PART TWO

AN EXPLORATION OF BEING WHITE

CHAPTER THREE

Being White

You can't remake the world
Without remaking yourself
Each new era begins within.
It is an inward event,
With unsuspected possibilities
For inner liberation.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

This chapter marks the start of my inquiry into whiteness. I begin with the meaning of whiteness to me and use my own reflections and experiences both from memory and from contemporary diaries in this exploration. Part of this involves present day thoughts and part an exploration of the history of my interest in this area. I am also informed by my reading, primarily in the area of White Studies, but also in Post Colonial Theory.

Some of this exploration was undertaken in a co-operative inquiry group and this is written about in the next chapter. My subsequent exploration of the literature in White Studies and Post Colonial Theory lead me to an exploration of the apparent 'neutrality' of whiteness. This attitude is evidently present among white psychotherapists and I explore the very small body of literature on this subject written by counsellors and psychotherapists. The detail of my work as a white psychotherapist is to be found in Chapter 6. I finish with an account of the development of my own consciousness of whiteness using Helms' *White Racial Identity Ego Statuses* (Helms 1995:185).

When I first embarked upon this inquiry my focus was on cultural difference and, although I understood that I needed to explore my own situation, my focus was on how I related to others of different cultures. I

was encouraged by my PhD supervision group to give more emphasis to myself as situated within a culture. When I started this inquiry I had already written one paper called *A Step Towards Understanding Culture in Relation to Psychotherapy* (Ryde 1997). Maybe the title reveals that I knew at some level that this was just a first step on a journey. In it I show an understanding of the importance of situating yourself within your own culture thus:

> 'There is an inevitable tendency to view the world from our own cultural stand point and it is easy not to appreciate that others see the world from an altogether different perspective. Although this is a familiar idea to psychotherapists and counsellors when considering individual differences, when they come across cultural difference they have an unfortunate tendency to understand this difference in terms of psychopathology.'

And also:

> 'Respecting the cultural integrity of our clients, acknowledging the legitimacy of their culture's way of understanding and being in the world, is of first importance when working across cultures. This will involve an acknowledgement of our own cultural background and how it might blind us to that of others, whether our clients come from vastly different cultures or more similar ones that are nearer to home. As psychotherapists who work within the majority culture which at present dominates internationally, we need to be sensitive to the way we will subtly intrude this culture on others whose own cultural backgrounds have as much validity as our own.'

We can see from these examples that I did understand the importance of owning one's own cultural base, but the main thrust of my argument was to try to understand how to work with others and challenge prevailing views within the profession. I had not thoroughly immersed myself in the exploration of my own whiteness.

This chapter begins with my exploration of what it means to me to be a part of the white, dominant culture. This has not been an easy

undertaking. As I will show, whiteness is so around and within me that it is hard to stand back from it enough to 'see' it and reflect upon it. When I do it brings up feelings of guilt and shame which are not easy to ‘stay with’. My attempt is bound to be imperfect and partial but is now an on-going project and does not end with the writing up of my inquiry.

Englishness or Whiteness

As I showed in the introduction to this thesis, my first attempt at a piece of writing which just concentrated on this theme was a piece I called ‘Englishness’. Although this was interesting to write, I found that the important issues connected to white privilege were more about being born into the privilege of the white, western world. Although particular wrongs were and are committed specifically by English people in the colonising process, much of the privileges I receive in today's world are connected with being 'white'. I would be afforded the same privileges if I were from any European country or part of the global European diaspora.

In spite of the European diaspora being scattered throughout the globe, It seems to be custom and practice to refer to the parts of the world which are predominently inhabited by white people as 'western’ or 'the west'. Bonnett (Bonnett 2000:18) has shown that Europeans have appropriated the use of the word ‘white’ to describe and ‘racialise’ themselves (see below) so the white people now found world wide are the result of the European diaspora that occurred through colonisation. Although many white people live in North America and Europe which are towards the west of the globe as it is commonly drawn on a flat page, this does not geographically describe this entire group. More recently it has become recognised that northern nations are richer than southern which also does not hold true in all cases. Whilst acknowledging that the use of the word 'western' does not honour the injustice in the north/south divide, I will follow custom by using the term ‘western’ throughout.

Although a cursory glance at this subject suggests that 'white' people are those who have 'white' skin, there are many people who have, roughly, the same colour skins as Europeans who are not counted in this group. (The colour of European's skins can also be of various shades) This includes people such as those from the 'Middle East' and 'Far East', Roma people, South Americans, native Americans etc. It has also included the Irish in America in the past (Bonnett 2000:35). Whether these people are ascribed a 'colour' by white people seems a more confused area. Those from the far East have been called 'yellow' and Native Americans 'red'. People with skin that is clearly more brown than Europeans' such as Asian and Africans sometimes assert that they are 'black' in order to make the political point that they are discriminated against by 'white' people (Brah 1992:127). Others whose skin is roughly the same colour as Europeans often do not describe themselves as 'white'. I found an example of this in a book that provides an opportunity for Thai refugees to tell their stories. It include one who talks about 'white' people behaving in a discriminatory fashion towards him (Refugee Action 2003).

Having decided to concentrate more on my being 'white' and 'western' than being English, I found that some of how I felt about being English, including a pervasive sense of 'nothingness' about it, applied even more when I thought about being 'white'. Although it seemed quite possible to write in theory about a 'white' western hegemony I found it almost impossible to 'feel' what being part of that was like. It is clear however that as a white woman I cannot go about the world without being immediately identifiable as a western person because of my whiteness. Two things immediately struck me about this. One, that I felt guilty and two, that it was almost impossible to think about. Whiteness, like being English, seemed a 'nothingness', an absence of a something, the ground from which other things appeared. As I write now I am struck by how much this has changed since I started exploring this subject when I came to CARPP at the University of Bath in 1999.

This made me wonder if 'white' also seems to imply an absence of 'race'. I am aware, for instance that when questions of race are raised in a professional context, people tend to turn to a black person, if one is present, as if they must be experts on this subject. So I began to think that ‘race’ is not just a matter of culture and identity, but a politically constructed concept (Gilroy 1992:50; Lago and Thompson 1996:19). As I began to read White Studies literature this began to make more sense to me. I discovered that race has also been called an ‘unstable’ category in that it is based on assumptions that have been shown to be spurious since it was first used (Donald and Rattansi 1992:1; Appiah 1994:149; Adams 1996:8).

Black people were thought of as closer to animals than white people when they first came to the west (Dalal 2002:201). It was assumed that there were different ‘races’ and that white people (Adams 1996) were the most intelligent and capable. (Lago and Thompson 1996:18). This came home to me when I was shown a copy of the ‘The Kington Gazette and Radnorshire Chronicle’ of June in the year 1900 (Appendix 1). In it is printed a poem, *A Song of the White Man*, by Rudyard Kipling. This poem and the editorial comment following it demonstrate the unabashed and chilling racist and imperialist attitudes that were commonplace at the time. The way the ‘white man’s hate’ is relished is also interesting. These attitudes are part of the English cultural heritage and, to me, they feel shameful to be part of. (The use of the term *‘white man’* in the poem also betrays the prevailing attitude to gender.)

Since then differences between ‘races’ have been shown to be insignificant and mostly based on superficial matters such as skin colour. (Acharyya 1992:84; Donald and Rattansi 1992:1) Genetic characteristics of this sort have evidently been handed down the generations, resulting in the various appearances of people in different parts of the world. Cress Welsing interestingly turned the whole notion of white superiority on its head by suggesting that white people were originally born to black African parents but had genetic deficiencies. She suggests that they

were rejected by their black parents and found their way to Europe (Cress Welsing 1991:4).

A Whiter shade of pale

Gradually, as I have started to look at it, whiteness has become more figural for me. Various things have contributed to that: reading various books and articles about whiteness (Frye 1983; McIntosh 1988; Jacobs 1995; Kincheloe, Steinberg et al. 1998; Brandyberry 1999; Kasl 2002; Tuckwell 2002), forming a co-operative inquiry group to explore whiteness and talking about whiteness with others. In discussion with colleagues about launching a conference on the theme of War, Terrorism, Cultural Inequality and Psychotherapy we decided to invite a panel of psychotherapists from different cultural groups. I found it impossible to consider this panel without including a 'white' perspective, much to the puzzlement of my colleagues who thought 'other' points of view more enlightening. I think it is unlikely that I would have had this attitude before embarking on this research. It is as if, through staring at a blank page, I have begun to notice contours and shades that were not at first apparent.

So what have I seen? I have noticed that I am advantaged by being white in many subtle ways. This was brought home to me by McIntosh (1988 also see appendix 2) who found 46 ways in which she benefited by being white in all spheres of everyday life in a paper she wrote 15 years ago, most of which still hold true. I take for granted that I have a rightful place where I live and work and where my children went to school. Like McIntosh, I take for granted a privileged standard of living that includes electricity and electrical goods; motor transport; plentiful and tasty food with much variety; a range of entertainment, both at home on TV and in the community; a criminal justice system that does not discriminate against me including a friendly and polite police force and an educational system which is embedded in my culture. (I am aware that some of these privileges involve class and age as important factors. They may not be afforded me if I were young and working class.) I am

writing this on the day that the war started in Iraq. I know that the largest armies in the world act on behalf of what they see as my interests. My material wealth is gigantic compared to most people in the world. Once I have *really* understood this I am bound to feel guilty.

One of the first things of which I became aware when contemplating my whiteness was my guilt at being white. This led to much discussion in my white co-operative inquiry group and, because of its central importance, I have devoted a chapter to the subject (see chapter 5).

White studies

At the start of my quest I was not aware of a body of knowledge about whiteness as a racial identity. I have since discovered that during the last three decades the discipline of White Studies has grown up in America but is little found in the UK. Alastair Bonnett (Bonnett 2000), who traces the way that white identity was formed historically, considers the area of 'white studies' to be an analysis of whiteness from a North American standpoint. He shows how whiteness has been used in several societies – particularly in the middle east and China - to denote purity and nobility (Bonnett 2000). However, in the process of colonialisation, Europeans asserted that they had white skin in contrast to those in the colonised countries (Bonnett 2000). He asserts that 'white identities are, if nothing else, global phenomena, with global impacts' and that no part of the globe has avoided the impact of this. He describes the way the concept of whiteness is used by Europeans thus:

> 'Modern European white identity is historically unique. People in other societies may be seen to have valued whiteness and to have employed the concept to define, at least in part, who and what they were. But they did not treat being white as a natural category nor did they invest so much of their sense of identity within it. Europeans racialised, which is to say naturalised, the concept of whiteness, and entrusted it with the essence of their community. Europeans turned whiteness into a fetish object, a talisman of

the natural whose power appeared to enable them to impose their will on the world.' P21

Bonnett shows that, in identifying themselves as a white and 'purer' race, others were identified as 'black' and inferior (Bonnett 2000). This idea, though now understood to be racist by all but a few extreme right wing groups, does not disappear so easily. Although thirty years ago the Kerner commission (Themstom 1998) identified racism as a 'white problem', The Centre for the Study of White American Culture carried out a survey in which it found that only 7% of that which is written about race in the last thirty years focussed on white people. It seems that white people find it hard to think about themselves as having a 'race' thus making it seem as if 'race' is the problem of those who do 'have' one – the 'ethnic' minorities. Certainly those who are not white feel the effects of racism enough to want to theorise about it as well as act politically in other ways. Of course, theorising about a societal issue *is* a political act as it focuses attention on the issue and legitimates a call for changes.

The 'neutrality' of whiteness as shown by White Studies Theorists

The issue of the apparent 'neutrality' of whiteness, an idea that whiteness is 'just normal' (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1999), is a central theme for White Studies theorists and seems to be central to the experience of whiteness, as I show below. This apparent neutrality was something I have found in myself and it was much commented on in my white co-operative inquiry group (see the next chapter). This blindness to whiteness seems to be the cause of much of the phenomenon of white privilege or at least extremely influential in maintaining this privilege. It is both the source of the problem and, in that it sets up a blindness to the moral and ethical situation, it sets in train ways of maintaining that privilege as I will show below.

The idea that whiteness is the normality from which others deviate is such an insidious and subtle idea that it may well be the biggest single factor that keeps white privilege in place. I have taken some examples

from various White Studies texts to illustrate this and followed them with my own comments:

> *'Whites alone can opt out of their own racial identity, can proclaim themselves non-raced.'* (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1998)

When whites are together then race is very rarely mentioned except in discussing other racial groups. It seems to be irrelevant. It is interesting to consider if this is a recent phenomenon. The poem 'A Song the White Man' (appendix 1) clearly does refer to the 'white race' which is very rarely named in this way in the last few decades. Up until the early days of the 20th Century white people were not shy about declaring their 'race' superior to other 'races' (Dalal 2002:12). More recently, since white people have apparently accepted the iniquity of this stance, they have, maybe defensively, withdrawn to the 'neutral' position of the 'un-raced'. In the eyes of the 'neutral' white it can seem that non-whites are shadow boxing when they accuse whites of racism or can be accused of having a 'chip on their shoulder'.

> *'But the idea of whiteness as neutrality, as that which is not there, is ideally suited for designating that social group that is to be taken as the 'human ordinary'.'* (Apple 1998)

As an example of this, I heard a discussion on the radio four programme 'Start the Week' about whether or not it was important to try to save beautiful artefacts that had been made in the past but were endangered by war or natural disaster. Adam Philips, a white psychotherapist, was present but did not speak until the end of this discussion. He then remarked that a certain consensus seemed to have been taken for granted in the discussion and pointed out that for many people these objects might be offensive or irrelevant, adding that in a truly pluralistic society such assumptions could not be made. There was a stunned, long silence following this remark after which the chairperson gave a nervous laugh and suggested moving on to the next subject. It seemed to me that

these highly intelligent people had no way of responding to a suggestion that another perspective was possible.

> *'There is no more powerful position than that of being "just" human'* (Dyer 1997:2)

No doubt the people who took part in the radio four programme, above, were people who considered themselves to be 'just' human. They were stunned because they could not see outside their 'normative cultural practices' (Frankenberg 1999:228)

> *'An unmarked marker of others'* (Frankenberg 1999:16)

White people, from their neutral position, can designate or 'mark' others. What a powerful position to be in: to be the one that describes 'reality'. All future discourse is carried out in the light of this marking. It is very striking to me that almost every author I have come across in this field has remarked on the way that whiteness seems to be a neutral category and that it is in this way that white privilege is so successfully maintained. White people 'name' or 'mark' others. The identities and boundaries of racial groups are decided upon by white people

> *'A predominant construction in American literature is undoubtedly whiteness as 'unraced' or racially neutral.'* (Aanerud 1997)

In her chapter Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in US Literature, Rebecca Aarerud foregrounds whiteness by exploring how the whiteness of characters in American literature is used to evoke certain characteristics such as purity and vulnerability in women and strength and rationality in men. If a white person is the protagonist of a book, the fact of their being racially white is rarely remarked upon. This is hardly ever true of anyone who is not white. However the whiteness of their skin is sometimes mentioned without reference to race, particularly in women, to mark these characteristics. (Aanerud p36)

The apparent ‘neutrality’ of white people is so little grasped by them that there can be a sense of outrage if this position is challenged by non-whites. For instance, attempts, often through equal opportunities policies, to encourage non-whites into areas of life that have in the past been closed to them often result in white people feeling themselves to be an ‘endangered minority’ and that ‘white culture’ must be preserved. I certainly came across this view myself when I was in South Africa.

This calls into question whether it is possible to talk about ‘white culture’ or, indeed, ‘black culture’. In fact ‘culture’, usually defined as the underlying values, norms and assumptions held in groups, is a complex and fluid phenomenon and it is clearly erroneous to think of there being a ‘white’ culture or a ‘black’ culture as both catagories have much diversity within them. Frankenberger (1999:19) is very critical of using the word ‘culture’ in relation to ‘whiteness’. She points out that this idea ‘evades and mystifies the positioning of whiteness in the racial hierarchy’ and that ‘such constructions reify and homogenize whiteness’. In other words the idea of a white culture encourages a collusion with the idea that there is something ‘real’ about whiteness even if a biological basis for it is not accepted. It suggests that being white is just another racial category rather than a construction that has been used to assert privilege for those with white skins. Whilst I understand these objections I also think that white people do impose an insidious culture on others which is regarded by whites as self evidently ‘good’. It includes the imposition of political systems, types of food, consumer goods, attitudes to the family and child rearing etc. There are many cultural manifestations among ‘white’ people but they do also represent a larger cultural consensus. Along with asserting privilege and dominance there is a pervasive homogenising of the world that is promulgated by white westerners which can be understood as a sort of pervasive cultural as well as racial colonisation.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is another important arena in which this theorising takes place. This is mostly engaged in by those who are not white, unlike White Studies, and provides an analysis of colonialisation. It is of interest, therefore, to my study but not as central as White Studies as I am writing from a white perspective.

The term colonialisation as used by postcolonial theorists does not have a simple definition but tends to include an analysis of past colonialisation by European countries as well as a complex critique of the present situation that former colonies find themselves in. Bhabha says

> 'the term postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of presentation by which the historical experience of the once-colonised Third World comes to be framed in the West' (Mongia 1997:1).

One of the most important analyses of postcolonial theory is similar to that of Bonnett (above) which is that the 'west' not only colonised the world but framed its identity by a process of naming. Not only was the map of the world drawn by white people but the descriptions and namings of peoples, 'races' and nationalities were carried out by them. Their identities have been 'colonised' in a process that still exists for them today. It is hard to find other descriptions that are not either compliant with western ones or that are not made in reaction to it.

As most writers of postcolonial theory are not 'white' people, they tend to speak from the position of having suffered colonialism themselves. This tends to make the perspective of the two disciplines rather different although there is some cross fertilisation between the two. Both offer similar analyses of white privilege and hegemony and the extremely distorting effect on people who are not deemed to be white. Postcolonial theorists are more likely to use the term 'western' (Christian 1997:152) or 'Anglo-American' (Mongia 1997:12) than 'white' but their analysis of colonialisation describes important ways in which white studies theorists

would say that ‘white’ people have ‘performed’ their whiteness on ‘black’ people (Frankenberg 1999:3).

It seems to me that one of the ways that whiteness is ‘performed’ on ‘black’ people is by actually giving them psychotherapy (Gilbert 2005). Psychotherapy theorising has been carried out in a white, western context largely without that context being acknowledged as I show below.

Whiteness and the psychotherapist

Having explored the meaning of whiteness in a general way I will now explore what this means to me as a psychotherapist and turn first to an exploration of the literature on this subject. I have found only three pieces written specifically by counsellors or psychotherapists on the subject of being a white counsellor or psychotherapist. One is a paper by Lynne Jacobs (2000) *For Whites Only*. Another is the book mentioned above by Gill Tuckwell *Racial Identity: White Counsellors and Therapists* (2002). The third is by Colin Lago (2005) called *Upon Being a White Therapist: Have you Noticed?* I will explore the first two of these in some depth and also, in this context, some of the work of Dalal (2002) as, in his book *Race, Colour and Processes of Racialisation*, he deconstructs the word ‘race’ and challenges its existence as a concept. In the course of this he explores the meanings of the word ‘white’ as well as the word ‘black’. These books and papers have been very useful in helping me, not only to think about whiteness *per se*, but also about whiteness within the field of psychotherapy. I will start with Jacobs’ paper.

Jacobs

Lynne Jacobs is an American dialogic Gestalt therapist who has also trained as an intersubjective psychoanalyst at the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis in California. She describes her paper as a ‘stream of consciousness' and that ‘a graceful paper would be a lie' (Jacobs 2000:10) though it seems to me to be much more coherent than this implies. Maybe her feeling about the roughness of her paper says

more about the disturbed feelings that she is aware of when she writes. I can certainly identify with this. In fact I found her paper passionate but very well thought-through and expressed. She says she wrote this piece in the hope of healing both the racial divide and herself. (p1). She encourages white therapists to be cognizant of their dominant status and see that 'unfortunately deeply embedded 'whites only' constructs of thought and ideology…..permeate our culture, largely outside of ordinary everyday awareness.' She looks at why she is passionate about the issue as she says she is often asked to justify it. Her parents were against the 'colour bar', 'and yet being asked to explore where [her] interest comes from seems to [her] to be a way of participating in the very racial insensitivity [she is] attempting to overcome'. (p1). And yet 'the more intriguing question for [her] is why so few whites are even aware of and distressed by, the extremity of the racial divide in the US.' She asks:

> 'how is it that an interest in one of the most cancerous problems of American culture is viewed as unusual and in need of explanation when a white person expresses interest and yet is viewed as self-evident – if overwrought, from the perspective of many whites – when expressed by a person of color?' (p1)

Much of this is of interest to me as it addresses some of the questions I began with. I came from a similar background, with politicised parents who were 'against the colour bar' but who had their own blind spots to their prejudice. Her question about why she should have to explain an interest in her 'race' perpetuating such a 'cancerous problem' also reminds me of the hostility that has been shown to me for attempting to explore this subject as it is thought to be more rightfully the province of black people. Whilst I acknowledge that the challenge to focus more on myself is the most fruitful way of proceeding (also acknowledged by Jacobs), I feel a little encouraged by her question. I hear an encouragement and a support in her assertion that this inquiry is important for me as a white person to pursue. She quotes McConville

as saying ‘any system of privilege not only oppresses the disenfranchised, but poisons the spirit and diminishes the humanity of those who are advantaged’ (McConville 1997).

Jacobs also comes to similar conclusions to myself about a way forward in terms of working across difference in culture in psychotherapy. She regards ‘self reflectiveness and openness to correction by the patient [to be] the best safeguards against ignorant abuse of our power as therapists’. Jacobs feels that she must always initiate race-based discussions with a client as she recognises that clients may well feel that a white therapist may not see the necessity for this. Interestingly she also chides herself for wanting to seem different to ‘those other whites’ (p7). I also recognise this in myself as a shadow side of ‘trying to get it right’ as a white therapist. This same dynamic was noticed in my white co-operative inquiry group (see chapter 4) and also in a similar group set up by European-American, Cooperative Challenging Whiteness (2004) who comment on the irony of wanting to be better than a group you are critical of because they think of themselves as superior! As Jacobs shows, this attitude can encourage a client to leave their feelings about white people outside the room for fear of hurting the 'nice' therapist.

Maybe one of the most important aspects to acknowledge in working across cultures as a white person is the power within the therapy room – how it is understood and how it is distributed. (Lago and Thompson 1996:46 - 52, see also chapter 7). Jacobs asserts that when we are ‘willing to be changed by close engagement’ the power balance changes. Then experiences and perceptions are welcomed not just tolerated (p16). Much of the problem here concerns the difficulty of not ‘meeting’ as therapist and client as the two cultural worlds are not so much in danger of being incompatible, as being unrecognised and denied. Jacobs suggests that a paradoxical notion of ‘meeting-by-seeing-where-we-cannot-meet’ (p13) as one way through. It is often found in psychotherapy practice that paradoxically, when immersed in

this work and really feeling the difficulties, greater ease with the situation is discovered (p17).

I am particularly interested in her comments about how the therapeutic relationship can develop when issues of power and culture have been well identified and acknowledged. She says: ‘when race issues have been well attended to we can be ‘busy with another way of relating’ and she is ‘keenly sensitive to the times when [her] patients want a chance to just talk as if we can know each other very well, way under the skin where those categorical differences do not live'. At those times the therapeutic atmosphere is a ‘play space’ (Winnicott 1971). ‘The therapeutic process involves continual co-construction and deconstruction of various meanings, including the meanings revolving around racial identity.’ Having shown how we might, at least for a time, transcend cultural difference she also warns that it is important to ‘keep in mind the different worlds we enter when the session ends.’ (p15).

Jacobs pushes her thinking further to encompass her work with white clients from this point of view and says that ‘racial thinking is rarely figural when [she is] working with a white client.’ (p17). She does not draw any conclusions from this but it is interesting to consider this reluctance to consider talking about being white. My fantasy is that, if one brought it up, most clients would think one was on a politically correct hobbyhorse. In my own practice with white people I can think of a few times when racism or feelings about black people were raised and worked with but not specifically feelings about being white and that we are both white people. As I write and contemplate so doing I feel awkward and embarrassed as if I would infringe a social code of conduct that could show me up as naïve or on a wrong headed campaign.

In summary, Jacobs encourages white people, and, in particular white therapists, to have a thorough knowledge of their own whiteness and cultural privilege as a basis from which to meet others whatever their

'colour' or 'culture'. She is not politically neutral but passionately wishes to find ways of addressing this 'cancerous' problem.

Tuckwell

Gill Tuckwell is a British counsellor, supervisor and trainer. I find in turning to her book*, Racial Identity, White Counsellors and Therapists*, that it is much less personal than Jacob's paper but it does bring up very important issues for understanding the consciousness of 'white' people in a racial context as well as looking at issues that are pertinent for white therapists. Tuckwell explores both biological and social theories about race, a subject that has been tackled in several other books (Sue and Sue 1990; Lago and Thompson 1996). What makes this book different is her emphasis on white as well as black experience. For instance she says:

> From a socio-political perspective, race has been seen as a signifier of relative power and status in society. This in turn has left a legacy of social experiences and memories for black populations and white populations collectively. These experiences have had a profound cumulative effect on the intrapsychic world of black people and white people. From their respective positions across the social divide, each group has developed beliefs, attitudes and feelings about self and other, and these operate at both a conscious and unconscious level. The interaction between socio-political events and psychological development is thus highly significant in understanding the meaning of race (P19).

Tuckwell goes on to explore the meaning of race in the individual's inner world and recognises here the way in which whiteness becomes invisible in a racial environment mentioned above. She says:

> 'The dominant group seldom needs to speak its name: it is defined in contrast to the more explicit naming of marginal and subordinated subjects.'

and goes on to say:

> ‘Historically the silence about white representation and white identity was part of the internalised assumption that white values, customs, traditions and characteristics were the exclusive standards against which other peoples and world orders must be evaluated and perceived.'

This accords with my own experience and reading, both of my own attitudes and those of people I have spoken to. She quotes Dyer (1997) as very powerfully suggesting that white people, by their silence, take up a position of authority, claiming to speak for the human race rather than only for white groups. He says ‘there is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity.’ (Dyer 1997:2)

Tuckwell has an interesting list of ways in which people tend to be resistant to acknowledging their whiteness in training events that she has run. These are:

- Focusing on experiences of gender or culture rather than race;
- Focusing intellectually on structural issues such as racism;
- Challenging the concept of ‘race’ at an intellectual level
- Referring to relationships with neighbours or friends who are black
- Wishing to ‘protect’ black people from hurt
- Wishing to identify with black people in the group.

She considers these to have the effect of ‘shifting the focus away from the vulnerability of looking at self and the experiences of whiteness.’ What strikes me about this list is that I can identify with all of them! No doubt the less I use these defences myself the more able I will be to encourage others not to do so in training events and structure these events in ways which will challenge these resistances. Even in a recent training event in South Africa I can see that some of these were employed by myself and the group.

In a later chapter on Race and White Identity, Tuckwell explores the complex interaction between inner and outer-world development including the insidious and all encompassing effect of the way white groups ignore whiteness. She shows how racial identity is an evolving process (p 76), much of which is unconscious and transmitted to children as they grow up and identify with family and those around them. However it is also a 'lifelong activity' as each individual interprets the messages received about race, and modifies these in the light of their own experience. She says the 'process of racial identification centres initially on superficial characteristics such as skin colour, which takes on a symbolic meaning in which certain belief systems and feelings about race are internalised'.

Tuckwell also explores the meanings that 'whiteness' has taken on, much of which come to us very powerfully from the Bible. Meanings of purity, forgiveness and redemption are examples. She also points out that the Islamic tradition also associates blackness with sin and whiteness with purity (p80).

In summary, Tuckwell shows how white people tend to see themselves as culturally and racially neutral and that this also applies to white therapists, including students and trainers. She explores in detail how attitudes to race and culture, both in oneself and towards others, are developed in complex ways, through inner and outer pressures and influences.

Lago

Colin Lago (Lago 2005) has written and lectured in the area of intercultural therapy for many years but has recently turned his attention to whiteness. His paper *Upon Being a White Therapist: Have you Noticed?* is something of a wake-up call to therapists and reviews the area of white studies to show white therapists how they take their whiteness for granted as a 'neutral' category. He comments that he recently offered a workshop on this subject and that this had a very low

take up. As he is a well-known speaker and would usually have no difficulty in filling a workshop I thought this was very interesting and accords with my own experience. In attempting to find interest in my 'white' co-operative inquiry group, for example, and other workshops on this subject that I have offered. It is also interesting that he has been experiencing difficulty in finding a publisher for this paper.

Dalal

Farhad Dalal is a British group analyst of Indian origin. I have included an exploration of his work at this point as he explores the issue of the meaning of whiteness in much more depth. With the help of Cruden's Complete Concordance (Cruden 1769), he looked at every usage of the words 'white' and 'black' in the authorised version of the Holy Bible (Dalal 2002:142 and 143). He has much to say about the word 'black' as well but I am confining meanings here to the word 'white'. These mostly concerned goodness and, in particular, purity, though there were two mentions of white as a cover up as in a 'whitewash'. (It occurs to me that a 'whitewash' implies that something is made to *seem* good even though it isn't.) He is very struck by the consistency of the symbolic meanings of the word 'white' which is seen as symbolising not people, but 'good'.

Dalal analyses the way that the word 'white' has evolved to have the symbolic meanings it has today with the help of the work of the sociologist Norbert Elias. Elias' book *The Civilising Process* (Elias 1994) is a compilation of two other books (*The History of Manners and State Formation* and *Civilisation* written in 1939 and translated into English in 1978 and 1982 respectively) and is a history of the way in which western culture was made. He shows that during this process, the symbolism of 'whiteness' with its implication of goodness and purity was identified with 'white' people so that others not identified in this way could be cast out and identified with what is sullied, evil and sinful.

As described in chapter 4, my cooperative inquiry group asked about 5 people to give associations to the word 'white' without telling them why the question was asked. On considering the responses, we saw that many associations had a neutral or even negative meaning. I had an opportunity to ask Dalal what he thought of this. He felt quite sure that it showed resistance to owning to racism on the part of those who responded to our question as he thought most people's first association with the word white was to that of white skin and therefore race. Of course the truth of this is impossible to ascertain but it is interesting nevertheless. This assertion was rejected by the cooperative inquiry group who thought that their respondents had not had white skin in mind, even unconsciously. We hypothesised that, with a change in the general culture and the reduction in the importance of the Bible in the education of children, the word 'white' no longer has so consistently a symbolic meaning of 'good' and 'pure' (see chapter 4).

Nevertheless, in summary, his work has helped me to see that, although 'whiteness' seems so completely unremarkable that it is not even noticed by myself and other white people, it is reinforced by cultural messages about goodness and purity.

The development of my own consciousness of my racial identity

Before finishing this chapter I will explore further the development of my own consciousness of a white identity by using the Helms' *White Racial Identity Ego Statuses* (Helms 1995:185). This scale was developed by the counseling psychologist, J. E. Helms, following her *People of Colour Racial Identity Ego Statuses* which was designed to help people to counteract internalised racism - in other words it encourages in black people an identity which is not dependent on the approval of white society. The *White Racial Identity Ego Statuses* is the white counterpart which shows a progression in five stages from a lack of awareness of oneself as participating within a racial environment to full awareness as follows:

Contact status:

Satisfaction with racial status quo, obliviousness to racism and one's participation in it. If racial factors influence life decision they do so in a simplistic fashion.

Disintegration status:

disorientation and anxiety provoked by unresolvable racial moral dilemmas that force one to choose between own-group loyalty and humanism. May be stymied by life situations that arouse racial dilemmas

Reintegration status:

Idealization of one's socioracial group. Denigration and intolerance for other group. Racial factors may strongly influence life decisions

Pseudoindependence status:

Intellectualised commitment to one's own socioracial group and deceptive tolerance of other groups. May make life decision to 'help' other racial groups.

Immersion/Emersion:

Search for an understanding of the personal meaning of racism and ways in which one benefits and redefinition of whiteness. Life choices may incorporate racial activism

Autonomy status:

Informed positive socioracial-group commitment, use of internal standards for self definition, capacity to relinquish the privileges of racism. May avoid life options that require participation in racial oppression.

(Helms 1995:185)

My analysis of my own consciousness is as follows:

Contact Status. Fairly early in life I was made aware of racism by my father and told that it was 'wrong'. I think this was pretty well simultaneous with my being aware of race as an issue. Having said that, it was not something that worried me very much as a young child, particularly as I did not know any black people personally. Very few, if any, lived in my immediate vicinity. When I was 12 a Nigerian girl came to my school and became a close friend. I was aware of the complexity and painfulness of the issues by then, but thought of 'race' as a problem specifically for 'black' people.

Disintegration Status. In my teens and early twenties I was aware of painful racial dilemmas. I was one of only three girls not chosen as a prefect in the school. One was my Nigerian friend and the other was very fat. Both were extremely clever and I knew that they were on the receiving end of prejudice of one sort or another and that this was grossly unfair. I was also aware of feeling that I did not want to be associated with them in this way. (Although I did not see it in this way at the time, my not being made a prefect may have been a class issue. My fees were paid by a Trust and my class status was lower than the other girls and I tended to be awkward and gauche.) Another incident that comes to mind is my rejection of two black men who were potential boyfriends as I did not want to have a sexual relationship with them.

Reintegration Status. I find this one very hard to think about in terms of my own behaviour and consciousness. I think I may be more guilty of sins of omission than commission. I do not see a retrenchment to an earlier phase as described by Helms but I do see many years in which this issue was not much further attended to.

Pseudoindependence status. I can indentify with this status more clearly. I was motivated as a young adult to 'help' other racial groups, most obviously through joining organisations like Anti-apartheid and Amnesty International. Although I lived in a racially diverse community in my 30s I did not know many black people.

Immersion/Emersion status. I think a seminal moment in coming into this status was deciding to join the Intercultural and Equal Opportunities committee of my national professional association. There I was exposed to debates and dilemmas thrown up by individual and institutional racism. It made me more acutely aware of the racism endemic in my own psychotherapy organisation and resulted in my efforts to challenge this both in myself and the organisation. It also led to my choosing this topic for my PhD.

Autonomy Status. I can see that in many ways I am not in this place. Although my awareness of my white identity has been greatly enhanced recently I struggle to find examples of 'relinquishing the privileges of racism'. Of course many of these cannot be relinquished as they involve how one is seen by others though it is possible to challenge them.

Undertaking the exercise of considering where I am on this scale has provided me with a touchstone to measure my own awareness. I refer to it again in the next chapter where I engage my co-operative inquiry group in using it and reflect on it further in the Conclusion to the thesis.

Conclusion

In writing this chapter I have engaged with questions that arose for me at the beginning and discussed in the Introduction, particularly these:

- Who am I as a white person?
- What is the nature of my privilege as a white person?
- How does being white affect my ability to relate to people who are not white?
- What is the nature of 'race' and who am I in a racialised environment?

I have become clearer about these questions (as I show below) though they are further explored in later chapters before I turn more specifically to questions which relate to how being white affects my work as a psychotherapist.

Through my inquiry so far I have come to see that, in a racialised environment, I, along with other western people, have a 'race' as much as anyone else, whatever their 'colour' or 'ethnic' group. Although race is an 'empty' category it exists in the popular mind – we live in a racialised environment. Having had this realisation the question that arises is 'how do I respond to being complicit in western institutional racism?' This

question seems to me to have two parts: ‘can I notice and challenge my own racism?’ and ‘can I notice and challenge institutional racism in my own culture?’

The first question: ‘can I notice and challenge my own racism?’ is an ongoing matter. It means being prepared to notice my own behaviour and inner dialogue and listen to the challenges of others. As I explore in Chapter 5, maybe it involves taking notice of feelings of guilt and shame when they occur. To some extent I think I have been able to do this but I can see that it is not something that is ever completed.

In many ways the second question is more challenging as institutional racism is embedded firmly in every nook and cranny of western society. As I write today it is ten years since Steven Laurence was murdered. Imran Kahn, who acted as the family’s lawyer at the time, spoke recently on the television to say that, while some progress had been made, particularly in police practices, it seemed to him that institutional racism is still endemic.

Although, as Dalal (2002) says, there is no such thing as ‘race’, we human beings do form ourselves into groups. We identify with the groups we ‘belong’ to and project ‘badness’ on to groups which are outside its boundaries (Hellinger and Hovel 1999). In the course of this, western society (or the European diaspora), with its particular history of undergoing a ‘civilising process’ in the terms Elias describes, (Elias 1994) has colonised most of the rest of the world in various ways over several centuries. More recently that colonisation has been a cultural one with the use of political and economic pressure. Much of this has been achieved by asserting a superiority of the ‘white race’. This sense of superiority is kept in place with the help of the human tendency to project negative qualities on to other groups (Hellinger and Hovel 1999). ‘Non-white’ groups being thought of as ‘black’ encourages this projection to include what is considered primitive, dark, mysterious and dangerous (Adams 1996; Dalal 2002). We therefore now live in a ‘racialised’ (Dalal

2002) environment in which white, western people seem to have ‘forgotten’ their assertion that they are a ‘white race’ and now tend to see themselves as being racially neutral (Bonnett 2000). This ‘colour coding’ of non-whites means that the situation is perpetuated over time and is hard to challenge or rectify.

This chapter has included the work of several authors who have helped me to understand the meaning of ‘whiteness’ in today’s society and has helped me to think about my own whiteness more clearly. The authors of these texts have provided me with a context in which to place my own experience and, particularly the psychotherapy authors, have given me a sense of having ‘fellow travelers’ on the path. The next chapter shows how I joined with colleagues in co-researching our whiteness within a co-operative inquiry group. It has helped me further with the questions I posed above and turns the first question from ‘who am I as a white person’ to ‘who are we as white people’.