CONCLUSION

For, after the gospels,
After the human and divine comedies,
After the one thousand and one nights,
After crime and punishment,
War and peace, pride and prejudice,
The sound and fury
Between good and evil
Being and nothingness
After the tempest, the trial,
And the wasteland,
After things have fallen apart,
After the hundred years of solitude,
And the remembrance of things past,
In the kingdom of this world,
We can still astonish the gods in humanity
And be the stuff of future legends,
If we but dare to be real,
And have the courage to see
That this is the time to dream
The best dream of them all.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Having reached the end of my thesis I will bring the threads together and describe what I have learnt, what new insights have occurred to me and how and in what way the learning might continue. I also explore the ways in which my inquiry makes a contribution to an understanding of the racial identity of white people and, in particular, the effect that this understanding has on work with clients and organisations in the field of psychotherapy. In so doing I revisit the important questions with which I started my inquiry and show how these have changed between then and the present day. These changes lead me to a different way of understanding the concept of 'race' and to advocate new ways of bringing out these issues in psychotherapy practice and within psychotherapy organisations.

Reflections on my Personal Journey

The aspect of my life's journey that has led to this inquiry had several possible starting points. These could include my early childhood when my father instilled notions of social justice; my friendship with a Nigerian girl at school; my joining a group to discuss intercultural matters in my professional organisation or, possibly, the writing of my paper *A Step Towards Understanding Culture in Relation to Psychotherapy*, (Ryde 1997), which I submitted when I applied to enter the CARPP Doctoral programme.

I now feel that I have walked a few more steps further along the path but that there are many more to go and that maybe there is no ending point for a journey of this nature. During it I have re-set my compass somewhat so that I am now facing in a slightly different direction in that my own whiteness has come more into focus.

Although, as I show below, even in that early paper I was aware that I needed to focus on my own culture and from there relate to others, I was not as aware that my own whiteness was so important. This discovery revealed an intense sense of guilt and shame and I found that I was not the only white person to feel this.

The journey has been significant and life changing for me, not only because of what I discovered along the way, but because it has transformed the *way* I see myself within a racialised environment. I have understood that the organising principles that I have held in common with most white people lead me to see myself as 'neutral' within this environment. It is easier now for me to recognise this assumption when it comes into operation and step aside from it. Although my inquiry has helped to begin to change my organising principles, altering these deeply held 'blue prints' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992) is not easy and maybe it is only possible to recognise them and not be so driven by them. For example, an African client said that she could not attend a session, although she very much wanted to come,

because she had to take a member of her community to a hospital appointment. I was aware of an automatic response of wanting to challenge the way other people always come first for her and her own needs last. Then arose an awareness that my own cultural assumptions and organising principles were in operation. The work I have undertaken in my white inquiry and written about in Section 2 of this thesis, as well as on-going supervised work with asylum seekers and refugees, has led to a change in my organising principles, so that I am now more likely to think 'these are my assumptions' than 'this is the cultural position of African people'. Although this may seem to come to the same thing, I feel that it is different. I am more able to be aware of my own organising principles rather than see my own position as primary and others as deviating from it. This is clearly an on-going project and not something that finishes with the giving in of my thesis. Because the research methodology is personally experiential, like psychotherapy, it can help changes to happen in a more grounded and fundamental way than purely intellectual insights that might come out of more 'objective' positivistic research.

Reflections on my journey as a researcher

As I show above, this inquiry has had a profound effect on me, but so has the way I have carried out the research and it has led to changes in my personal epistemology. The experiential nature of the research was part of what initially attracted me to action research. This is congruent with my philosophy and the epistemology of the psychotherapy that I practice.

Having undertaken this inquiry, I now feel more strongly grounded in understanding the world to be participative and intersubjective in nature. I see that all that is manifest in this particularised[1] universe is held in a

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[1] I have taken this word from the Sufi master, Ibn Arabi, who understood the world to be 'particularised' into manifest forms which are actually part of a the greater reality of the 'one'. Affifi, A. E. (1998). The Twenty Nine Pages: An Introduction to Ibn'Arabi's Metaphysics of Unity: Extracts from the Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul Arabi. Roxburgh, Bishara Publications.

complex web of relationship. This ontological position leads to an epistemology which sees knowledge as emergent and contingent on context and requires a methodology which finds approaches to explore the world that honours the complex ways in which we are all connected. Bringing this awareness to my work, particularly with asylum seeker clients, has strengthened my understanding of this position because the differences between us seem to underline the complexity of the connections between us as I show in chapter 6. This means that I am not tempted to make claims based on a quasi 'objective' way of knowing (Park 2001:82). This way of understanding has guided me throughout this inquiry and, insofar as it has underpinned it, this inquiry has been a valid one.

The journey of writing a thesis
Carrying out my inquiry in the world is only one part of the research process, however. The other is the writing of the thesis itself. In order to have integrity and validity, the writing of the thesis also needs to be guided by the same principles. The way I go about my inquiry and the way I write it up need to be congruent with each other. In particular this means that I do not claim anything in retrospect that involves others without including them in my thinking. As I have discussed in chapter 2, I have shown my drafts to the people whose thinking I have included in this thesis so that they can comment further and ask for parts to be changed or deleted or make further comments on the way in which I have thought about the work we have done together.

My work with clients has not been approached in quite the same way (see chapter 2). I have asked them if I can write about our work together in my thesis, explaining that I would disguise their identity, and all have given their permission. I have not made claims for how they feel but concentrated on

my own responses to them. As I have discussed in chapter 2, detailed conversations about how I write up their work could be an impingement on the therapy.

Throughout I have wanted my inquiry to be for myself, my clients, my colleagues and for the wider profession and society. In action research terms this means engaging in first, second and third person research (Torbert 2001:150). It has been helpful to be able to think about my inquiry and its methodology in this way so that I can think rigorously about how my inquiry affects my life within these expanding circles of relationships. In practice I have also found that these apparently differentiated areas of relating (with myself, with colleagues, clients and friends and with the wider community) cannot be completely separated and tend to fade into each other.

Action research methodology requires that those who take part in the research are co-researchers rather than 'subjects' – it is 'research with' rather than 'research on' (Heron and Reason 2001:179) – but this can be problematic if you draw people into your study that have not explicitly contracted to be co-researchers. I have found that it is possible to ask people, without making them into 'subjects', to contribute their experience to my inquiry in a limited way without fully signing them up, as it were, to be my co-researchers. I have suggested that this might be called 'extended first person research' rather than second person research as I asked these others to help me in what is basically a first person inquiry. I might, for instance, ask them to let me know how they experience something (such as guilt about being white). This means that my inquiry includes the experience of others, both by contributing to my own first person inquiry and as co-researchers in a co-operative inquiry. In the same way, my experience within groups and organisations has been part of my inquiry, even though

they had not explicitly contracted to be. My stance has nevertheless been inquiring and dialogic and I have not made claims for others that they do not claim for themselves.

The Effect of Action Research on my Practice as a Psychotherapist
These action research concepts have been useful to me in considering my practice as a psychotherapist particularly because they have helped me to recognise more rigorously when I am making claims for myself and when I am spuriously making claims for others. I have equally found that ideas from psychotherapy have been useful for my inquiry as an action researcher. In particular I have found the idea that individuals and groups acquire a set of 'organising principles' which underlie the way they give meaning to their lives to be very helpful (Stolorow and Atwood 1992), as I explore below.

The organising principles of societal and personal life
From the position of having finished this inquiry, I can see that my view of racism and my place within it has gradually changed. From the muddied waters some fresh clarity has begun to emerge so that I am beginning to see the area of my study in a new way. In particular, it now seems to me that racism exists within the 'organising principles' or 'pre-reflective unconscious' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:55) both of every individual and within what I call the 'organising principles' of one's culture.

Within this thesis, particularly in chapter 6, I have drawn on the work of intersubjectivist psychotherapists, Stolorow and Atwood et al who describe part of the mind they call the 'pre-reflective unconscious'. This is made up of our 'organising principles', so called because they refer to the structure rather than the content of the mind, and are thus unavailable to be directly reflected upon. We are not conscious of these principles, just as by living in a house we are not normally conscious of the 'blueprint' that was drawn up

when it was built. The blueprint can be referred to but not actually *experienced* in the way that we 'experience' *living* in the house. The values and assumptions that underlie our way of being in the world are arranged according to our organising principles and we live our life by them most of the time without questioning or even noticing them.

I am coming to find it helpful to understand cultures as well as individuals as being organised around a set of structured principles in the same way. These provide the way that assumptions and values are 'held'. It is within this scaffolding or web that racism shapes itself so that it is built into the fabric of society in a way that we are normally not cognizant of. The web is something we partake of as individuals as the culture shapes our ways of understanding the world. It passes, as it were, through us whilst also running through the culture. My perception of 'institutional racism' has been similar to this but I am beginning to understand racism as a total phenomenon in this way.

This idea about racism comes as part and parcel of no longer seeing human beings as having completely separate watertight identities, but recognizing that all is intrinsically connected through culture, (as I will show below). I have an image of a web or network of invisible lines that runs through society joining and connecting us. At places this web is thicker and more complex where culture is shared.. Maybe we would have to go to another universe to find someone to whom this web did not connect us at all.

The threesome of myself, an interpreter and an Arabic client comes to mind in illustration. The web connects the interpreter with the client. They belong to the same national culture so share many of the same basic assumptions and ways of approaching life. They are both Muslim and deeply religious and they both have had to flee their country so share something of what

that means to them. The interpreter and I are both professional women and work within a Primary Care Trust together. The threads of professionalism and care and respect for clients join us also with a certain professional cultural norm. The client and I are both women in our 50s who have married and had children and know the depth of feeling and contact that that brings us. The web joins us in this profound knowledge. We are all joined by our human experience and cultural knowledge though the web may be thicker in some places than others.

Since working more intensively with people who are not white or western I have never found myself talking with someone who is a complete mystery to me. Some point of connection can be found and often this feels a deep and significant connection. Sometimes the other's reality is harder for me to understand. My interpreter, maybe because of having different organising principles, finds it difficult to say certain things to my client. She cannot, for instance, refer to my client's husband as a 'husband'. She must refer to him as 'the father of your children'. I find that I am not quite clear why this is even though I have asked her. The subtleties of this are hard for me to understand. She also cannot refer to my client's body. I find this easier as it accords with some of my own organising principles. My mother could never refer to 'bodies', as they were intimate and embarrassing. Maybe I overlay my own situation on hers here so I thought the feeling was like my own in what Stolorow and Atwood (1992:103) would call an intersubjective conjunction, but the thread of connection is broken at this point. Although I think I understand this, maybe I have assumed something from my own experience.

To return to my work with my client, I feel that her bodily experience is important to talk about and ask the interpreter if she would mind making an exception. I am aware that we are both taking a big risk but I weigh it up and think it is worth it. I remind myself that this client is not living in ordinary

times so that extraordinary measures have to be taken. My interpreter agrees to interpret. I refer to the arthritis she has had since her daughter was murdered. I say 'I think the death of your daughter has entered your body and gives you pain in every cell of it'. The client cries and nods. My sense is that we have had a break through in our understanding of each other. I feel that the interpreter and I also reach a greater intimacy as we all participate in moments that feel painful but connecting. The client does not appear to notice that something has been infringed. Maybe this is because my understanding of her deep sorrow has been heard and that is more important. Another human being can approach something of what she feels. A connection along the web has been made.

When I started this work there seemed to be a tension between thinking that cultures are so different that they are beyond comprehension and thinking that if we are to work with people who are from a 'different' culture we must try our best to understand them. Neither of these positions seemed completely satisfying to me because different cultures did not seem to be as completely different as this dichotomy appears to imply but I also felt it was not right to insist on our similarities either. I now understand that the situation is extremely complex in a way that I have found hard to articulate and which I have attempted to describe in my account above. Our connection with each other between and within cultures is infinitely variable and cultures of different sorts overlap each other in fluid, complex and subtle ways. This understanding helps me to make significant connections with my clients who have culturally different backgrounds to myself in a way that does not deny the differences. Finding a connection in this way is basic to building trust. I find that it helps clients to allow themselves to be more vulnerable in my presence and share experiences which were traumatic and distressing.

Understanding Racism

Having used the idea of organising principles to help me to relate to individual clients where there is a difference in culture, I wonder if it can help me to understand racism as well? Maybe it can as, if we see racism as existing within the organising principles that run through society and individuals, it is not surprising that we find racism so difficult to eliminate. Getting rid of racism is not just a matter of finding it within us and expunging it. We cannot merely change our mind about it. Larger shifts in cultural consciousness need to occur. We can, though, contribute to bringing to awareness the underlying organising principles and help reveal them within the culture. For example, I would ask questions in my questionnaire on guilt and shame in relation to racism differently now (see chapter 5). I learnt through this example that racism is rooted in the generative substructure of our cultural consciousness, rather than as a form of 'false thinking' that could be dropped easily.

So how could the question be asked in the light of this consideration? At the time I was receiving the results I felt dissatisfied by the respondents' stress on personal racism and was not at that time able to articulate my difficulty well. I said in chapter 5:

> 'I am interested to see, for example that much less shame and guilt seems to be felt about endemic racism than personal racism. My own sense is that it is very easy to feel helpless, uninvolved and not responsible for underlying cultural assumptions in our own society. Of course these are very hard to change as an individual but my own sense is that we are all contributors and help to maintain it if we do not try to become conscious of our assumptions and do something about them.'

I had a sense that we all do have a personal connection to endemic racism but could not quite see how that worked but did feel that 'we are all

contributors and help to maintain it'. I have deepened my awareness since then by becoming mindful of the way in which white people have imposed their own organising principles globally by racialising the world and by seeing themselves as a superior 'race'. Although racism is largely condemned in contemporary western society it continues, deeply held, within our personal and cultural organising principles. Our very 'forgetting' of our culpability reveals just how embedded these ideas are, and how deeply most of us take for granted obvious 'reality'. This was the rock I tried to dislocate and perhaps all co-researchers have shifted it an inch.

Is psychotherapy so embedded in the white, western world that it has no relevance to those who are not part of that culture?

Having come to the way of understanding racism I outlined above, I wonder how far it throws a different light on one of the fundamental tenets of my original questions: Is psychotherapy so embedded in the white, western world that it has no relevance to those who are not part of that culture? I asked this question at the beginning of my inquiry and have been engaging with it ever since. It was an important question for my diploma and transfer papers[2]. In the light of my new way of understanding racism as embedded in the complex web of organising principles within individuals as well as multi-overlapping cultures how does the question now seem to me?

The use of the word 'embedded' implies a 'structuring in' to the culture in the way I am suggesting now but it does seem too absolute, as if white western culture were a complete monolith. It does not imply the complex web of interrelating cultures I am now envisaging. Maybe it implies something about white, western power though and in that sense it may seem like a monolith. Could there be a danger in my not remembering that cultures overlap – that this may be a way in which I as a white person

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[2] Taken prior to my embarking on this doctoral thesis at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice

might 'perform' my whiteness? (Rodriguez 1998:53) As I showed in chapter 6, power difference, which is at the heart of the way that this 'performing' of whiteness originated, must have serious contorting effects on the normal flow of interconnectedness that needs to be acknowledged and reflected on in psychotherapy if race is really to be addressed. As psychotherapists we need to constantly remember this power difference and the white centredness that is taken for granted as a result of it and reflect upon it both in supervision and with the client.

However, when I work with asylum seekers the phrase 'we are not living in ordinary times' comes to me so that extraordinary measures sometimes need to be taken. Normal cultural supports are not present for people who live in exile. This includes support given by immediate and extended family, religious practices, healing rituals, community structures, the celebration of life transitions etc. Human emotional need for connection and recognition are addressed in these ways in all cultures including those in the West (Sheehy 1977:29) though in the west we might also go to a counsellor or psychotherapist to help us with emotional dis-ease. I believe, through my work with asylum seekers and refugees, that the need is the same in all cultures though the way of meeting it may be different. Any of these ordinary rituals of everyday life might provide for the deeply rooted human need to be heard, recognised and known.

One asylum seeker client tells me that it makes a difference to him that I am 'there'. He has told me things that he hasn't been able to talk to others about and my acceptance of him and desire to understand him mean a lot. Nevertheless, he also says that it would be nice if there was a sympathetic person living in the room next to him to whom he could open his heart whenever he felt like it. I notice this and wonder if he also needs to be angry with me for not being there for him all of the time. In my countertransference I am aware of feeling guilty for the small amount of time I am giving him.

Can I 'take' his anger that does not feel safe elsewhere? In this exiled environment he tells me that he fears and mistrusts those around him. These are not just English people but also the people he has been given as housemates by NASS (National Asylum Seeker Support – a government body that oversees the placement of asylum seekers in the community). He is gay and has been rejected by his family and community and expects rejection all round. He has found English society to be homophobic also. Although the Muslim community rejects him he asserts that God would not have created him this way if it was not 'meant'. He strongly believes in God's love for him and acceptance of him. He tells me that this knowledge sustains him beyond anything else and I feel that my complete acceptance of this is important too. A wide and engaging smile lights up his face when he talks of this.

I sometimes think that my non-western clients have a better 'feel' for what therapy is about than some of my 'western' clients and often have similar ideas about the usefulness or otherwise of psychotherapy. For instance a 'western' and a Sri Lankan client both think it would be best not to talk about emotional matters because it will make them feel worse. They are both men. None of my female 'non-western' clients have ever said that. One or two 'western' women have, but not many. Of course someone else might have found something different amongst their group of clients but this observation makes me wonder if psychotherapy is so very countercultural outside the west as it is sometimes painted to be.

Another experience, which occurred on a course for interpreters, also gave me food for thought. There were three white and English people in a group of ten. The two interpreters who left at coffee time were both white and English, saying they did not want to be caught up in anyone's emotional world. They considered it to be unprofessional as their job was just to interpret. Those that stayed for the rest of the course valued and

understood the inevitability of engaging with the emotional life of the clients under these circumstances which suggests an openness to a psychotherapeutic approach. (As I showed in chapter 6, psychotherapy is sometimes questioned as inappropriate for those who are not part of western culture.) I am not saying that English people are less likely to understand the value of psychotherapy and non-English people are more likely to do so. I am just saying that you cannot rely on English people to have a better understanding of the needs of people within a psychotherapy context than non-western people. The whole picture is much more complex than that.

My experiences since the start of this study have strengthened my belief that inquiring and respectful intersubjective psychotherapy can offer something that can run along the web that connects between and across cultures. In any case complex interrelationships between different cultural groups make the question of whether psychotherapy is suitable for non-western groups too simplistic to be answered with just yes or no. I have certainly found that it can be. Developing an ability to be in a state of on-going inquiry is more important than looking for clear cut answers as I show below.

Maintaining a dialogic and inquiring attitude in order to foster a continuing learning process

My inquiry process has led to significant new ways of understanding my own place within a complex racialised and multicultural world and a more grounded way of understanding how to be as a psychotherapist within it. However, in the introduction to this thesis I said that it was

'my intention that my research will spark off a continuing process in the organisations within which I work just as it is my intention that my personal learning process will continue. I will need not only to explore

whether this has happened or might happen, but also what I do, or could do, to foster it.'

Maybe this is the most important test of the usefulness of my research. I will now look at how far I have been able to foster a continuing process in myself and in others who have been touched by my inquiry.

I have found that to keep learning I need to maintain an inquiring attitude. This is an important and foundational idea in action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001) recommended by Judi Marshall in what she calls 'inquiry as life process' (Marshall 2001). By keeping open a space in her mind for 'inner and outer arcs of attention', she has experiences and then reflects upon them. She is not claiming here to total self-knowledge but of pushing areas of her learning forward.

These kinds of ideas are current in psychotherapy theorising as well. Winnicott's notion of playing within a 'potential space' is similar (Winnicott 1974). This 'play' space is part of what Winnicott calls 'transitional phenomena' (Winnicott 1974) which exist between the internal and external world and allows something new within our sense of self to emerge. A psychotherapist's exploration of their own responses (or 'countertransference') also exists within a space of this sort. This notion of a 'play space' allows anything to be held within it, however fanciful or violent or bizarre, as it has not yet entered external reality. It may be important also to play with these fantasies with a supervisor (Hawkins and Shohet 2000:79). The psychotherapist might find that they are thinking[3] something that is, under normal circumstances, completely unacceptable like 'I want to pin this client up against a wall and shoot him'. Not a pretty thought and not one to be conveyed to the client undigested! The psychotherapist might

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[3] 'Finding that you are thinking' something is different to having a 'thought'. It is like catching the unconscious on the wing.

then think 'what on earth is that all about? Something is happening that draws me to feeling murderous and in that particular way! Do I feel under threat? Would I enjoy feeling sadistic? Maybe an old experience of mine is being restimulated. Maybe I am picking up a fear or desire of the clients'.' She might then put it to one side until something else is said which seems to make it clearer. My point here is that the therapist does not push away an unacceptable thought but puts it within an orbit of 'playing' so that it can be thought about safely and trusts that something can be learnt through it.

In a similar way I can allow myself to be aware of my thoughts and feelings that arise in my inquiry and reflect upon them. The co-operative inquiry group provided such a space.

During the course of this process, my consciousness about being 'white' changed. How did this happen? In considering this question I am engaging in another turn of the inquiry process. I find that my immersion in three interrelated inquiry processes seem to have helped to bring about a change in consciousness.

The three processes are
> 1. An immersion in the literature.
> 2. Allowing difficult and painful thoughts into consciousness.
> 3. Learning through the co-operative inquiry.

Firstly, I immersed myself in the literature, allowing it to filter through beyond the intellectual knowing to something deeper (Moustakis 1990). This meant that I reflected on my own experience in relation to the reading and sometimes helped this process by writing about it as well. For example on reading White Reign (Kincheloe, Steinberg et al. 1998) I wrote:

A key part of White Reign is that it advocates an understanding of white oppression but wishes to show how a positive white identity can be encouraged. It stresses that white guilt is unnecessary and even harmful. I have sat and thought about this for some time as it feels like a bit of a cop out to me. I wonder whether it misses out an uncomfortable phase of really taking on board what white privilege has meant.

Notes made in April 2004

I show here, through my use of reflective writing (Winter 1999), how her writing points up my own behaviour and puts me in touch with my difficult feelings. Reflecting on these contributes to my learning at several levels by allowing the concept in, not just to my intellect, but to my feeling self as well.

Although this inquiry process which involved my reading was a first person inquiry, it also has a third person element in that I was engaging with the ideas of people 'out there'.

Secondly, I encouraged myself to allow difficult and painful thoughts into my consciousness so that they could be processed and learnt from. These included everyday experiences such as getting it 'wrong' in the area of equal opportunities and the ways in which I benefit by being white. The structure provided by CARPP provided a place where I could hold painful thoughts in my mind so that I could learn from them.

For instance, I sent a letter in April 1999 (a few months after starting at CARPP) to a member of my supervision group. It illustrates some of the painful feelings I had, along with attempts to process them:

'As for my research, it is not very surprising that you didn't understand as I don't fully understand it myself yet! But to be less cryptic about it, I have been struck recently by the painful and vulnerable feelings that I and others feel when matters of 'equal opportunities' come up. For example:

1.   Our (BCPC – my training org's) equal opportunities committee told me that they wanted me to have a particular paper introduced to students on Stage 1. Now it is not my style or practice to 'tell' our staff how or what to teach on the curriculum, though I might negotiate with them if I felt strongly about something and the ultimate authority if there is a clash is the training committee. I felt caught between all these in a painful way and in a way I wouldn't feel on any other topic. I did eventually say 'it is isn't my way to insist, but I will suggest it.' In the event the equal ops committee were happy with that and the staff of the course thought it was a good idea, but what interests me was my process in it all.

2.   The intercultural committee of UKCP have written a reading list with accompanying notes on different areas of working with difference. I was one of the co-authors. BCPC's equal ops committee poured scorn on what it said as woolly and liberal. On the surface I was open and undefensive and welcomed their idea of encouraging debate by using it in our Newsletter, but in fact I felt attacked and rubbished.

3.   When the Race and Culture group presented to the AGM [of UKCP] they said they did not want to have questions until the end because they couldn't cope with racist remarks while presenting. They thought it would be inevitable that there would be racist remarks, even if they were not intended as such, and they would be too painful to have to field whilst having to be 'in charge'. (It was agreed that I would chair the plenary later.)

4.   The process of the UKCP in trying to implement equal opportunities monitoring of access to training has been horrendous and still is in spite of all involved saying that they are for it. After several years of negotiation it was agreed last AGM, though how it was to be done had not been worked out.'

I am struck by how raw the feelings were about being 'in the wrong'. Maybe somewhere I was aware that I was fundamentally 'in the wrong' and could not bear that. On reflection I think that my decision to focus on my own racial identity grew out of my need to 'grasp the nettle' of this - of what could

be thought of as the source of the pain – my guilt and shame about being in a culturally more powerful position. In the letter quoted above I am struck by my desire to act with integrity but feeling that that was difficult or even impossible. Maybe, as I suggest at the end of chapter 4, this was a move from merely 'finding out' about other cultures to really allowing in an embodied sense of guilt-shame and taking the truth of that into my life. I am interested to see that my sense of feeling guilty and ashamed is no longer as current for me or as painful, though it can be re-activated from time to time. More often I can now regard this feeling as a message to myself that something is amiss. Maybe this takes me closer to the 'White Ego Identity Status' of 'Autonomy' in the scale developed by Helms (1995: see also chapter 3).

Reflecting on that now I feel that I know myself within my racial position more clearly. I can see that all I can do is to learn to respond with more and more integrity within a racialised and multicultural environment. I find that I use the word 'racial' more freely. I do not think this is because I see the term as having any more legitimacy than I did, but that it is a construct that influences social relationships and so within that constructed field I am as much a 'person-of-race' as any other.

The *Third* area of my learning was through a co-operative inquiry group that I set up to focus on and learn about the experience of being white. This meant that others collaborated with me directly and helped me to keep this focus because of their shared interest. Some of what I learnt in the second area above was considerably helped within the co-operative inquiry group as it was a safe space, not only to allow difficult thoughts and feelings into my consciousness, but to share them with others who would help me to make sense of them. They were admissible without being colluded with. It was a place where I could bring my ideas and preoccupations and where others could bring theirs. Others' preoccupations sparked ones that I held

just out of awareness. The group became a container for my inquiry. In a world where whiteness is something that is not normally thought of as a legitimate object of study, it became a place where I had fellow travelers.

Reflections on the extent of my learning

Having spent so much time inquiring, both on my own and with others, how do I know that my consciousness about being white has changed? An incident occurred when I was engaged with others in constructing a panel of speakers for the conference *War, Terrorism, Cultural Inequality - and Psychotherapy* for an organisation called Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility. Others wanted only to have panellists who were from 'minority ethnic groups' while I insisted on a white panellist as well. I felt that my colleagues' position revealed a stance of seeing 'white' culture as the 'basic' one from which others 'interestingly' deviated. It was a stance that implied: 'we who hold the normal ground would like to hear from you people of other cultures.' Even thinking: 'You might be able to help us with this' is seeing the white, western view as the basic one. I am quite sure that I would have been blind to this implication before I undertook this inquiry. I would have thought, like my colleagues, how interesting it would be to have the opinions of people from 'minority ethnic groups'.

As I write the difference feels huge on the one hand and very subtle on the other so that it is hard to convey the enormity of the difference in attitude that I experience. I was struck by the way that this insight came to me naturally. There was a 'feeling' that something was not right rather than a response to a politically correct dogma. Maybe this demonstrated a shift in my 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:55). My experience of trying to put over my point of view also reminds me of the frustrations often expressed by people who are of the minority culture. Something is 'wrong' but it cannot be conveyed. Maybe when this happens there are not shared

cultural organising principles on which to structure the thought and to create consensus.

The contribution of this thesis to the fields of psychotherapy and cultural awareness

As I have shown above, my thesis has had a fundamental effect on my sense of self and on my practice as a psychotherapist. I have also shown, particularly in chapters 6 and 7 that colleagues have been affected and changed by sharing with me in my inquiry. The following are ways in which I made a contribution to the field:

Intersubjectivity theory applied to working across cultures

I am indebted to those from the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis (particularly Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, Bernard Brandschaft , Donna Orange and Lynne Jacobs), whose work has in recent years inspired my approach to psychotherapy. I am unaware, however, that any of these writers, except for Jacobs, have specifically applied their ideas to working across difference in culture. I have nevertheless found this approach particularly useful in helping me to find a way forward in this regard. It not only makes sense to me in theory; I have found it helpful in practice. My work the asylum seeker whose child had been murdered which was described earlier in this chapter illustrates this point.

In recommending this approach when working across cultures, I am recommending an experiential immersion rather than just a cognitive learning of theories. I have found that the more I have been able to *feel* a sense of myself and my client within our separate and shared contexts, the more real human contact is made.

Racism

As shown above, although this thesis is primarily about my practice as a white psychotherapist, I have also contributed in a more general way to thinking about racism. By putting my whiteness at the centre of the inquiry I have been able to see the way that racism is embedded in the organising principles of individuals, cultures and societies and is not just 'housed' in individuals, except insofar as certain individuals may have organising principles which lead them more certainly to racist thoughts and attitudes. This has led me to conclude that racism is more properly 'institutional' in character. Maybe it is unhelpful to think of racism as a 'personal' phenomenon at all as this leads to the idea that racism can be 'stamped out' by simply 'getting rid of' racist people or prescribing 'politically correct' language/behaviour.

This way of understanding Racism could have important implications for public bodies which try to tackle institutional racism, such as the police, or, indeed, the psychotherapy profession.

Dialogue as a methodology for working across cultures

As I have shown (see particularly chapter 2), dialogue has similarities to action inquiry methodology and intersubjective psychotherapy. All these methods stress the importance of questioning one's own assumptions and meeting the other in an open way so that 'the truth' may be discovered between the two. As I show in chapter 1, dialogue as a methodology for meaningful conversations across difference, could be extremely important in a world where politicians, amongst others, reiterate entrenched positions rather than start from a position of not knowing where 'questions are more interesting than answers' (Hawkins 2003). Whilst several authors have written about dialogue in a way that I have found very helpful, I am unaware of any authors specifically recommending this in the area of racial difference.

Awareness of whiteness in the field of psychotherapy

As I have shown in chapter 3, I have only found three authors who have specifically written about being white as a psychotherapist or counsellor (Jacobs 2000; Tuckwell 2002; Lago 2005)[4]. This thesis therefore contributes to this small number and I am indebted to the other three for helping me to think about the issues involved. All of these authors write about the prevalence of a sense of guilt in white people about their privileges. My contribution has been to extend the thinking on this, particularly by showing how awareness of guilt and shame may alert white people to what is amiss in their dealing with those who are not white or western.

Back to my Roots

In completing my thesis I want to acknowledge my dialogic roots in the soil of BCPC and the support I have received throughout my inquiry. Serendipitously I discovered this diary item just as I reach this point in the writing. It was written one month before starting my research at Bath University:

> '2ND DECEMBER 1998
>
> Last night we had a BCPC staff meeting. For some time I have been wanting to bring up the issue of equal opportunities training. I have felt very nervous about this as I expected that the idea would have been disparaged as 'politically correct' and over simplistic. That people would think I wanted to bring in the 'thought police' however much I protested that this was not the case. I would end up feeling misunderstood in a

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[4] Others such as Robert Altman Altman, N. (2003). "How White People Suffer from Racism." Psychotherapy and Politics International **1**(2): 93 - 106.

   have considered the issue of whiteness in psychotherapy but not about being white *as* a therapist.

rather embarrassing way. That I was stupid and easily persuaded by those who took the moral high ground.

Having said this I think there is some truth in it. I think I am easily swayed if the other person seems to have high principles. I don't like to be on the 'low' ground and I equally don't like to be seen as stupid. No wonder I was nervous!

In the event things happened in both directions. The two male staff members had the sort of reaction I feared but all the women in their different ways backed the idea to the extent that we could find enough emotional space to really look at the way our 'liberal' attitudes blind us to how minorities feel and experience us and our culture. There was particular mention of a black student on Stage 2 who [one staff member] felt had been on the receiving end of a lot of racism from both staff and students (and she was including herself in that). There was also talk of what [one staff member] felt about being the only lesbian person in the group.

I suggested we might get some people in to help us with this and I felt there was some resistance to this idea but a willingness to explore it. By the end of the discussion I felt that [the two men] were on board with it, as it seemed an exciting and challenging thing to do into rather than introduce the thought police.

This morning I got up early and have had an exciting idea. It is to use this as my research subject. All sorts of possibilities occur to me:
- the staff group could become an action research group.
- the whole of BCPC could become an action research group!
- The whole of the UKCP could become an action research group! - no that is megalomania.

- the training could be transformed by a new awareness of what it is to work with difference
- I could go off and look at other trainings,
- go abroad and look at trainings in America, South America, Australia etc
- I could look at how psychotherapy which embraces phenomenology and intersubjectivity can contribute to ways of working interculturally
- I can look at how training for intercultural awareness can best be done
- I can look at the culture of psychotherapy and how it is so un-multicultural and how that trend might be reversed.

I feel very excited by having the staff group behind me in this. I have a sense that how I felt yesterday about introducing the idea of equal ops training was how people in minorities feel and my present elation is about breaking through that. It almost feels as if anything is possible!

No doubt I will go through a lot of other feeling before this project is finished.'

How true that last statement is! Nevertheless, some of what I had hoped for has been achieved. The staff have begun to share my concerns and difference in culture is very gradually being brought in to the curriculum although there are reversals and still some way to go.

In the end two new factors have been contributed to my learning in a way that I had not anticipated. One is my work with asylum seekers at BCPC that was not even a gleam in the eye in 1998. I have had real experiences of difference and connection with these clients. The other is the most fundamental, however. It is the learning that has come to me through understanding my own racial identity. Everything else has sprung from that and that is what I most did not understand when I wrote the list above.

Final thoughts

It now seems to me that there is unlikely to be more than tinkering on the edges of progress towards real integration of all our populations in the west unless white, westerners can really 'see' a racialised environment in which white people are just one part. In my view this is a necessary stage in 'race' becoming an unnecessary construct and assigned to history.

For me the starting place is my own continuing inquiry which includes my own personal exploration but also my work within organisations. My experiences to date have led me on to enough firm ground to advocate action for others. I recommend to psychotherapy training bodies that they:

- Find ways throughout the formal training and in specially designed modules to encourage an understanding in students of the racialised environment in which they live and their own place within it.
- Encourage a sensitivity in supervisors to this issue so that it is constantly seen and explored in their work with clients in supervision. This has implications for the training of supervisors.
- Encourage a sensitivity in psychotherapists to this issue who work with students so that a deep, embodied understanding of ourselves in a racialised environment is really felt and known.

Psychotherapy institutions exist within a wider environment and will affect and be affected by others. To make a change there needs to be a movement in both directions – from the widest institutions like governments and training institutions who make policies, to individuals and their personal explorations. Both can feed into and support the other to provide a virtuous rather than a vicious cycle.

This is not a straightforward matter where the policies of institutions alone will make the difference. Hearts need to change as well as minds. White

people will continue to dominate the world in a way that will inevitably lead to conflict unless we are able to take on the difficult and painful work of clearly seeing the damage done by our domination and be prepared to do something about it.

No doubt this is an arduous and difficult work for, as Ben Okri (Okri 1999) says:

> The sooner we admit our crimes to others,
> To other peoples, creeds, genders, species,
> The better and lighter the human
> Future will be.
> The more we deny, the greater will be the horrors
> And vengeances of time
> That wait silently in the wings
> Of the bloody drama of our future
> From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

However, he is also optimistic about the ability of the human race to continue in the face of great difficulties. To those who feel exhausted by the difficulties he says:

> They who are exhausted have lost
> The greater picture,
> The greater perspective.
> They are trapped in their own labyrinth,
> Their lovelessness, selfishness.
> For those with limited dreams,
> There is chaos to come.
> Disintegration. Nightmares.

And he goes on to say:

> Exhaustion is a mental thing,
>
> The absence of a spiritual viewpoint,
>
> A universal vision,
>
> A sense of new journeys,
>
> Higher discoveries
>
> From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

I take hope from this, both to find new energy for myself, but also to remind myself that I am part of a wider pool of humanity and my thoughts are not just my own. As Bohm (Bohm 1996:51) says, the

> 'deep structure of thought is what is common and this is what we have to get at. We will have to come to see that the content of thought and the deep structure are not really separate, because the way we think about thought has an effect on its structure. If we think, for example, that thought is coming from *me* individually, this will affect how thought works, so we have to look at both content and structure.'

I cannot advocate then that institutions just should come up with better policies or that individuals change their consciousness. Both work together in a synergistic way. Thought is in the culture and we are affected by it and affect it just as drops of water make a pool and a pool is full of drops of water.

I have found, through my inquiry, ways in which supporting frameworks bring together the personal, interpersonal, group and societal, particularly through understanding the ways that 'organising principles' run through individuals and groups to provide the ways in which thought is structured within, through and around us. This feels to me to be an important shift in perspective that could lead to less attachment to our own narcissistic needs

and a real acknowledgement of our membership of the human family and the wider world.

As Ben Okri says 'Maybe we can still astonish the gods.'