EXPLORING WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPACT ON PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ORGANISATIONS

INTRODUCTION

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Everyone loves a spring cleaning.
Lets have a humanity cleaning.
Open up history's chamber of horrors
And clear out the skeletons behind the mirrors,
Put our breeding nightmares to flight
Transform our monsters with our light.
Clear out the stables
In our celebrated fables
A giant cleaning is no mean undertaking.
A cleaning of progroms and fears
Of genocide and tears
Of future and slavery
Hatred and brutality.
Let's turn around and face them
The bullies that our pasts have become
Let's turn around and face them
Let's make this clearing-out moment
A legendary material atonement
From Mental Fight *by Ben Okri*

This thesis is about the implications of being racially white and a psychotherapist. Being a psychotherapist is part of my personhood, so inevitably this is about myself as a white person as well as myself as a white psychotherapist. Although the starting point of my inquiry is my own experience, I extend this to other's experience as well as to the psychotherapy profession as a whole.

In this chapter I introduce my inquiry, how it arose as a matter of interest for me and the emergent processes with which I engaged during its course, both before and during the writing.

I show the different arenas in which my inquiry took place as well as the kinds of questions that have arisen for me within the process of the inquiry. I introduce the themes and ideas on which my inquiry is built as well as the philosophical underpinnings of the work.

Finally I set out the scope and structure of the thesis by briefly describing each section and chapter.

Origins of the Thesis

I came to the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) because it offered me an opportunity to be supported in exploring an aspect of my professional practice. Although I am a psychotherapist it appealed to me to do this academic work in a place which was not just for psychotherapists, particularly as I wanted to explore something about the interface that psychotherapy has with society. It was important to me to communicate beyond the world of psychotherapy as well as within it.

I chose action research because it seemed to me to be entirely consistent with the way I practise psychotherapy both in its value base and in its methodology. I understand the psychotherapeutic relationship to arise from the intersubjective space between therapist and client, thus seeing myself in the encounter as very much part of the 'field' (Stolorow, Atwood et al. 1994; Hycner and Jacobs 1995; Abram 1996; Orange, Atwood et al. 1997). This is also an important precept for myself as an action researcher, as researcher and subject are both seen as part of the same 'field' in action research epistemology (Gustavsen 2001). Both action research and intersubjective psychotherapy are, then, inquiries in which all parties are acknowledged to interact within an intersubjective field and the inquiry arises in the spaces between them.

My reflections on my practice as a psychotherapist led me to see that psychotherapy as a profession has very little diversity and I felt disturbed by this observation. Most professional members of psychotherapy organisations, as well as students, teaching staff and clients are white. I myself am white. Moreover, mainstream theories of psychotherapy do not attend to diverse cultural differences and experiences either. Psychotherapy theorising, both about theory and about practice, make assumptions based on white, western attitudes and values.

I therefore started this thesis with the following questions in mind:

- Why is the psychotherapy profession so lacking in diversity?
- Why do so few members of black and minority ethnic groups join the profession or come to psychotherapists for help?
- Why is that I, in particular, feel disturbed by this lack of diversity?
- Can psychotherapy practice change sufficiently to address the needs of those from black and minority groups?
- Can psychotherapy theorising about human development and psychological condition reflect sufficiently on its own assumptions to address human psychology across difference in culture?
- Can I and other psychotherapists become sufficiently aware of our own assumptions to address the needs of diverse clients groups?

So this thesis is about psychotherapy and whiteness, and, in particular, is about myself as a white person and as a white psychotherapist. In psychotherapy, as I understand and practice it (see below), the personhood of the psychotherapist cannot be separated from a professional persona, the two being inextricably connected. The thesis therefore focuses on two linked themes:

1. psychotherapy theory and practice in order to see how and whether it can address issues of whiteness in a diverse world, and
2. on the meaning of being racially white for myself and for others in the context of psychotherapy.

I strive to understand my own and others' place in global society as 'racially white' as well as my own place as a psychotherapist in a racially diverse world. This leads me to understand how that affects my practice as a psychotherapist. It also has wide reaching implications for psychotherapy as a whole.

As my inquiry progressed I noticed how hard I found it to focus on whiteness as it seemed like looking at nothingness. I discover that others who write in the area of White Studies have found the same phenomenon (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1999) and I follow this discovery in order to find out more about the *quality* of whiteness. Further questions arose such as:

- 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?

In making this inquiry I discovered a prevailing sense of guilt and shame in myself regarding how privileged I am as a white person. My understanding of guilt and shame had been influenced by psychotherapy theorising and, as there is a tendency to regard guilt and shame as evidence of neurosis, I wondered how far my feelings were neurotic and how far they were useful in my inquiry into my own sense of privilege as a white person. I therefore took my inquiry into the nature of guilt and shame*, per se*, before looking at how far they may be signposts on the road to change consciousness of privilege.

A further question thus became:

- Can guilt and shame be useful in drawing attention to the privilege of whiteness?

Race

Insofar as my study is about myself as racially 'white', I need to understand what I mean by the word 'race'. At the start of my inquiry I regarded 'race' as an essentially constructed category in which peoples

with different skin colours are thought to belong to different 'races'. I understood racial prejudice as a term that describes prejudiced attitudes between peoples of these different 'races'. 'Racism' arises when prejudice and discrimination occurs in people from a more powerful 'race' (usually white, western people) towards those of a less powerful 'race' causing disadvantage to the less powerful group. Since then my understanding of the concept of 'race' has not so much changed as deepened. I have come to understand it as a systemic, societal rather than individualistic phenomenon as I show in more detail below. My inquiry has also led me to understand that people, like myself, of European origin[1], have racialised the world in the course of processes of colonisation. In doing so they have declared themselves to be a 'white' and 'superior' 'race' whilst naming other 'races' as inferior (Bonnett 2000). In more recent decades 'white' people seem to have 'forgotten' this 'naming' of 'races' and tend to see themselves as 'neutral' within a racialised environment (Dyer 1997; Bonnett 2000:120). I discuss this further below and in chapter 2 as well as in other places throughout the thesis.

Arenas for my inquiry

This inquiry is set in three arenas:

The first arena is the personal - a first person inquiry (Reason and Bradbury 2001). In this arena I explore my own motivation, including my motivational roots (Hawkins 1997) – what has driven me, my own feelings and thoughts and how I track the changes in my responses as I progress through my inquiry (See particularly chapters 3 and 4).

The second arena is the interpersonal - a second person inquiry. Here I join with others to explore the meaning of being white. Some of this work has been with co-researchers in a co-operative inquiry group (Heron 1996) as others agreed to collaborate with me in this exploration. In

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[1] In chapter two I show how white people as they are understood in today's world are in reality a European diaspora.

addition, other people have helped me by letting me know their thoughts and feelings. These explorations have been undertaken with various methodologies such as formal and informal interviews including follow-up interviews to questionnaires. Some of this second person inquiry is fully collaborative. At other times I have approached individuals with certain questions of my own. These people cannot really be said to be 'co-researchers' (Heron 1996) as the inquiry is very much my agenda rather than theirs. I have suggested that this might more properly be called an 'extended first person' inquiry as the collaboration with others was not directly 'bought into' by them as part of their own inquiry. However, in all situations I have been clear about my own intentions so that they can make informed choices. I do not claim anything for others, however, that is not claimed by themselves. To this extent my work with them is in the spirit of second person research and certainly within the methodology of action research.

The third area of my inquiry is set within the larger societal context - a third person inquiry. I have worked with many different organisations within the profession of psychotherapy but have chosen here to focus on my main workplace, The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling (BCPC). I explore the extent to which a growing understanding of racism allows a change in policy which leads to greater diversity within the organisation. Some of this work was started before this present inquiry at CARPP and some was concurrent with it. These were not formal inquiry processes, but developed naturally from the processes of being a psychotherapist. I have included these experiences in my study as they evolved from the work in a natural way which feels congruent with Reason and Bradley's suggestion that the work should be:

> '…..emergent and evolutionary: you cannot just go to a village or an organisation or a professional group and 'do it', but rather the work evolves (or does not) through mutual engagement and influence.' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:449)

I show how the work emerged and evolved through my engagement with others within this organisation. Reason and Bradbury go on to say:

> 'Further, because we are participating in work of enduring consequence, we must attend to the question of viability in the longer term (third-person research/practice). We must therefore ask whether the work was seeded in such a way that participation could be sustained in the absence of the initiating researcher. We must create a living interest in the work.' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:449)

This question is extremely important to me and is one I will evaluate at the end of this thesis. Certainly it is my intention that my research will spark a continuing process in the organisation 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.

Origins of the work

In both the Diploma and Transfer papers that I wrote at Bath University (CARPP programme), I said that I did not feel clear about my reasons for exploring racism in a psychotherapy context. I suspected myself of being patronising and 'politically correct' and just using 'black' people as objects of interest. My self-searching about this has been a large part of my inquiry. On 12th March 1999, soon after joining CARPP in the January, I wrote a note to myself thus:

> 'I have just written an autobiographical piece about why I am interested in cultural difference - or why I have come to be interested in it. I realise that I have an uneasy feeling that someone might say to me that I am not allowed this subject - I don't deserve it. I haven't met enough discrimination or something. Having understood that I realise that it is another way in which I feel that I don't belong. I can't even belong to those who don't belong! It is as if by going to Channing [my school] I joined the main stream but actually didn't and so am banished by all worlds.

There was also another thought that I had before writing this piece and I realise that I hadn't included it. That is the way in which I always have identified with minority groups and feel most comfortable within them – Labour (in 1950s and 60s), Northern, Unitarian, Amnesty, occupational therapy, humanistic psychotherapy. I couldn't have been a nurse or a teacher, for instance, because there are too many of them!'

March 12th 1999 Diary entry

The paper I refer to was entitled *Why do I try to understand cultural difference?* In it I explore my own sense of not belonging within cultural groups and discover my mother's discomfort with her own sense of her place in society. I also explored how I am affected by a desire to please my father who was a committed socialist and lover of social justice. I end the paper by saying:

'Looking back I was put in an untenably difficult position about finding my place in the world [while at boarding school amongst richer people of a higher social class and in a different part of the country]. I don't think I ever really felt that I have lived among people that I belong to. In some ways this has been an advantage. Although I feel as if I don't entirely fit anywhere I can rub along with most groups of people. Feeling accepted by a group is something I feel from time to time and when I do I feel wonderful and ridiculously grateful. In fact I probably fit as well as most people within my community of friends and in a day-to-day way I know that I do. At a deeper level I have an uneasy feeling of being odd, at odds, with those around me.'

Included in Diploma Paper for CARPP March 2000

Having written this I can see that in some ways, in wanting to understand people's response to cultural difference, I am still joining with my father to help 'the oppressed'. But maybe beneath that I am searching for my own place – somehow trying to create a world in which differences are acceptable so that I can find my own place within in it.

Saying that I am at odds with the culture may be true but I imagine it

does not compare with feeling at odds with the majority culture if you are 'black' or Asian. I therefore decided to inquire into the quality of my own contact with black people. My first thought in relation to this was the memory of a close friend at school who was Nigerian. Writing a paper about my relationship with her was an important step for me in understanding more about my own racism. I wanted to understand something about the complexity of my own cultural position in the school and in relation to my friend. Towards the end of that paper I wrote:

> 'This whole experience of my school life, including my own coming into a different cultural group, has given me a feel for what it is like to be on both ends of cultural differences and a certain knowledge that these differences left unacknowledged can be harmful to the spirit of the individual and of the larger cultural group. It blights wholehearted engagement in life, as in my timid attempts to 'fit in' and leads to the angry rejection of one group of another, just as Abiola [a Nigerian school friend] quite rightly rejected me and my friends…………Writing this paper has been a step in grounding my approach to my research. It has strengthened my realisation that I need to understand and accept my own racism, to know it more intimately, and take it fully into account. Only in so doing will I be able to recognise and face up to racism in others and relate honestly to black people I know personally and as larger cultural groups.'
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> *Included in PhD transfer paper, September 2001*

And yet the question still remains: what is my business in writing about racism? I am not black. I do not suffer from racist attitudes. Or do I? If I do, how do I? I suffer from uncomfortable feelings of shame and guilt because of the way I know that I benefit in a material sense from the way that society is arranged. Thinking I can maintain these benefits may well be short-sighted but am I prepared to give them up? They are built into the fabric of society so can I give them up even if I want to? I have to live in a violent and angry society fed by injustice because the splits that racist attitudes engender result in conflict. At some level, rather than delighting in diversity, I am afraid. These are questions and thoughts that have preoccupied me in the course of my inquiry.

Being a white person

I have restricted this thesis to an exploration of my position as a white person and psychotherapist within the constructed world where 'race' becomes a category, partly for the sake of a more containable process, but also because, in the course of this inquiry, these thoughts 'captured' me and have become my preoccupation. I discovered this focus organically, as I will show below and throughout my thesis, by becoming interested in myself as 'white'. Being challenged in my PhD supervision group to focus more on myself and rather than on 'black' people sparked off this interest.

At some points over the course of my inquiry I have tried to define the terms that I use and it was often the lack of validity in the words and phrases that have pushed my thinking further as well as my reading (see chapter 2). For instance the term 'ethnicity' seems to imply that some people 'have' an ethnicity. We do not talk about craft work carried out by white people as being 'ethnic', for example. I now know that this definition of terms is very hard to undertake without being constantly in danger of colluding with the 'racial' project that has been undertaken by white people over the last few centuries. The white, European diaspora, have declared themselves to be a superior race of 'white' people and others 'races' as inferior (Bonnett 2000). However unjust, this process has occurred and does affect global relationships. As the whole racialised environment was created by white people the terms we use in association with it like 'black', 'ethnic', 'race', or even 'west' and 'east' become illegitimate because they are imposed. The very fact that Europe and America are to the west of the globe when drawn on a flat page is because that is how Europeans represented it. Sometimes the best that can be done is to put these terms in inverted commas to indicate that it is problematic.

It is this racialising process, as well as the cultural differences which are embedded within this racialisation and its impact on me, that I wish to

explore in this thesis. The impact on me includes myself as a private individual, myself as a psychotherapist as well as the profession of psychotherapy as a whole.

In chapter 2 I look at the way in which 'white' people have colonised the globe and still do in more subtle ways by using their economic and cultural power to privilege their own agendas. I am concerned to ensure that my work as a psychotherapist is carried out with an understanding of this cultural and political context and I address this particularly in chapter 6.

The interface of race and culture

In the course of my inquiry I have become clearer about the differences between the terms 'race' and 'culture' and this has helped me to become clearer about my own 'cultural' position as distinct from myself as a 'racialised' person – one who exists as a white person within a 'racialised' environment. The term 'culture' refers to groups who share similar norms and assumptions, usually unquestioningly (Trompenaars 1993:21 - 22). These groups may be very large such as national groups or very small such as family groups. Cultural groups do not have firm edges. There are innumerable cultural groups and sub-groups throughout the world with different assumptions and attitudes embedded within their interconnected consciousness but they each have fluid, semi permeable boundaries. Particularly in recent times people can, and most often do, belong to several overlapping cultures that may hold different norms and assumptions. There may be a completely different culture at home, for instance, to that at work. This is particularly true of second generation immigrants who may live at home in one very different culture to the one in their wider lives.

The concept of 'race' is not the same as culture, as culture cuts across 'racial' differences (black people may be British, for instance), so conflating the two may imply a legitimisation of the idea of 'race'(Frankenberg 1999:19). Nevertheless, I show how cultural issues

cannot be ignored when exploring the effect of racialisation in a psychotherapy, or maybe any other, context. Relating within the racialised environment often involves a dialogue with people who do have differences in culture as I will explore particularly in chapter 3.

My own place within a racialised and cultural context

In the course of my study I became more and more clear that racism is better understood if we do not see it as individualistic, but as a culturally determined belief system which is woven into the fabric of society and is therefore manifest in the attitudes and assumptions of individuals. I need to understand my own place within this system so that I comprehend the way that racism is played out in my relationships. My path towards this understanding went through a time when the question of being English arose for me. I wondered if being 'white' or being 'English' was primary for me. I decided in the end that being 'white' was more important because much of what I wanted to say was true because I am white and not just because I am English. However I did discover a discomfort in myself about being English and that is partly what led me to write about shame and guilt. In a paper about being English I wrote:

'In pushing past my feeling that being English has a nothingness about it, what do I find? My first thought is John Major's attempt at describing a culture involving warm beer and cricket in country villages! I feel rather repelled and hurry to find something else, aware that anything that sounds self-congratulatory about being English is immediately rejected by me. I try to make a tentative step towards a cultural experience. I have a view from my window that has often been described to me as 'very English'. I can see 20 – 30 miles of rolling hills and two or three distant villages. Middle-sized fields surrounded mostly by stone walls cover the hills in various shades of green and brown. There is a wood in the middle ground of deciduous, broad-leafed trees such as oaks and ashes. Hedges surround the smaller fields in the foreground as the land falls away to a deep valley. Birds of prey and sea gulls swoop and glide below me from my elevated position whilst smaller birds fly around in front of the window. Two large Douglas firs and a Wellingtonia tree dominate the immediate foreground, reminders of a

confident Victorian/Edwardian past. This view does not allow me to forget the days when people were proud to be English and brought their plunder from foreign lands to grace their English gardens. What I can see constantly changes by the minute, hour, day, week and year as the light, the visibility, the seasons, the work of the farmers and the weather changes it. As I gaze at this view for hours each week, walk in it and put my hands in its soil, it becomes part of my inner landscape. Is my soul learning to know a sort of Englishness, one that is connected to the land?'

September 2001

I felt that in some way I had come to terms with this ambivalence but found that I felt just as pained on reading, more recently, a paper called English National Identity and the English Landscape. Having read that I wrote the following in my diary:

'I have just read a paper called British National Identity and English Landscape by David Lowenthal. (Lowenthal 1986). I wanted to capture a feeling I have about it. I am struck by the sense in the paper of the unacceptableness of English people loving their landscape – or of loving being English. I heard an African woman (can't now remember which country) on the TV saying how she loved her country and the people of it and there was no sense of shame or inappropriateness about it. In this paper (which was hard to read, not just emotionally, but because it is a very bad photocopy!) the author was saying that there was something arrogant about English people's love of the landscape. It was anyway not as timeless as we thought as it had changed over the last 2 centuries and it had become prettied up and nostalgic and made into 'heritage'. Very tidy and neat with nothing out of place as if people could not inhabit it.

I know there is truth in that but it isn't the only truth. I think a sense of inhabiting a landscape that has been walked on and worked with for generations is fine and genuinely moving. Of course all peoples of the world feel like or may feel like that about the landscape they inherit. My sense though is that it has become shameful for thinking people to identify with anything English because it invokes a self-satisfied, over confident, arrogant past (and possibly present if this paper is correct) where others were

unthinkingly subjugated and were told they ought to be thankful about it because we know best. It's as if this also has soaked into the landscape so that it becomes shameful to love it. I feel it as a deep wound.

I guess I could be savage about it too like David Lowenthal but it isn't really what I feel. I feel hurt by it. I would like to be able to love England without the shame of the British Empire being part and parcel of it. As I pointed out in my paper on Englishness, I can actually see from my window trees that were planted by people who brought them back from parts of the Empire or parts of the world they wanted to plunder like China. I would like to be able to admire their indomitable nature in an uncomplicated way but I also feel ashamed of their arrogant self-satisfaction and blinkered view.

Feb 2004

This shows how my focus on 'race' may be grounded in being white but my sense of being English is also of necessity an important part of my experience. This includes England as a major colonial power that played a large role in shaping the modern world. I explore this further in chapter 2.

When I started this work I was already aware that problems with diversity were not a problem 'out there' for 'black' people. If we are really to tackle problems with our society not properly representing its diverse communities then a good place to start is with one's own place in colluding to keep the status quo. However, it is easier to say this than to really engage with it when one is part of a cultural majority that has as much power as the white, western culture. Most of what we read and see and experience takes for granted that this cultural view-point is a base line from which others deviate. Moving from this position is like being strongly magnetised to a position and having to heave yourself away from it. The magnet is always in danger of dragging you back. The more I resist this magnet the less power it seems to have over me so that I feel that a less 'white-centric' view has become somewhat more natural to me over time though I can still feel the old magnetic pull.

Working with unconscious processes within the inquiry

In chapter 3 I look at the power that unconscious processes have in influencing underlying thoughts and attitudes. I have found within my inquiry that, if I am to really understand the assumptions that underlie my experience as a white person, I must be prepared, as far as I am able, to inquire into unconscious processes (See below for a definition of 'unconscious processes'). As I have stated above, one of the important reasons for choosing action research as a methodology was its openness to this type of inquiry. I wanted not to be afraid to explore any aspect of myself that arose as my inquiry progressed. I have been on a long journey regarding my reasons for wanting to study racial and cultural difference. The challenge to myself has been productive in uncovering the complex contradictions in concepts I have held about race.

My research process has been complex because I had to take unconscious processes into account. I have done so in order that genuine rather than superficial shifts in my own and others' awareness could take place as beliefs and assumptions are held in place unconsciously. (Adams 1996:153). .

What are unconscious processes?

My way of understanding the term 'unconscious' differs from the traditional Freudian or Jungian way. To Freud individuals 'have' a 'psyche' that is an individual rather than a relational phenomenon. He understood the unconscious to be a structure within the psyche and the psyche to consist of the Id, the Ego and the Superego. He saw the Id, and to some extent the Superego, as unconscious with the Id as being a cauldron of instinctive desires (Freud 1973:106). It therefore had to be kept in check by the Ego which mediated with reality. Unacceptable feelings and thoughts were 'pushed down' into the unconscious and would then re-emerge in various symbolic ways such as with 'slips of the tongue' (Freud 1938:103), bodily ailments or inexplicable behaviour such as forgetting appointments (Freud 1938:74; Freud 1973). Jung

suggested a 'collective unconscious' (Jung 1959:42; Samuels, Shorter et al. 1986) that we all can tap into as a source of spiritual nourishment. For Freud the unconscious was something each individual 'possessed'. For Jung it was partly personal but partly also transpersonal, maybe not found 'between' us, as the intersubjectivists would see it (Stolorow and Atwood 1992), but 'around' us.

My own understanding of the unconscious is that it exists in the spaces within and between us, as that which cannot be acknowledged or symbolised. I have found the intersubjectivists, Stolorow and Atwood, very helpful in understanding this. They suggest three types of unconscious – the *prereflective*, the *dynamic* and the *unvalidated* (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33)

The **prereflective** unconscious consists of the 'organising principles' that unconsciously 'shape and thematize a person's experience' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33). This idea 'fits' with an understanding of culture, as they suggest that our experience is shaped by these 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33) of which we are largely unconscious, and which act as a sort of 'blueprint' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:35) for life. These principles are soaked up naturally from our cultural milieux as we grow up. Learning to understand this 'blueprint' can free us from the assumptions that inevitably arise from it.

The **'dynamic unconscious'** consists of the 'experiences that were denied articulation because they were perceived to threaten needed ties' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33). In other words experiences which may seem to threaten our bonds with others – particularly primary care-gives on whom our very existence, both physical and emotional, relies. This is more like the Freudian unconscious in that it is more individual to us. The dynamic unconscious consists of what we as individuals cannot accept. It is nevertheless understood to have arisen within an intersubjective, relational context.

The **'unvalidated unconscious'** consists of the 'experiences that could not be articulated because they never evoked the requisite validating responsiveness from the surround' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33). They understand that our potential is present at birth but needs what they call 'validating responsiveness' to come into being. This idea is common in psychotherapy theorising. Winnicott, for instance, suggested that we are born with potential that is only brought out by a 'facilitating environment' (Winnicott 1965:300; Winnicott 1971:105). We are therefore unconscious of what we have never known but might still know if we are given more conducive circumstances.

Stolorow and Atwood (1992:33) say that 'all three forms of unconsciousness …….derive from specific formative *intersubjective* contexts.' (emphasis mine)

How far can this way of understanding the unconscious help us to comprehend forces that give rise to racism? The individual's unconscious process in relation to racism has been discussed by psychotherapy theorists in terms of 'splitting' and 'projection' (Kareem and Littlewood 1992; Adams 1996:132-133)[2]. This theory understands racists as people who split off unacceptable parts of the self and projecting them on to 'black' groups or individuals. As 'black' is often associated with 'darkness' and 'evil' (Adams 1996:20; Dalal 2002:153 and chapter 4), it is an easy target for this sort of projection. I am interested to discover if the intersubjectivists' way of understanding the unconscious helps us to understand whether racism is something personal to us, however intersubjectively formed, or more a matter of societal context.

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[2] The term 'splitting' is often used by Kleinian psychoanalysts (Hinshelwood 1989) and those influenced by them as Klein talked of 'schizoid' mechanisms in which unacceptable parts of the self are split off and denied. These are often then 'projected' into others rather than owned as part of the self. Klein particularly introduced the idea of the paranoid/schizoid 'position' (Klein 1986, Hinshelwood 1989)which is held by the infant in relation to the mother so that the 'good' mother (or breast) is phantasised to be different to the 'bad' mother (or breast). The complexity and anxiety of ambivalence does not then have to be experienced.

Unconscious Processes and Institutional Racism

Institutional racism is largely unconscious and is a term in current usage which maybe comes nearest to my own understanding of racism. This term is used to describe the way in which racist attitudes can run through the fabric of society in an endemic and largely unconscious way and seem to be much more intractable than personal racism. Institutional racism was famously brought to public attention in the Macpherson Report (1999) on the murder of Stephen Laurence. In 2000 I wrote a short briefing paper for the UK Council for Psychotherapy suggesting that institutional racism is as prevalent in the psychotherapy profession as it is in the police force. In it I point out that Macpherson writes about 'unwitting' and 'unintentional racism' and seems to make this interchangeable with 'unconscious racism', a term which implies that there is no consciousness of the racism. I suggested in the paper that a distinction needs to be drawn between these terms although there may well be a genuinely felt desire not to be racist in both cases. I think nevertheless that it is vital to draw a distinction here between unwitting and unconscious racism. In the briefing paper I point out that:

> '……the terms 'unconscious', 'unwitting' and 'unintentional' racism are all used but not really defined in the report and it is implied that they mean something the same. The terms 'unwitting' or 'unintentional' imply to me that there is something accidental in the behaviour. This suggests that the behaviour would stop if it were pointed out to the individual. They would become more careful in the future. If the racism is unconscious then it will not so easily be dealt with as it implies that the individual is driven by unconscious motivation and forms of thinking.'
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> *Included as an appendix in PhD/MPhil transfer paper September 2001*

I think this is important because, if racism is 'unconscious' rather than 'unwitting', it implies a different and much more difficult path to bringing about change. In fact, for me, the term 'institutional racism' implies that

the racism is embedded in the 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992) of society in an endemic way. In the course of my subsequent inquiry my growing awareness of racism led me to understand racism as intersubjective in nature (see chapter 3).

Unconscious processes and 'politically correct' behaviour

An alternative to working with unconscious processes may be to apply 'politically correct' behaviour and principles. These have grown up more or less informally and provides a convention that, if you follow 'correctly', will ensure that you will not *be seen* to behave in a prejudiced way. My own way of inquiring into conscious and unconscious awareness is an alternative to this as I *allow* thoughts and feelings which are unacceptable to this 'politically correct' code. Rather than 'correct' my behaviour I reflect upon it to discover more of its meaning. For instance, when an African client sits on the floor rather than a chair I notice that I think that he is probably not used to chairs and a sense of being 'primitive' comes to my mind. In order to be politically correct I should bat these thoughts away. Instead I wonder about both his sitting on the floor and my own response and allow them to be there without an immediate conclusion as to what it means. I sense that some unconscious assumptions or beliefs have been triggered between us but I do not rush to try to understand or correct it. I allow it to be wondered about.

Having said that, I do consider that 'politically correct' ideas have certainly been successful in changing many behaviours and attitudes. It is almost unheard of now to refer to black people as 'coloured' or 'negro', for instance or, indeed, the word 'chairman' rather than 'chairperson' or 'chair'. It provides a simple code of behaviour that is relatively easily followed and can be taught in a straightforward way. However feelings towards those one regards as having a different 'race' may be very complex and not readily dealt with by prescribing a simple formula. The reception of 'politically correct' behaviour in society has been mixed and is often derided as being absurd, for instance on its embargo on the use of the word 'black' in any circumstances. Although change is not as

easy as the use of 'politically correct' language and behaviour implies, I do also think from my personal experience that changing our habits of speech can effect a change in attitude as well.

The difficulty with this approach to racism is that it can encourage racist thoughts and feelings to go underground. I am not suggesting that the hiding of racist attitudes is necessarily unconscious. An individual may make a conscious effort not to use offensive language when in certain situations (such as at work where it is required that they do not show racist attitudes) whilst knowing quite consciously that these are not their real attitudes. This was clearly shown on a BBC programme and reported in the Guardian (Carter 2003) in which a reporter joined the police force under cover in order to show the real racism that is found there. Although the police in this case were conscious of their racism, it is my contention that the reason for their racism is, at least in part, unconscious, much of it is held within the organisanising principles (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33) of individuals and groups. In fact, the unconscious, endemic racism in the police force shows itself by the very fact of providing courses which tell policemen and women how to behave, as a change in behaviour can thus be learnt compliantly, leaving basic attitudes and assumptions untouched. If these basic attitudes are to be changed it would be necessary to open up the unconscious, implicit assumptions operating in the police culture from which racist attitudes spring. It is too easy to think that getting rid of obviously racist officers will 'get rid' of the problem, rather than see it as being embedded in the culture.

Changes to my client work through working with unconscious processes
In this inquiry I have wanted as far as possible to work with, rather than avoid, unconscious racism in myself so have sought not merely to apply politically correct behaviour and principles, but to understand it, as I showed above. I was determined that I would allow myself to think thoughts only caught at the edge of awareness to try to catch my own unconscious racism, as well as reminding myself to pay attention to the

feedback of others. As time went on, and particularly by the emphasis placed on this in the White Co-operative Inquiry group (see chapter 5), I became more and more sensitised to catching thoughts that are just on the edge of consciousness, such as seeing a black person in an expensive car and wondering how s/he could afford it. This is uncomfortable and painful work and it is easy to retreat into a 'politically correct' position. I wanted to be more honest than to retreat in that way by acknowledging, if possible, any feelings and thoughts that arise out of what I feel rather than just acknowledging the acceptable ones.

In starting this inquiry I was interested to see if my work with clients from non-white groups would improve or change in any way as a result of my research. The kind of changes which I hoped to see would indicate a greater ability in myself and my clients to talk about the difficult feelings that arise when white and black people meet, and a greater sense of trust resulting from this. I often find it hard to get beyond a client's flattering feeling that I am 'not like the others' (see Lynne Jacob's (2000) remarks in chapter 2) when I try to approach this area. In order to address this I might say, for instance, that I guess they feel they need to be polite to me as I seem to want to be helpful. It feels like delicate ground, particularly as being 'rude' to someone who is a professional and evidently trying to be helpful is 'bad manners' in most cultures. Getting beyond this is often difficult. I try to pick up on ways in which 'intersubjective disjunctions' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:103 and see chapter 6) are evident; in other words where the differences between my own and my client's 'organising principles' have led to misunderstanding. I say how I have experienced this misunderstanding in order to show that I welcome it being explored between us.

The following extract is from my notes of a client who was brought up in an Islamic country and is an example:

'We talked of what she called being 'human' rather than a 'person'. She was using the word 'person' to mean something like 'less than human'. She said

she was often treated as a 'person' here and gave an example of a dentist who didn't want to treat her. She also said that women were treated in this way in Islam. I asked how she felt treated by me. She said I treated her as 'human' and that if she felt I didn't she would immediately leave. I asked her about not feeling a sense of belonging when treated like a 'person' in England. She didn't understand my use of the word 'belong' and we tried to understand each other. I suggested this didn't feel like her 'place' and made a sort of downward gesture with my hand. She said of course she did not feel that here. I wondered if, although I seemed to treat her as a human, that she might have feelings about me being part of a country in which she didn't feel she belonged. She seemed to dismiss this. Now I am thinking about it, I may not be from her country but I am a woman. Solidarity with women seems very important to her. No doubt there are other feelings to contact here.'

Notes written on 2nd June 2004

Although this client no doubt generally felt that I was on her side, her feelings may well be more complex than that. I noticed for instance the sharpness with which she told me 'of course she didn't feel that here' (ie with me). I try to stay alert for any disjunctions between us while allowing that I may also provide her with a relatively safe place within a hostile environment. This kind of sensitivity is an example of the ways in which I have developed skills in working with my own awareness of my whiteness and the way it affects my relationship with others. As I explored in chapter 6, inquiring into my own unconscious processes has helped me to work more sensitively with clients.

Returning to questions

In order to make this kind of study, whether or not the unconscious is taken into account, I need to be aware both of questions that were in my mind at the start and the questions that are thrown up by engaging in it. Hawkins (1994) points out that questions are more important than answers. When we are questioning our mind is still open. We can be playful and creative. When we have decided on an answer the further options have often been ruled out and we are likely to feel that our

answers have to be defended. So for me questions do not so much get answered as engaged with. Sometimes a question becomes resolved for a time only to re-emerge as fresh light falls on it. Sometimes the question changes or deepens; sometimes it is just known more thoroughly.

This approach to questions is congruent with an action research approach. Action research is an *inquiry*. If we are to inquire it follows that we must question. But we inquire using *cycles* of action and reflection (Moustakis 1990:40; Marshall 2001:435). The process will be something like the following:

- On reflection a question occurs to us.
- We then act to find out more about the question
- We reflect again on our findings, thus possibly coming to some sort of an answer.
- We may, however, come up with another question.
- Even our tentative answers are questioned again
- Further action may bring out further answers or further questions and so on.

These and other questions do not arise from a *tabula rasa.* They arise from the complexity of my life experience and led me to my study as we will see below. They are woven throughout this inquiry and many layers of them will be discovered through my engagement with it. I explore my use of questions and how they change as part of my methodology in this inquiry in the next chapter.

An outline of the thesis

The thesis is in three parts. The first part is called *Philosophical and Methodological Considerations.* It has two chapters, *Ontology and Epistemology* and *Methodology and Validity.* This section explores the way in which my inquiry is underpinned by research theory and practice.

It sets out the ontology and epistemology that underlies it and the methodology that I have chosen to use as well as how I have ensured the validity of the study. I show how my methodology is congruent both with psychotherapy and with an exploration of racial diversity.

The second section is called *An Exploration of Being White.* The purpose of this section is to explore and to understand more clearly my identity as a white person. There are three chapters. The first starts an exploration of my identity as a white person/psychotherapist and is called *Being white.* In it I draw on both my own experience of having a white racial identity and the experience and thoughts of others, both known to me personally and authors of books and papers on this subject. I have not included a literature review in this thesis as a specific chapter but have reviewed various texts throughout. In this chapter these include several, mostly from the academic discipline of White Studies as well as two key texts by a psychotherapist and a counsellor, *For Whites Only* by Lynne Jacobs, (Jacobs 2000) and, *Racial Identity, White Counsellors and Therapists* by Gill Tuckwell, (Tuckwell 2002). Besides these key texts I also explore the work of various psychotherapy theorists, particularly those of the Intersubjectivist School from the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles and Dialogic Gestalt therapists as well as the work of Dalal, whose book *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialisation*, has also been particularly influential for me (Dalal 2002). His understanding of the concept of race and racism as constructed rather than real categories and his nuanced appreciation of the meaning of racism within western society are important for my study.

I also start to discover what it means to me to be white and western[3] in a diverse world, both by reflecting on my personal experience and that of various authors. In this chapter I have shown that it is very hard to challenge well-worn pathways of the mind and see my own assumptions as being just that, assumptions and not a basically correct position from

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[3] For a discussion about the term 'western' in this context see chapter 2

which others might deviate.

In the following chapter, *A co-operative inquiry into the experience of being white,* I joined with others in a co-operative inquiry to explore these same ideas. Having conducted a first person inquiry by reflecting on my own experiences and reading, I decided that I wanted to connect with others to explore these areas to see if my experiences were similar or differed to theirs, to spark off new thoughts and to bring some challenge to my ideas. I therefore sought out others to join with me in my research. This chapter is an account of how the inquiry was set up, what occurred when we met and the learning that sprang from it.

In the course of the exploration within this group I was confirmed in an idea that feelings of guilt and shame were endemic in white people regarding race. I have therefore included a chapter about this called*, An Exploration of Guilt and Shame Experienced by White People.* This chapter makes an inquiry into how far this is the case and whether feelings of guilt and/or shame may be useful in alerting us to our racism or merely self indulgent and irrelevant to those on the receiving end. This chapter draws on my own experience and also that of my co-researchers as well as others through the use of questionnaires and follow-up interviews in order that my own thinking can be stretched and challenged through creative dialogues (Chisholm 2001:329). These experiences are supplemented by my reading of various texts about guilt and shame from psychotherapy and sociology. The chapter also shows how I gradually come to understand that racisim is largely an intersubjective phenomenon, embedded within the fabric of society. This has a profound effect on how I understand guilt and shame in the context of racism as I become more interested in the way that guilt and shame are experienced in regard to institutional rather than personal racism.

In the third section of the thesis, *Being a white psychotherapist*, I bring what I have learnt about my white racial identity to bear on my practice as a psychotherapist, particularly insofar as there is a racial difference

between myself and my clients. In the first chapter of this section, *Psychotherapy within a White Hegemony,* I set out to look at how my identity as a white psychotherapist affects my practice in work with my individual clients. The chapter starts with an exploration of my own development as a psychotherapist and how an appreciation of racism in myself and in the profession gradually arose. I go on to explore how I work within a racialised environment. For this purpose I draw most extensively on my work with asylum seekers and refugees. In particular I look at the way that intersubjectivity theory is helpful to working across cultures and races, taking not only cultural and racial differences into account but also, most importantly, power differences. This chapter draws out my development as a psychotherapist including my theoretical and practical approach to the work and shows how I became aware of myself as white within this context and how I responded to this realization. This exploration includes a review of the literature that has influenced me, particularly the Intersubjectivists and I also refer to those that write on the subject of Intercultural therapy such as Sue and Sue, (1990) Lago and Thompson (1996) and Kareem and Littlewood (1992).

In the second chapter of this section, called *Performing Whiteness in Psychotherapy Organisations*, I explore my work within one particular organisation to improve its diversity as well as its understanding of race and racism. This includes work within management and with training programmes. It brings the work into a 'third person' realm (Reason and Bradbury 2001) where I try to make a difference, not only to my own practice, but also in the psychotherapy profession more generally. I explore three areas where I made initiatives for change: one, to bring more tutors and students into the organisation from black and minority ethnic groups, two, to set up an introductory course called Counselling in a Multicultural Setting and three, to set up a counselling and psychotherapy service for asylum seekers and refugees.

In the conclusion I reflect on the learning from my inquiry and the way that engagement in it has brought about changes in my own ways of

understanding myself within a racialised environment. This leads me to explore how the learning can become built into my life, my practice and that of the organisations with which I am associated.