how another 17-year old boy ended up shooting Etem in the back, and killing him simply because he happened to live on a particular Estate.

Today I wanted to look at the theme of young people in trouble from two very different perspectives gained through therapeutic work. Firstly, therapeutic work in schools with young boys in trouble, and secondly my work with offenders in prison; much further down the line, after they have committed violent crime (including murder). What has been striking for me, as a

psychotherapist is how often I am dealing with the same or similar narratives. That 11 and 12 year olds I have met in schools, tell the same stories and voice the same distress, as the 25 and 30 year olds (and older) that I meet serving life and other long sentences in prison.

What brings this level of violence and danger into the everyday lives of young people? Or draws them into involvement in gangs and organized crime? Dominant contemporary narratives about young people, who commit crimes, remain rooted in genetic fundamentalism ('he or she was born like it') or drenched in stereotypes ('black people from poor families are criminals) and quasi-religious language ('these people are just evil').

So who are these evil monsters we are talking about?

I'd like to introduce you to two boys I worked with.

Although I was supposed to be in the school to help students in distress or suffering from MH problems, what many of you will probably be unsurprised to hear is that what tended to happen was that teachers referred to me the students that were causing the most trouble in their class, whose behaviour was disruptive, and who came across as angry, disengaged from learning, or hostile.

Keith was referred to me when he was 11 years old. Keith's father had left Jamaica to make a better life for his children when Keith was too tiny to remember. Keith's mother continued to raise him with his siblings, until she died when he was 5 years old. Keith was then brought up by his grandmothers, living very much between the two houses. This was a time in his life, which he told me about with great longing and happy memories of his warm attachments with both grandparents. When Keith was 9 years old, his father decided it was time for Keith to join him in London. His father had married again and had two small children with his new wife.

Keith's grandmother brought him to London for what she told him would be a holiday, and left him to live with his father and his new family. His primary school file included a report of a child protection intervention, triggered by a concern of a previous teacher, who had asked Keith where the many bruises and marks on his body came from, which led to Keith disclosing his father was beating him with sticks, belts and wires.

On his better days, Keith's teachers found him resistant, lethargic and sullen. He would simply refuse to cooperate with any requests made of him in class. Often this was with a detached, passive disinterest, but it was mixed with sporadic bursts of rage and violence, which most often led to Keith running out of class and roaming the halls or the school grounds until a teacher caught up with him.

It was clear on first meeting Keith that he was chronically depressed. He presented as many depressed adults do. Low affect, exhausted, listless, uninterested in the world around him and unable to manage relationships or enjoy activities or pursuits. He was tiny for his age, with huge eyes and closely cropped hair. Keith would always greet me with a shy smile and insisted on calling me Miss, though the other children called me Rachel. For the first few weeks he talked to me about his happy times in Jamaica, and drew pictures of his grandmothers. I said to him that he smiled and looked happy and lively, when he talked to me about this, but that the rest of the time he looked very tired and very bored, perhaps sad. His face would become closed and angry when I said this and he wouldn't talk any further about it. One day he came to see me because he had been sent out of his lesson and thought he would come and find me. I asked what had happened. He told me that his teacher had begun the lesson, as every teacher did, by asking them to get their books out of their bag. Keith just said he couldn't face it. He was too tired. He couldn't bear the endless getting books out and putting them away again; moving from class to

class. He said he just wanted to lie down all day.

On this particular occasion, Keith's passive refusal to take his books out of his bag and led to a row with the teacher and Keith throwing a Chair across the room. He began drawing me a picture, which he told me was about how when he was little he could just run off into the countryside when he was bored or miserable and in trouble. He felt trapped. I had realized by this point that Keith's pattern tended to be flight rather than fight, and he was always looking to run away or escape his situation. However, when cornered he would become desperate and enraged and this is when he could become either a danger to himself or violent to others. One day he banged on my door, having clearly stormed out of his lesson, and shouted 'I've run away and I'm never going back'. He ran off, and out of the school into the grounds. 'Just leave him' the deputy head told me angrily, don't give him any attention. I persuaded her that I was concerned about his safety and managed to dash out after him. He was hiding and then running around the very large school grounds for some considerable time, shouting 'I'm never going back miss'. The school was surrounded by locked, very high spiked metal railings and gates, specifically designed to prevent anyone from getting in or out. Keith, unusually energetic fuelled by his rage, managed to climb up the railing and cling to the top. On the other side was a road. He shouted 'I'm going to kill myself miss. I'm going to jump in the road. there's nothing you can do to stop me'. After a half hour or so of painstakingly talking to him, Keith climbed sobbing down into my arms, begging me to help him. A few days later he came to see me he had been suspended and told he would not be back again for a few days. He had lost his temper again in class. I noticed he had bruises and cuts on his hands and arm and he was later to show me cuts and bruises on his back. He said he had been in trouble a lot over the holiday. I explained to him that I could not keep this a secret, that if he was telling me he was being beaten I had to talk to the Child Protection teacher. He seemed unphased. 'Oh they did that before' he said, uninterestedly. Nothing had changed. The CP teacher, was unconvinced by Keith's story and unsympathetic to his outbursts. However, she had no option but to call social services. Keith went home, and I felt very concerned on his behalf. The next day I found a letter posted under my door. 'Miss, 'Dear Miss, I am not your friend any more. I hate you, I am very angry with you and I am never coming to see you again'. 10 minutes later there was a bang on my door' 'I've just come to tell you I'm never coming to see you again' Keith said, half shouting, half sobbing. I persuaded him to come in and sit down. He was even more bruised and this time I felt I had to find a way for a more serious intervention to be made. Keith had to sit with 8 adults and was asked to say in front of his father what he had told me, and to tell the social worker whether it was the truth. Before we went in, Keith was shaking with fear. But in the room he looked clearly at the social worker and told his story with eloquence and was calm. His father did not deny it but said that Keith was indeed a very bad boy. In the end, I had to contact the NSPCC and was able to follow this through until an agreement was made that Keith would go and live for a period with an aunt, his father's sister, who he liked.

No this story has something of a happy ending: at least temporarily. But what struck me was how difficult it was to get Keith's lack of safety, internal or external to be seen or responded to, and how resistant everyone around him was thinking about the source of Keith's depression and anger and to the bringing to an end the violence that was committed against him. The focus was on the violence or aggression exhibited by Keith and a complete lack of knowledge about how to intervene to prevent Keith's behaviour from escalating once traditional school sanctions had proved ineffective. I have no doubt that Keith's suspensions would have escalated into exclusion over time. I don't say any of this as a criticism of teaching staff, who were dealing with large classes of 30 plus kids with very diverse needs and difficulties. But it does deeply concern me that so many years after the birth of attachment theory, an understanding of the impacts of separation, loss and trauma are still missing from any understanding of disaffected or so-called anti-social behaviour in young people.

The other young man I wanted to talk to you about today illustrates this I feel even more poignantly.

Kai was also a student at SNS. He was referred to me as what his Head of Year described as his last chance saloon. The staff were concerned that Kai was committing as yet minor acts of arson around the school, as well as truanting, fighting and being aggressive with teachers.

Kai's family was Columbian refugees who came to this country when Kai was 10. None of the family spoke English when they first arrived, and although Kai now spoke some English his family did not and the school had managed to have very little contact with them.

Kai was tall, wiry, with curly dark hair and walked the corridors of the school with a look of permanent intense suspicion and wariness, ready to fight if approached. which he frequently did. He was seen as hard and street wise, disruptive and dangerous.

When Kai first came to see me, he rarely spoke. He would respond to any questions or comments with grunts or with stony silence. Occasionally he would burst out with a complaint about something that had happened that day - his school diary was covered with incident reports from teachers, and he was mostly 'on report' which involved having to have his diary signed at the beginning and end of each class by the teacher, who also had to state how his behavior had been. Any negative comments about his behaviour whilst on report would lead to suspension.

Because Kai found it hard to talk, I tried to find creative ways to communicate with him. It was clear he was angry and unhappy, and he also seemed to me to be scared. He presented with typical hyperstartle responses, and would literally nearly fly out of his seat if there were a sound in the corridor outside during our sessions. I found over time, that of the best ways to encourage Kai to communicate what he was feeling was to find code language. Colour was particularly effective and we developed a chart which he would fill in with a different colour for each morning and each afternoon since I'd last seen him. He chose the colour code. Grey was the colour he would fill in for his worst days. Red for his best days.

I noticed that a pattern began to emerge. Kai would begin each day with a colour which was not too bad, and it would gradually decline as the day went on. Grey cropped up at regular times on regular days.

I talked him through this: 'Look do you see this Kai? You were having a good day. Everything was going OK in the morning, and then suddenly, not long before lunch, you've started colouring grey again. And that's happening a few times a week. These are days when you often end up in trouble.

He looked at the chart and agreed that yes, this did indeed seem to be the case. 'So what happens?' I asked. What happens so that suddenly you can go from a red day to a grey day?'

He was silent for a long time and then said 'It's after the lessons when the teacher won't let me go to the toilet. That's when it's a grey day'.

This suddenly made sense to me. Kai's file reported an incident at his primary school, shortly after Kai and his family had first arrived in the country. Kai had been sexually assaulted in the boy's toilets by some older boys. There had been a follow up by the police and social services.

Once this became clear, I spoke with Kai's Form Tutor who was very sympathetic, and he got special dispensation to go to the toilet during lesson time. He did not dare go in break time when the other boys were around. Kai did not abuse this new right, and his behaviour began to improved - markedly. He was able to engage much more in sessions, and would talk animatedly at times and make me

laugh. I was becoming very fond of him. Then suddenly I found out he had been suspended again, and for a considerable period. I pursued his form tutor and found out that he had been suspended for setting fire to wastepaper bins around the school during break times. His arson had started again and in the latest case had caused considerable damage. I was puzzled, as there had been such a period of improvement. As Kai was out of school I could not ask him about what happened. I spoke to his form tutor again and this time he told me that Kai was peeing in the wastepaper bins then setting fire to them. This began to make a little more sense. We investigated together and found that Kai's head of year had withdrawn his right to go to the toilet during lesson time on the grounds that it was not fair, if other kids weren't allowed to do this, why should he. Explanations about Kai's traumatic associations with going to the toilet at school carried no weight with the year head. It was about time he started getting over it and trying to fit in, he couldn't be mollycoddled forever.

This time there was nothing I could do. Kai returned to school and although he tried to talk to me about it, he remained angry and scared, refusing to enter the boys' toilets and getting into trouble either for peeing in the grounds, or in the bins. Shortly after returning to school he again set fire to one of the bins and the SMT decided to permanently exclude him. He was sent to a Pupil Referral Unit. When I last heard of him, his behaviour had continued to deteriorate and his offending had escalated and branched into other areas, with other young people.

I will never forget my last meeting with Kai on his final day before being excluded. He came to see me, his old hard wary look apparent on his face. I held my hand out to shake his and clasped it saying to him 'don't let anyone ever make you feel you don't matter Kai. You're special and you matter'. Tears began to pour down the cheeks of this tough young man, and he clung to me like a little boy.

I could have chosen many other examples to give to you today, to give you a flavour of the issues of separation and trauma in the histories of young people in trouble. These examples are by no means unusual.

But before I continue I just want to pause for a moment to reflect on this. Because the current media focus, and moral panic about violence committed by young people, can lead to quite a distortion in our perceptions. It can also lead to political solutions which are based on fear and prejudice rather than being backed up by facts.

We are certainly part of a culture in which a generation of young working-class people being is criminalized. Black and Minority Ethnic young people are particularly focused on as potentially dangerous, and over-represented in stats on at every stage of the Criminal Justice System - including those stopped by police, arrested and then prosecuted for crimes. Recently, the Government has begun to develop policies aimed at identifying children from 'socially excluded' - read poor, or black families - who they feel are at risk of becoming the dangerous criminals of the future. But evidence suggests that the issue of violent crime is much more complex than this and involves the whole community - both in its cause and solution.

Violent offences involving young people age 10 to 19 have actually fallen by 18% this year, but police are concerned about rise in number of teenagers being murdered, the majority in gang conflict).

I'm also aware with young offenders I have worked with, by the time they commit their index offence a number of serious crimes have been committed against them, as with both Keith and Kai. Yet those who subjected them for years to violence and abuse have very rarely been caught or prosecuted for these crimes and are sometimes seen as responsible citizens.

What the risk statistics actually tell us is about those at risk of being caught.

As we know, the vast majority of serious harm is committed in family or interpersonal relationships: through domestic violence (2 women are killed through domestic violence per week, yet there is no equivalent public outcry). As well as Domestic Violence, the crimes of violence which are most prevalent in our society are violence between peers; violence through child sexual abuse in the family or social network; and through rape, the vast majority of which is committed by partners, colleagues, friends, acquaintances or family members. Much is being said about crime levels dropping. But in these categories which leave the most harm to their victims, there is no evidence of any fall in rates.

And when it comes to rape, convictions are dropping; reporting is rising and survey evidence backs up that levels of rape continue to be much higher than those reported. Rape remains one of the most widespread crimes and one most likely to cause serious long-term harm to victims.

And those who commit rape do not fit any neat profile. Think of Frat Boy initiation ceremonies in the US, which involve white middle-class students who go on to become respectable members of the establishment, raping freshmen students; the numbers of rapes on University campuses by fellow students, women raped by professional colleagues they ask in for a drink etc. Most of these offenders will never come to the attention of the authorities in any other context and even if they do are very likely to result in a conviction.

We might not be too surprised by this if we take into account that young people's attitudinal surveys regularly report high levels of social and peer approval of rape; the recent Amnesty International survey revealed that many young people felt there were a whole range of circumstances in which it is legitimate to rape a woman; also in relation to domestic violence.

This is a question of levels of social permission: this is not just about identifying individuals, it cannot be tackled by narrowing down those we perceive to be a danger to us into a small group of socially excluded or attention seeking teenagers who we can assess for risk and keep under control. This is a social myth, which aims to deal with our fear of harm.

But we do need to address how to bring about change in rising levels of young people killed through gun and knife crime. And we also urgently need to address how we can bring about change for young people drawn into the Criminal Justice System, and how to prevent re-offending.

If we are serious about trying to help young people come out of the Criminal Justice System, and particularly if they have been serving a custodial sentence, proper resources need to be put into addressing the issues of trauma, neglect, attachment and loss - this means longer-term interventions by skilled attachment therapists. This would require a reduction in custodial sentences per se; to allow those seriously at risk of harming others to have the resources in custody to do the work needed to bring about change.

More than 50 years ago, in his groundbreaking paper 44 Juvenile Thieves, John Bowlby presented us with insights into the aetiology of crime and began to provide an evidence base on the impact of disruption, separation and loss in early attachment relationships and the costs for children and wider society. At this early stage, Bowlby identified the link between unmet attachment needs and stealing and other criminal activity. In an age of mass social insecurity, grief and dislocation through seeking asylum or evacuation during and after World War 2, Bowlby's insights into our need to be attached and to belong, addressed directly the pain and distress millions of people were facing. His insights were badly needed and in the current social context, are more relevant than ever.

The portrait of Bowlby's 44 thieves provides us with an image of children with little or no sense

of belonging to a secure social network, and to consistent adult attachment figures. This is most extreme with the affectionless group specifically, with their traits of truancy and 'wandering', and their history of multiple shifting caregivers, or of being 'looked after' children. 1 third of people currently in prison grew up in the care system.

Instead, Bowlby highlights our basic need for each other as human beings, our need for secure relationships and the necessity for society to provide a culture of stability, inclusion and belonging for its children. When this is absent, we see a rise in young people getting involved in gangs and cults.

We could be forgiven for thinking Bowlby's work had fallen on unlistening ears, when we consider the current climate in relation to young offenders. The emergence of 'Anti Social behaviour orders' (ASBOs) has criminalized young people acting out in traditional adolescent peer cultures; whilst those prosecuted or convicted for more serious crimes, leading to harm against others, have become the target of harsher custodial sentences and increasing vilification in a retributive post-Bulger climate.

Bowlby (39) describes his discovery that 'behind the (offender's) mask of indifference is bottomless misery and behind the apparent callousness, despair'.

The impact of violence and trauma in the early lives of offenders has been better understood and exposed and we can look again at some of Bowlby's young thieves in this light. Bowlby does mention violence in the histories of some of these children, but without highlighting the significance we now understand it to have. He makes no mention of sexual abuse, but we know that this is frequently a factor in the history of female offenders specifically. Equally, we now understand that responses to attachment difficulties and trauma are gendered in their manifestation. Reviewing the one girl in the group, Betty, is revealing in this light. The presentation of her 'affectionless' character is very different to the boys in this group. Bowlby describes what we would now recognize as dissociation - her 'tendency to be dreamy' - and sexual acting out which is often seen in children who have been sexually abused. Betty's distress leads to her withdrawal and disconnection from others. My experience of working with women in prison has brought me together with a lot of Bettys - who once given the opportunity to work therapeutically, reveal histories of profound abandonment, betrayal and trauma. This includes offenders whose crimes have been sadistic, and so apparently lacking in empathy, that they have literally become inhuman to us, hence the labels of beasts and monsters, so common in media coverage of their crimes.

This was the case with Tracey. I began my work with Tracey in 1997, when she was serving the 10th year of her life sentence for murder.

In July 1987, Tracey and her 17-year-old friend Mandy, were arrested for the brutal murder of an elderly neighbour, Edie. In her late 70s and described as small and slight, Edie was found by a friend one morning with her throat cut, having been stabbed 37 times, strangled, tortured and mutilated with a number of weapons including a Stanley knife, scissors and broken glass.

Tracey's fingerprints were found at the scene, as well as her blood soaked footprints. Later, Mandy told police that Tracey had attacked Edie and slit her throat. On finding them guilty, the Judge described the two girls as 'evil'.

Tracey's solicitor had hoped that given Tracey's young age at the time of the crime, she would be a promising candidate for parole.

But Tracey could not demonstrate the feelings of remorse, which would qualify her. She maintained that she had no memory at all of the night the murder had taken place.

In the first session, Tracey came into the room shyly. She was small and very slight, smiling nervously, her long dark hair tied neatly in a ponytail.

Tracey began by saying that her solicitor had said I might be able to help her.

I asked Tracey what I could help her with.

She told me that she had recently begun remembering being gang raped during the weeks leading up to 'the offence'.

'I wouldn't talk about this with anyone in here' she said.

In discussing her attachment history, Tracey told me about the death of her grandmother when she was 16. It became clear that her Nan had been her most secure attachment figure. In the context of a violent and chaotic home environment, Tracey's Nan who lived close by, was a sanctuary for Tracey. I asked Tracey how she felt when her Nan died. I felt a sudden break in the connection, her eyes became hard and flinty, empty, and she said quietly, but in a very different voice, 'She betrayed me'. 'She betrayed you?' 'Yes. She left me. I only went out for 2 minutes to buy some cigarettes. I'd been at her bedside the whole time. She couldn't even hold on for me for 2 minutes. She didn't wait for me'.

In the room I could feel the extent of the rage as Tracey said this although her voice and body appeared calm.

Tracey began trying to piece together fragments of memory. She said her father was drunk every day. She described the atmosphere of the house - of tiptoeing around; herself, her mother and brother all terrified that something they said or did might trigger a bout of rage and violence. Much of her childhood was spent in silent terror or whispering when necessary.

In one session several months into the work, she began to recall an incident from around the time she was 6.

Tracey told me: 'I'm lying in bed, I can hear mum screaming so loudly, it sounds worse than usual, there's something creepy about it. I think he's killing her, he's killing her. I'm in my purple nightie. I run downstairs, Mum's lying on the floor covered in blood, in the kitchen. I mean she's actually soaked in blood. Seems like her face and her hair are just a mass of blood. My Dad's screaming at me to get the fucking hell out of there; to get out of his fucking sight. I run back up the stairs I'm sitting in the corner of my bed terrified I don't know what to do - he's killed her. Maybe now he's going to kill me. I'm sobbing. The door opens and my mum's standing at the door, her face, hair, clothes, everything still covered in blood. I can hardly see her face there's so much blood. At first I think she's a ghost.'

Mum says: 'Tracey your Dad says I should kiss you goodnight'. She's coming over and I'm frightened. I don't want her to come nearer. I don't want to smell that blood. Or feel it. It looks sticky.

She comes over and then says 'Right now go downstairs and kiss your dad goodnight'. She's still bleeding.

I can't mummy.

You have to. Go on'.

In the room, Tracey's eyes are darker than I've ever seen them, big

child's eyes. I didn't remember I kept thinking she'd die. I didn't

remember being so scared'.

This was the beginning of a series of recollections of being raped and sexually abused by her Uncle in the bathroom of his home. Some of these memories involved frightening instances of being held underwater or being tied to the bath.

One session she arrived considerably more agitated than usual. She said she had dreamt she was locked in a prison cell with a dangerous, violent man who was threatening and tormenting her. 'The worst part was, he kept whispering in my ear. He just kept saying over and over that his name was Stanley and I should be afraid of him. But I've never met anyone called Stanley'.

Having read Tracey's file and the papers from the trial, I had a very good idea what this was about. The weapon which was identified as the actual cause of Edie's death was a Stanley knife, and was later found covered in Edie's blood and hidden with Tracey's blood stained clothes. It was the main piece of evidence against Tracey at her trial.

I did not mention this to Tracey. If this connection was to mean anything, it needed to be made conscious by Tracey.

There was a long pause. Tracey said: 'Oh - Stanley knives. We had a Stanley knife at home' pause' and the trial - they talked about a Stanley knife at the trial'. She looked scared. 'I don't want to meet that teenage Tracey again'.

In the next session, she told me that she had something to tell me, and it was the worst ever thing she would have to tell anyone. I may not feel able to work with her anymore. Tracey told me that earlier the day her Nan died, she had taken some money from the jar downstairs where she knew her Nan kept it. She took the money to buy drink and drugs. She began to cry, the first time she had let tears fall down her face.

'You see, I am evil. That judge was right. I'm bad inside. I'm the kind of person who would steal money off a dying old woman. The one person I really loved. And I don't know how to live with how guilty I feel'.

I felt enormous compassion for Tracey as she told me this and something about my response, both authentic and spontaneous, meant Tracey was able to register it. 'You don't think I'm evil do you. You don't think that proved I was evil'. No, I said.

This removed another key layer in Tracey's resistance and she began talk about the events that built up to the night of the murder. 6 weeks before the murder she went to a party. She remembered very little from the early stages of the party - till she'd woken up the next morning. Sore, bruised, small amount of blood, a toothbrush inside of her. This was the night of the gang rape.

Tracey told me that after the rape she started staying in the house all day, found it hard to get out of bed. Her mum finally insisted she go with her to the doctor who prescribed tranquillizers. On the way home they bumped into Mandy, who invited her round - saying her parents were having a party that night.

Tracey was so nervous about going out she took half the prescribed tranquillizers - later found in her system by the police - and started drinking heavily. 'By the time I got to Mandy's I was already quite out of it. They had some pills so I took one of them too.

At this point, Tracey began to find it harder to keep going. 'Then I remember Edie came by. Mandy was calling her an interfering bitch. Saying that she was going to get her for it. I was joining in. I don't even know what I said.

But she was now reinhabiting the internal space she was in leading up to the murder, including the sensations of confusing drug and alcohol altered flashbacks. She told me 'This is what it was like. I was out of it so much of the time. And then this stuff in my head that I didn't understand. It was like the rape had triggered flashbacks of every single thing that had happened to me. I was seeing my mum's face covered in blood, then my uncle, then I'm seeing the boys who raped me; I just felt I was going mad'.

I wrote in my notes from the following session:

Tracey is talking to me, but I can feel her going further away inside. 'I can see them all in my head'. She begins to cry 'I hate you'. She starts hitting at the air with her hands. And running through a commentary of the images that are coming into her head: boys at school attacking her, her Uncle, her violent boyfriend, her father, her uncle again, finally the boys who raped her. As she talks through each one coming into her head, she is describing to me what she's doing to them 'I'm getting the scissors. He's raping me and I'm stabbing him with the scissors'. She goes through each one and the weapons: the glass, the Stanley knife, the belt for strangling. By the end I can hear her breathing slowing down. She goes still. There's a long silence. Tracey, I say. Tracey you're here. Here with me. Can you hear me?

Tracey nods. 'Yes', she says. 'I'm coming back. Don't worry'. And then she opens her eyes and starts to sob.

After that session Tracey told me 'Mandy and I did kill Edie. Only in my mind, it wasn't Edie. I wasn't even there in her house. I was just in my own private horror story. Nothing outside was real anymore'. The view that Tracey had been working very hard in therapy and feeling remorse, meant that she got her parole, a move to open prison and later, release.

That session, as Tracey saw in front of her the succession of images of those who had abused and violated her basic human rights, I saw them too. I felt the murderous hate and rage of these perpetrators in the room with us. I felt that I had witnessed more than one murder in this work. The murder of Edie, a vulnerable human being who ended up on the receiving end of all the rage Tracey was carrying; and a much earlier murder, one of Shengold's 'soul murders' in which a young girl's life was destroyed and stolen, by what others did to her. External reality might be able to tell us that Tracey murdered Edie, and that her fingerprints were at the scene. As with many other acts of crime and violence I had worked with, the internal narrative told me that those really responsible for Edie's death may only have been ghosts at the scene of the crime.

These insights give us the information we need to bring about long-term change for injured children and adults. Putting it into practice would have to include changes in our approach to looked-after children, our mental health system and our education and criminal justice systems. Most fundamentally, it requires from us a new understanding of the necessity for the whole community to share responsibility for meeting our needs for attachment and belonging, rather than scapegoating individual mothers yet again expected to pick up the pieces caused by violence, loss of community, social inequality, and isolation in our society. I am reminded of the old African saying: it takes a whole village to raise a single child.

Two days after Etem Celebi's murder, 17-year old Biendi Litambola became the 24th teenager to be killed in London this year. 4 young people have been arrested for his murder. He

was beaten to death in Canning Town, on broad daylight. His friends spray-painted E6 Gangstas on the wall of the Estate of the arrested boys; the local gang believed to have killed him. His brother spoke out desperately that he hoped this would be a wake up call to the black community, saying that black on black violence has to stop.

I remembered the newspaper report, by a white writer, concerned that next time it might be 'one of us' who is killed. In the meantime, how many young people's lives and deaths will be written off as 'gang violence', and written about as throw away lives. How many socially excluded young people will keep ending up in prison or psychiatric hospitals

Scrolling through the records of missing and murdered teenagers in London 2007, reveals a list of socially excluded youngsters - those who have been in care, on heroin, in prostitution, or homeless.

In her work on prostitution, Andrea Dworkin, writes about how our society has 2 classes of women - innocent victims of murder and rape, and women we feel who somehow deserve it more. She says society takes the view: you shouldn't rape or be violent to 'us' but you see those women over there, prostitutes, illegal immigrants, junkies, care leavers offenders and ex-offenders' you see that woman? You see that woman over there? Do it to her. It doesn't matter if you take her. We won't miss her. But WE MISS HER. WE WANT HER BACK'.

We want these young people back. The ones we can keep alive, we want them alive. The ones who deserve to be part of our community, who deserve to have lives and careers and people who love and care about them - we want them back. We don't want them excluded from our society, thrown away, in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, hostels, on the streets. We honour the lives and deaths of every single one of them and need to pledge to fight for their right to a future.