

The Colour Question in Psychoanalysis

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Introduction

When we look at the psychoanalytic literature, we find that there is little or no reference to colour. This can mean one of two things: either colour is of no significance, or that the absence tells us something. In a Sherlock Holmes story, the clue to the criminal is given by a dog that did *not* bark in the night. In other words, the silence spoke and revealed something. This methodology, of looking at gaps and absences is well known to psychoanalysts, and is part of the repertoire in the task of engaging with the unconscious. In part then, this paper will use the psychoanalytic method to look back at psychoanalysis itself, its theory and practice, to try to hear what is being said by the silence.

The position taken in this paper is that given the critical role 'colour' plays in the fragmenting of the world, the absence of this material, speaks, and is a clue to something going on in the analytic world. To be more precise, a clue to something going on in the world in general, and the terrain of psychoanalysis being part of the world, reflects this. I should also add that the focus on the notion of 'colour' in this paper is not to be taken to mean that other differences are attributed a lesser significance, or that the dynamics found here are not also found elsewhere.

To set out the ground let us begin with a fictitious assessor, who, in describing a patient Mr. Jones, says that he is 33 and unhappily married. He adds that Mr. Jones is a successful architect. He had a strict and remote father who died a year ago, and an ineffectual mother, who died a month ago. Mr. Jones presented with anger management problems at work and at home.

Presumably, the assessor mentions these fragments of biography, because we think that these fragments have some bearing on the structure of Mr. Jones' personality, and his current state of mind. No doubt as you have listened, you have inevitably started forming some sort of an impression about Mr. Jones.

Now, if the assessor adds that Mr. Jones is black, what is the effect of this new piece of information?

Does it change your previous impressions in any way? The question is, has anything of relevance been added by mentioning his colour? What if anything is the purpose of communicating this fact? Does his blackness carry any psychological significance, or is it irrelevant to the project of psychotherapy?

Some would argue that the amount of melanin in the skin is completely irrelevant - a trivial external issue that has no bearing on weightier matters of internal splits, death instincts, Oedipal dramas, projective identifications and so on. They might go on to say that it is of no more or less significance than, say, whether the person has hair on their arms or not. But now, we may challenge this view. The challenge can take two broad forms.

One challenge prioritises the internal world, and the *particular* history of this patient. Crudely, we could say that the significance of the hair will be dependent on which parts of the internal drama are being *projected into* the hair by the patient. Thus the significance of

the hair lies in its weight and value as a *psychological fact*. In other words, the hair might or might not have relevance to this particular person, depending on their *particular* history and the current state of their internal world.

The other challenge is launched from the external world by thinking of the hair as a *social fact*. From this vantage point, the significance of the hair for the patient, is determined by the history, meaning and value allocated to hair by the socio-cultural context. Which in turn has been internalised by the patient. Crudely, this view says that the number of possible reactions available to the patient are severely constrained by the context.

There are two further things of importance to be noted as an outcome of the social challenge: First, because the term 'hair' is thought of as a social fact, then the observer/therapist, who is also embedded in the context, will *inevitably share* some of the responses of the patient. There won't be any choice in this. Second, the relationship that any person will have to the social fact, hair, will be dependant on *where* they are located within the context. In other words the difference will be partly informed by the social positioning of the protagonists. For example, in the contemporary era, hairy arms will tend to be more problematic for women than for men.

This intermeshing of the shared and the differentiated is critical to the theme of this paper. What we have to tease out is which bits are similar, and which bits are different, when, why and so on.

In describing these two challenges, I have delineated two positions, one emphasising introjection, the other projection. If taken on their own, neither of these positions hold water. The problem with a model based exclusively on projection is that it presupposes a solipsistic existence in an ideological vacuum, and the problem with a model based exclusively on introjection is that it presupposes no internal autonomy or volition.

It is now apparent that I have come a roundabout route to considering the term 'psychoanalysis' in the title. A briefer way would have been to say - psychoanalysis - which psychoanalysis? As is well known, depending on the particular theory, there are vastly differing weights and meanings given to internal and external realities in the developmental process. And although it is not my intention to get into the differences within the theories here, it is necessary to acknowledge their existence, and to note that this will impact on the subject of this paper.

For our purposes, the importance of the question remains - how is the significance of colour to be understood, is it a psychological category, or a social category, or something else all together. And what ever it is, how will it impact on the psychoanalytic project?

In discussing 'colour' we come across a surprising anomaly: When we speak of black and white people, we are patently not referring to any chromatic category. Black people are not actually coloured black, any more than white people are actually coloured white. An added difficulty, is that the terms 'black' and 'white' are often implicitly or explicitly conflated with the notion of race. And races too do not exist as any objective category. Something mysterious is going on, two sets of things that do not exist that somehow give substance to each other.

One way into the mystery is to ask questions that are more fundamental: how is it that particular groups of people get categorised as black and white? Who has done the categorisation? Why? And so on.

I shall now begin the main body of the paper, in which I will begin to engage with these questions.

Does Colour explain anything?

From the psychoanalytic perspective, broadly, there are three vantage points. The first is that skin colour explains nothing. This view says that colour is a neutral description of an objective fact, and a trivial and irrelevant fact at that. We have already looked at this briefly and will return to it later. The second view says that skin colour explains something about the *intra-personal* world, and the third view says that skin colour explains something about the *inter-personal* world. To take the last two in turn.

Colour as explanation for what happens in the internal world.

The explanations grouped together in this section are the ones that we would recognise as overtly racist - arguing that a person behaves, thinks or feels in particular ways, *because* of his skin colour, or alleged 'race'. Here, skin colour is used as a marker, as an external sign of an imagined internal situation. In other words, a whole set of attributes are pulled and kept together through the notion of 'blackness' and 'whiteness'. In this peculiar way of thinking, the linkages between negativities and blackness, and positivities and whiteness, are transformed into a cause-and-effect relationship. Colour somehow, is taken to cause a variety of effects. Thus it is said that blacks are stupid, lazy or criminal, *because* they are black, and so on.

On the whole, psychoanalytic thinkers have not taken this route, of overtly using colour to explain the psyche. Whilst one might want to distance oneself from this kind of view, or indeed any overt racism, I think that things are more complicated. And I think that they are complicated by particular unconscious associations that reside in all of us. I shall come back to this shortly.

Colour as explanation for what happens in the interpersonal world.

This is where we will be able to locate the majority of psychoanalytic thinkers. Whilst they have had nothing to say directly on the issue of colour, they have however all had something to say about the effects of 'difference' in general. They have used 'differences' for explanations for things that go on *between* people, rather than *inside* people. In particular they have used notions of difference to explain the apparently inevitable and 'naturally' occurring antipathy between groups of people¹. We now find ourselves embroiled in the various disputes concerning the aetiology and meanings of aggression and hatred.

In what follows I will try to delineate some of the theoretical positions, and from each try to extrapolate certain things about the effects of colour as a difference. But it should be stressed, that the issues about colour are extrapolations, and not stated in the theories themselves.

¹ The main exception to this is gender difference. Here a particular biology is said to be causative of particular internal structures and states. But that is a whole other subject, which cannot be pursued here.

As it so often happens, we find that most of what is to be said is said already in Freud.

Freud.

Freud described two separate theories, but never explicitly distinguished between them. In one theory difference is *used* to manage hatred, and in the other theory difference is said to *cause* hatred. In fact one is a theory of difference, and the other is a theory of aggression and hatred. The two are usually conflated.

Freud's first theory is his theory of aggression and is grounded in the instincts. This theory describes how difference is *used* in the service of aggression and hatred. He says: "Every emotional relationship...contains a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility, which only escapes perception as a result of repression..." (Freud 1921:101). Having repressed the hostility, which is instinctual, the second step follows, which is projection. "The advantage which a comparatively small cultural group offers of allowing this instinct an outlet in the form of hostility against intruders is not to be despised. It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness." (Freud 1921:114).

One can see then that in this theory, the Other is *used* as a container in which to deposit hatred, but the hatred itself is instinctual and primary. However, the theory does not say why race, culture or colour as a difference, should be any more prone to be used as a depository of aggression than other sorts of differences. One could even go so far as to say that it is the *need* to get rid of the aggression that *activates* a difference, any difference. After all, Freud does say that the object of an instinct is the most variable thing about it - any difference will do, any port in a storm. But the evidence does not bear this out. It appears that some differences are particularly prone to be used in this way.

Freud appears to answer the question of why race or colour should be prone to activating hatred with his second theory. This is his theory of difference, in which difference *causes* hatred and is encapsulated under the rubric - 'The Narcissism of Minor Differences'. But this is a theoretical sleight of hand. These are two different types of theories, and logically, one cannot be used to substantiate the other. But let us continue and describe the second theory.

Here he argued that it was when differences were minor, that they were at their most virulent. "Every time two families become connected by a marriage, each of them thinks itself superior to.. the other. Of two neighbouring towns each is the others most jealous rival.. Closely related races keep one another at arms length; the South German cannot endure the North German, the Englishman casts every kind of aspersion upon the Scot, the Spaniard despises the Portuguese." (Freud 1921:101)

According to him, these minor differences affronted the self preservative instinct. The self preservative instinct was said to experience something different from itself, as a criticism of itself. Thus it attacked and felt hostile to the thing that was different.

Next, the argument goes, if minor differences cause such strong feelings, then major differences must cause even stronger feelings: "...when men come together in larger units..... We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and *the white races for the coloured.*" (Freud 1921:101;italics added)

Now, there is a fundamental flaw in the argument, as he sets it out. He begins by saying that hostility is *inversely proportional* to difference, i.e. that the smaller the difference the greater the hostility. But he then goes on to reverse this and argue the opposite, saying that if minor differences cause such ructions, we are not to be surprised that bigger differences causes even more ructions. Now, hostility is made *directly proportional* to difference. Freud has begun with a theory of Minor Differences, and ended in a theory of Major Differences.

Freud clearly cannot have it both ways, as the two theories of difference are mutually exclusive. This can be clearly seen if we represent them in a pseudo-algebra:

The theory of Minor Differences, where hostility is said to be *inversely* proportional to difference, would look like this:

$$\text{Amount of Hostility} \propto \frac{1}{\text{Amount of Difference}}$$

And the theory of Major Differences, where hostility is said to be *directly* proportional to difference, would look like this:

$$\text{Amount of Hostility} = \propto \frac{\text{Amount of Difference}}{1}$$

□

If one were to ignore this logical anomaly, then one could say that this second theory does suggest reasons why colour, as a very visible difference, is an inevitable marker for hostility. However, the theory as it stands, is flawed. We can make some impression on this logical impasse by drawing on Fairbairn next.

Fairbairn

Fairbairn derives hatred very differently from Freud and Klein. For him, although aggression is endogenous, it is secondary to libido in that its appearance is always a consequence of frustration. Aggression is activated when libidinalised object-relations are disrupted in some way (Fairbairn 1944). Now although the genesis of Fairbairnian aggression is very different from that of Freud's, once it comes to exist in the Fairbairnian schema, then Fairbairn uses the same mechanism as Freud's first theory to manage the aggression. However there are an important and helpful distinctions between their views.

Fairbairn says that libido helps cohere a group, whilst aggression tends to fragment it. Fairbairn agrees with Freud that to protect itself from it's own aggression, the 'us' group projects the aggression outside itself into the 'them' group. This idea, that aggression has to be projected outside the 'us' group bound together by libido, allows us to invent an aphorism which encapsulates the spirit of Fairbairnian theory:

"Racism begins where libido ends".

This general formula allows us to resolve the anomaly between the Freudian theories of Major and Minor Differences. In order to do this we have to consider what *level* the 'us' group is operating at, family, club, nation and so on (Fairbairn 1935).

To recapitulate, the primary need is to get rid of the aggression, so that a 'we' can exist. A difference is activated to create a 'not-we' space in which the aggression may be deposited. It would follow then that if the 'we' is a family, then the aggression would be deposited in

another equivalent structure, a 'them' family. If the 'us' were operating at a different level, say nation, then the aggression would need to be deposited in another nation.

What is being argued here is that the *amount of difference* is irrelevant in itself. What is relevant is the level that the group is identifying itself at, and it is this that will determine the type of difference that will be made relevant and thus activated – a minor difference between neighbours, or a major difference between nations. To use Fairbairnian language, difference is a *technique* and not a cause.

We can see then that Freud's theory of Minor and Major differences can be thought of as special cases of the more general theory, the theory of primary aggression. From this it would follow that to examine the complexities of colour racism, one will need to ask new sorts of questions, such as: why, at this time, is this difference, colour, being activated to create a 'them'?

Klein

Klein's theory is one of managing and modifying the death instinct. Greatly simplifying matters, her theory of the death instinct is in two parts. One part echoes Freud's first theory, the theory of aggression in which difference is used to contain destructive forces. Here, because the death instinct is said to be so dangerous to the self, it is split off and projected into other territories - both internal and external. There follows from this a fear of attack from the receptacle of the death instinct - the object into which the death instinct has been projected.

The other part says that the death instinct attacks and hates for no other reason, apart from by virtue of its nature - rather like a wild vicious animal. This is her theory of primary hate. In this part of her theory the death instinct is constantly on a search and destroy mission. Anything and everything is potentially hated and attacked .

Like Freud, her theory does not offer explanation of why objects that look different should be particularly used for projection.

In her early writings, Klein formulated another theory of hatred, by suggesting that hatred of the Other was an inevitable outcome of the epistemophilic instinct. She says that the infant is first assaulted by sexual curiosity at a time when it has no language in which to either formulate the curiosity into questions, nor does it have the language to understand any answers. Klein says that this is experienced as a terrible situation and leads to "an extraordinary amount of hate" and also to the "*hatred of those who speak a different tongue.*" (Klein 1928:188; italics added). The point bears repeating: Klein is saying that a hatred of the foreigner, is an inevitable outcome of the timing of the genesis of the Oedipus complex. Whilst Klein is not saying that foreignness *causes* hatred, she *is* saying that this particular difference, foreignness, is hated *because* it reminds one of a terrible time, a time before language, and not because of foreignness itself.

A point needs to be stressed: In this theory, the difference that is hated is not one of sight but one of sound. If this idea were right then one would expect, black Britons born here, speaking the English tongue not to be the recipients of racist hatred. The evidence does not bear this idea out in any straightforward way. The situation is very complex and one cannot engage in any simple mapping of language and accents onto hatred. Of course language and the way it is spoken, is critical to social positioning. For example, it would appear that black Britons speaking 'Queen's English' are much more likely to appear on the BBC, than those who speak in regional accents, and so forth. Until recently, this was very true of whites as

well. The main point being made here is that hatred of the foreigner is due to much more than the fact that they might or might not speak a different tongue.

Winnicott

Winnicott suggests that paranoia is an inevitable outcome of the formation of the Self - which he calls the first group. He then extends this idea to the formation of groups in general. "A group is an I AM achievement, and it is a dangerous achievement, [because] the repudiated external world comes back at the new phenomenon and attacks from all quarters and in every conceivable way." (Winnicott 1965:149)

The next question we have to ask is what attributes are included within the I AM, 'the group'? What are the bits included in the 'I', or to be more accurate, the 'We'?

What ever the attributes, call them 'X', designated to be part of the 'Us', Winnicott would say that the group will inevitably fear attack from those designated Not-X. Thus if 'white' is a significant designator of the 'Us', then the group will fear attack from those designated as Not-White, and perhaps attack in turn, or even, instead.

We are led then to a deeper question: Why make 'white' a designator of the 'Us'? Is it a 'natural' grouping? I would say not. It is no more natural than vegetarian or Catholic or psychoanalyst or train spotter. The groupings are contingent, which means that they are informed by the socio-historical context. I would say that the groupings are pragmatic², and are then rationalised as natural and biological. To understand the contextualisation we have to enter the domain of history, which will be done a little later.

The important point to be underlined from this reading of Winnicott, is that the *name* taken on by a group to define itself, will inform the *name* of what the group fears, and perhaps what the group attacks.

Having looked at how colour is used as explanation, I will now move onto consider some of the unconscious dynamics involved in the next section - which I have called:

Colour as Evocation.

Whilst some, and perhaps all, the people in this room, and I include myself, would properly be appalled to be associated with le Penn, The British Movement and other overtly racist groups, I would like to argue that things are not that straightforward - nor that comfortable. I would like to put forward the hypothesis that the more explicit racist linkages do in fact exist in some way, *in all of us* - but that they are repressed.

But where is my evidence?

Well, the fact that the linkages are repressed means that one will not find any direct evidence for it. Because, as for any unconscious material, the evidence will be found in the slips and associations of speech and behaviour. Evidence will be found in the seemingly innocent.

² By pragmatic I mean that the choices must be heavily informed by the material conditions, access to resources, the locus of power, and so on.

Let me reformulate the proposition: In psychoanalysis, as in any discipline, there are two discourses, the formal and the informal. Whilst colour and race are absent from the formal discourse, they reveal themselves in the informal discourse. I suggest that if one subjects the formal discourse to scrutiny, then one will catch glimpses of the informal discourse. And by informal discourse, I include such things as conversations over coffee, and private fleeting thoughts one might have when (say) cut up by a black driver in a BMW.

But let me give you an example from a talk some years ago on 'containing violence in institutions'. The speaker, a well respected professional, began the talk: "I am going to talk about the most violent patient I ever had to deal with. He was West Indian."

On one level this is innocent speech. On another level it reveals something about the unconscious of the speaker, an unconscious linkage between violence and West Indianness. No doubt the speaker would be horrified to have this attributed to him. He might reply that all he is saying is that this violent man, happens to be West Indian, and that he is not making or implying any causative link between the two.

Now, if the psychoanalytic method has taught us one thing, it is that nothing is ever innocent. I would thus understand the speaker's defence, as denial and resistance. And this is very understandable, after all things are repressed in all of us precisely because they are difficult to bear, and they are difficult to bear because they contain something frightening or unsavoury. But the speaker might protest that this is not so and repeat Freud's famous line - 'sometimes a cigar is just a cigar'. But this cannot help him much - because the speaker is no more privileged to know his unconscious any more than anyone else, black or white.

I would argue that the second sentence "He was West Indian" was an unconscious causative association to the first one "... the most violent patient I ever had to deal with".

Let me give another example, this time the first sentence from an actual psychiatric assessment, prior to a person beginning a psychotherapy: "A dark Indian man, very sweaty hands, submissive and anxious, but likeable, and seems to have certain areas of personality strength".

Now, this too can no doubt be taken as merely descriptive. Well of course it *is* descriptive, the question is what is being described? Is it just something physical, like 'tall' or 'thin'? Why do we say such things? Let us take 'tall man' as opposed to 'small man'. Each phrase *evokes* a different response in each of us - whatever they are. Similarly, to say 'dark Indian', or 'light Indian' is evocative - of something...

But what does evocative mean? It means that it is empathetically stirring up in the listener, particular sets of images and feelings about the described person. Something that is implicitly, that is unconsciously taken in and understood. This then is the other element of any communication - the communication of a feeling-picture, of the emotions evoked by the described object.

Let us return to the sentence, and ask: what is the significance of 'dark' in a psychiatric assessment? To my mind the word 'dark' does indeed describe something, but it is not just to do with the patient, it is also to do with the assessor; it gives us a glimpse into the unconscious mind of the assessor. The elements of the sentence try to communicate something of the feeling sense the assessor had of the interviewee, "...very sweaty hands, submissive and anxious, but likeable...". The other part "The dark Indian..." contextualises the adjectives, leading one to unconsciously hear the person described as: a sycophantic, obsequious, greasy oriental, but a likeable one.

So far I have said that whilst the word dark indicates something about the external of the interviewee, it also indicates something about the internal of the assessor. The first is explicit, and perhaps trivial, and the second is implicit but critical. Critical because it subliminally informs one's attitude towards this patient. I would argue that what makes the whole thing insidious, is that the words trigger off similar associations in the unconscious of the listener, in all of us, *whatever the colour, and whatever the conscious intentions.*

Let us complicate the matter further by re-asking the question slightly differently: "Why did the word 'dark' come into the assessor's mind?" In other words, what is the patient's unconscious contribution to this? If we answer from within the territory of transference and countertransference, then we are led to say that the word 'dark' is also embedded in the patient, and the appearance of the word dark in the assessor's mind is some sort of a communication from the patient.

We are now in dangerous territory, the danger being the possibility that everything is put into the analyst at this point, or that everything is put into the patient. We are now at the heart of the issue, the intermeshing of similarity and difference, the struggle to think

As you can see things are getting increasingly sticky. It is often the case that in discussions of this particular subject, things get acrimonious very quickly. Some might already have taken umbrage at my comment that all are affected, whatever their colour - that the patient is implicated in some way. Others might have taken umbrage at my suggestion that they harbour unconscious but virulent associations with blackness. It is very interesting to me that one can think analytically and allow for feelings of patricide, matricide, hate, lust, fecal wishes and so on, but in the arena of colour racism things get stuck. Let us spend some time now thinking about why in this subject, things become heated so quickly, often leading to an impasse.

The Difficulties in Discussing the Area of Colour and Racism.

The Fence

First: It seems to me that when we are discussing a patient, or some notion like the instincts, then what is happening is that we are joined together as fellow professional observers, and we are all together looking at the same other thing. We might have different opinions about what it is we see, and these differences might be heated, but these differences are expressed from within a field of sameness. The critical word here is WE. *We* are all on one side of the fence, looking together at something on the other side of the fence, something *Not-We*.

When it comes to the issue of colour, then the language changes subtly but dramatically, from 'We', to 'Me' and 'You'. Two things follow from this. Firstly, no longer is it a 'We' looking at something 'Not-We'. Instead, 'I' am looking at 'You', and 'You' are looking at 'Me'. We are no longer joined - we are on opposite sides of the fence. The structure of the situation has of itself changed; the structure of the situation has become adversarial. Here we can find echoes of each of the analytic theories described above.

Secondly, because the structure of the situation is changed, there comes about a dispute and struggle as to which side of the fence is to be the *object* of scrutiny, and which side of the fence is the *subject*, initiating the scrutiny, the white or the black.

History tells us that when it comes to black and white, then it has been the white European eye that has held the upper hand, that has been used to being the subject, the one that looks, the one that pronounces. When the situation is potentially reversed, as here, then the white is made the object of scrutiny. To put it kindly, being unused to this situation, it becomes affronted and frightened.

The affront is something to do with Narcissism.

The fright is something to do with repression.

The two are linked, but in order to expose the link we have to move terrains, into history and etymology.

History and Etymology.

Things are repressed because they are loaded up with difficult things. It is self evident and uncontentious to say that the notion of blackness is loaded up with negative connotations. But how has this come about?

Some argue that the associations are natural and so inevitable. However, if one takes a historical perspective on the meanings of the words black and white, one discovers something surprising; which is just *how* late the negative associations with black actually are, in other words they are not at all 'natural'.

For example, in the English language the use of 'black' as a synonym for dark first occurred in the 14th Century³. It was at a similar time the association of black with dirt began. The word black was linked with death in the 15th C. Blackness became associated with immorality and evil in the 16th C. It was not until the 18th C that the term was associated with anger, and not linked to sorrow until the 19th C. From the 17th C the word black starts becoming racialised, that is being used as a noun, and gets increasingly fixed, glued as it were, to particular groups of people. There is a similar but less marked trend for the uses of 'white' over a similar period, but this time in the positive direction.

By the time the words 'black' and 'white' start being used as nouns for types of people, they have already been loaded up with all the different sorts of associations they are to bear. As soon as these words are used on people-as-a-type, they immediately tar the group with the brush loaded with all its previous meanings. Thus the naming of peoples as black, is part of the larger continuum of events, it is an ideological and emotional act and not just a descriptive one.

From the evidence regarding the history of the words black and white, it would seem that one can delineate two historical periods of significance, one beginning around the 12th C and the other around the 16th C. In each of these periods there begins an explosion of negative meanings associated with blackness, and to a lesser extent positive associations with whiteness. Each of these dates signal the beginnings of epochs which are critical in the formation of the sense of European Identity. The first epoch, beginning in the 12th C., was the time of the Crusades. These resulted in Europe starting to define itself as Christian and white, in contradistinction to the pagan, the black. The sixteenth century, with the beginnings of imperialism, gave another dramatic impetus to the reinforcement of the sense of a European identity, predicated in part on the notion of 'whiteness'.

³ The dates are those cited by the Oxford English Dictionary, for the first known written examples of the meanings.

Narcissism and Repression

As soon as we use the word ‘identity’ then we find ourselves in the region of Narcissism. Narcissism is a huge topic, and a complex one. At its simplest level it is to do with the sense of Self, of identity, of self worth. When the self image is over inflated, then it is precarious. Clearly, Europe had to inflate its sense of Self, to give itself psychological and *moral permission* to conduct the imperial and colonial adventure. The ways in which this was done is well known, and we need not rehearse it all here again. Suffice it to say that Europeans elevated and inflated themselves, whilst denigrating and deflating the non-European. A crucial signifier used in the division of the world into European and non-European was, and is, colour. To use Winnicottian language, the formation of a sense of Self is predicated on the distribution of the universe into the sets ‘Me’ and ‘Not-Me’. Things that get incorporated into the European ‘Me’ get whitened, and the things excluded, get blackened. A prime example of this is the figure of Jesus Christ. He was born a Semite, a Jew, an Arab, but in the European psyche, he is *made* white and golden.

What I am suggesting here, is not just that a difference is *activated* to give a sense of ‘Us’, but that difference is actually *created*, or at least *hallucinated* to give an *illusory* sense of ‘Us’.

For example, on the largest land mass in the world, *how* was it decided where Europe ended and Asia began? *Who* decided it?

An ‘Us’ so defined, is always precarious, because it constantly threatens to disintegrate. To my mind, this is one reason why it is so hard to engage in this subject, because to engage in it, is to threaten something at the core - identity, the sense of self.

Winnicott again: “We can share a respect for *illusory experience*, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings. Yet it is a hall mark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not their own.” (Winnicott 1951:231; italics added)

The narcissistic vision of European superiority is predicated on the *splitting* off of innumerable negativities, which as the formula goes, are then *repressed* and *projected* out. The recipients of this projection, the coloured, are then denigrated and kept at bay.

To recapitulate the argument: the ‘colours’ black and white, are not about colours *per se*, and neither are they just about differences. ‘White’ is about that which has been retained within the Narcissistic vision of European identity, and ‘black’ is about that which has been split off from the collective European psyche, repressed and banished.

The Psychoanalytic Forum.

Returning to the psychoanalytic forum, if the arguments put before you so far are even partly correct, then we can see that the absence of colour from the formal psychoanalytic discourse is not just because of irrelevancy, but because it is unconsciously experienced as dangerous. The repressed is always experienced as threatening, as it always threatens to express itself, to make itself known. Psychoanalytically, we can say that the notion of ‘black’ links the external repudiated object with the internal repressed object. The fear and the problem is experienced as coming from without, but in fact it is within. I would say then that it is the fact that the whole subject of colour is so loaded with hidden and dangerous

meaning, threatening as it does to subvert the European sense of self, that makes it emotionally problematic to engage in the topic, and so is resisted with a ferocity or denied altogether.

Returning to the question, why is it that psychoanalysis is able to talk about other horrific themes like incest, patricide, anal universes, and so on? One can speculate that these subjects are able to emerge in analyses, because to some degree analysts have dealt with them themselves, in their own analyses. If the meanings of colour, as I have expressed them, are unanalysed in the analyst, then surely the analyst, being human, will resist knowing about it. Freud says: “No analyst goes further than his own complexes and internal resistances permit” (Freud 1910:145). The material will be felt to be too hot to handle, threatening the internal status quo of analyst and analysand.

I think what makes the situation difficult for all of us, is that we are all in the same predicament, or if not the same, at least a similar predicament. What I mean by this is that we are all embedded within the socio-historic context, and none of us is privileged to stand outside it. And the context that is relevant to the theme of this paper, is the history, meaning and internalisation of black and white.

The way forward must lie in the task of mutual examination and understanding. Understanding frees us somewhat from automatic defensive reactions. But this task is difficult, and things often get stuck precisely here. I will end this paper by examining the dynamics of one defensive mechanism that makes for stuckness.

One defensive mechanism.

This mechanism is grounded in the nature of evidence. Broadly, evidence comes in two forms, statistical and anecdotal. However, both sorts of evidence can be used to deny the general existence of racist phenomena; to explain:

When there is a particular piece of overt racism, then it can be dismissed as an anomaly, a one-off, something that is an aberration. Thus the evidence is named ‘anecdotal’. The fact that this evidence is not statistical is used to render it meaningless, precisely because, it is said, that this evidence being one-off is not part of a pattern, and therefore says nothing apart from itself. This mechanism may be employed to dismiss the two sentences I looked at earlier in the paper.

On the other hand when statistical evidence is marshalled to demonstrate that an institution is (say) favouring group A over group B, then this time anecdotal evidence is used to undermine the statistics. It is in the nature of statistical evidence, that some of the body of evidence will be contrary to the conclusion. In other words the fact that there are (say) some green apples in basket, does not invalidate the statistical truth that most of the apples in this basket are red. Something similar happens when the statistics show that (say) blacks get fewer jobs than whites in a particular sector. Now, the fact that some blacks *do* have those sorts of jobs is used to individualise and particularise the issue. The issue is reframed as this sort of question: If Joe, who is black, got that sort of job, then what is wrong with Harry, Jim and Jack (who are also black) that they didn’t get those jobs. The location of the problem is shifted from that of institutional dynamics to personal psychopathology, from the outside to the inside.

It is part of the complexity of racism, that things have different meanings depending on which side of the fence they occur. An individual racist act on the ‘white’ side of the fence can be dismissed as an anomaly. However, when there is an incident in which a black is the

perpetrator of a crime, then this particular piece of anecdotal evidence, becomes converted in the mind into a piece of statistical evidence. Because one black is criminal, makes all blacks criminals. This is a kind of primary process thinking.

In conclusion

I have argued that the absence of colour from psychoanalytic theory and practice says something about how the 'colours' 'black and 'white' are linked to the formation and maintenance of European identity. I have tried to elaborate these linkages in the body of the paper. I have also tried to expose some of the linkages between the notions of difference and aggression.

It is true that in this paper I have looked primarily at the white side of the fence. This is because clearly that is where the genesis of psychoanalysis took place, in Europe, and is not to imply that there is nothing to be looked at on the other side. Europe did not and does not exist in a vacuum. I hope that I have made it clear that in looking at this side in this paper, I am not making some simplistic and puerile point, saying that psychoanalysis is white, and so bad. I am saying that the body of psychoanalysis has an unconscious, one element of which is located in the notion of 'colour', and this by its nature is hidden. I am also trying to say that to expose this unconscious is a difficult and frightening process for all concerned, and the difficulties should be recognised for what they are.

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