Introduction

A vintner from New Zealand described his first impressions of Britain and France on a recent visit. He said of the people he met on either side of the English Channel: 'I don't know why they fought so much with each other, because to me, they look so similar; to me they are the same people'.

It struck me that the vintner was voicing prevalent beliefs not only about the causes of hatreds between groups of people, but also their solution: hatred is caused by difference, and if one gets rid of, or attends to the difference in some way then harmony is more likely to follow. But if we note two obvious things: that people who are 'the same' are not free of hatreds and violences to each other, and that people who are 'the same' in some respect are also 'different' in others, we can see straightaway that things are more complicated than first impressions suggest.

This work then, is about one such difference and its consequences: race and racism. Even more specifically, it is about the racism that is organized via another difference: the notions of black and white. Although I will primarily use the British context to build my arguments, the ideas are of relevance to other territories.

In my experience, the mere articulation of the intention to look at the racism between white and black is likely to set off a series of protests, and so I am obliged to attend to these immediately, but briefly, as more substantive discussions on these subjects are developed as the book proceeds. There are several types of protest that tend to come

up, all of which do have a validity. The first is a claim of 'unfair'; if racism is indeed ubiquitous, then all people are prone to it, and so why focus on the racism of the white to the black? I agree that the capacity for racism is not the sole privilege of the white or 'The West', however, at this moment in historical time not only do the notions of black and white dominate contemporary dynamics of racism in Britain, the structure of power relations are such that blacks have the larger burden to bear in regard to racism and tend to be the primary recipients of the negative consequences of racism.

The second challenge to the validity of this project comes in the form of reminding us that hatred and violences are not just organized around this particular difference – of black and white – but around many others, religion, class, gender, and so on. In response I would say that the focus on colour racism is not to imply that it is more basic than, or has any particular privilege over and above other racisms (say anti-Semitism) or other discriminations (gender, class); but having said that, it is bound to have its own particularities and peculiarities. However, the attempt to broaden the field of view does not just serve the manifest purpose of making the investigation more universal, it also serves at times the more disguised function of avoiding looking in sharp focus at a particular aspect of the larger picture. In part this occurs because of the difficult emotions stirred up by the subject, and so one is prone to diluting the specifics of the situation by dissolving it in a larger generalized sea. But having said that the central focus of the book is racism, the work does in fact proceed by building a general theory of difference which is then applied to the territory of 'race'.

But why the focus on colour-racism at all? There are two answers here, one subjective and personal and the other a little more objective. The personal reason comes out of the experience of me, a self evidently 'coloured' person, living in London where I have been one of the dark people. But my first twelve years I spent in India, where as a Parsee I was perceived as one of the lighter complexioned people. As a lighter person I was definitely someone to be looked up to and privileged in various ways. In contrast, *aspects* of the experience of being a 'darky' in Britain was at times of *feeling* fearful and anxious, but not for reasons that could always be clearly seen and stated. This then gives rise to questions of where these feelings came from – what was the 'cause'? There are two crude answers: either inside me – my psychopathology, or outside me – the ills and evils of society. This work offers a more complex answer, one that does simplistically reduce things to either the *purely* psychological, or *purely* sociological. But in order to do this I will be forced to engage at a deeper level with the relationship of psychology to sociology. The sociologist of knowledge, Norbert Elias, has already begun this task, and so I will make much use of him.

The more objective reason is born out of noticing just how powerful, pervasive and apparently universal were the notions of black and white. It was not just the well known fact that white was attached to positive things and black to negative, but also the sheer variety and range of things that these terms were attached to: peoples, emotions, behaviours, thoughts, cultural artefacts and so on. We might surmise (although I will dispute this shortly) that objects and people get called black and white because this is their actual colour; but how is it that things that have can have no colour – the emotions for example – get to be called and *experienced* as black and white? How and why has this come about? The 'common sense' answers are

suggestions of the ilk that it is natural to feel frightened of the dark, and it is

unfortunately the case that this fear slips over and gets attached to black people and

black things. This kind of answer runs several things together. It takes for granted

'black' as a naturally occurring name of a type of people, and it uses this to 'explain'

the presence of negative feelings in some other person. But now, if we make the rather

obvious observation that people are not literally in any chromatic sense black or white,

then clearly whatever is going on, it is not at all straightforward and natural.

Having said something about 'colour' let me now say something about the other term:

racism. Racism can be thought of in several ways – overt *acts* of violence perpetrated

on those of another group; *feelings* of fear, hatred or aversion felt towards members of

another group; and finally, the invisible workings of society that somehow manage to

make it difficult for members of particular groups to participate in the centre and

partake of the resources generally available.

These descriptions of the manifestations of racism have skipped over two difficulties.

First, as descriptions they are so general, they say nothing directly about racism. The

second connected difficulty is that these descriptions take for granted the existence of

the very idea of race. Thus, it is supposed that race is an objective description of

groups of people, and racism consists of the nasty things perpetrated by one group

onto the other.

If for the moment we assume that this is right, then we have a preliminary descriptive

frame. First, there is the idea of race; this is a *cognitive* category – a way of dividing

and classifying the world. Second, there are the oppressive ways that people of one race treat those of another; this is a description at the level of the *political*. The third element occurs in the domain of the *affects* – the emotions and feelings that are experienced about ones own race as well towards those of other races. The first of these taken up by psychologists and is grounded in mental functioning, the second by social theorists who emphasize the external world, and the third by the psychoanalysts who emphasize the internal world. Of these three territories, my primary emphasis will be on the last of these, the analytic, but the work will inevitably draw in the other two as each will be found to interpenetrate the other.

Chapter one consists of a critical exploration of the notion of race. I do this in several ways: first, by tracing the history of the notion of race and contrasting it with notions of culture and ethnicity; and second, by detailing its appearance in religious, scientific and political discourses, and delineating the anomalies thrown up by this engagement. What becomes clear very quickly, is that race has little meaning outside the arena of racism and so the two cannot be differentiated. In other words, the preliminary descriptive frame was found wanting. This preparatory work is used to formulate working definitions of racism. This is followed by a discussion on racism, but not in any great depth, because in a sense the whole book *is* this discussion.

I should now explain why I primarily use psychoanalysis and group analysis to examine racism. In the main this is because my interests and preoccupations are stirred by my occupation – a psychotherapist and group analyst practising analytic

psychotherapy in a metropolitan British context: a 'black' therapist working with 'black' and 'white' patients.[1]

Having said this, clearly it is not possible to 'use' psychoanalysis *per se* as the investigative tool, as psychoanalysis is not a single body but a variety of disparate theories with conflicting world views, metapsychologies and clinical techniques. I simplified the territory by limiting myself to a study of the British schools of psychoanalysis. I took these to be Freud, Klein, Fairbairn and Winnicott. The reasoning behind limiting myself to this list was that these are the main psychoanalytic schools that are currently of clinical import in Britain. An exception to this is the work of Bowlby and attachment theory; I left this out partly in order to circumscribe the study, but also because many of the relevant points that occur there are already found in Fairbairn. I have also left out the ego psychology schools that flourish in the United States of America, as well as the theories of Lacan that prosper in the 'Latin' countries. Although one reason for leaving out the 'continentals' and the 'Latins' is in order to circumscribe the study, the other is that these schools have not made much impact to date on *clinical* discourse – the work and thinking of the practitioners of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in Britain.[2] This last point is also true of other analytic contributors, for example Adler (1933), Fromm (1982) and Reich (1970); to my knowledge none of them appear on syllabuses of the main analytic trainings in Britain, and neither do they engage *directly* with the subject of racism.

The work of chapter two consists of a critical summary of the four psychoanalytic theories with a view to see 1. whether they have the conceptual space in which to

address the phenomena of colour racism, and if they do then 2. What theoretical structures from within the theory may be brought to bear on the phenomena? and 3. what if anything may be done (according to the theory) to alleviate the situation? I limited myself to the written words of these theoreticians and avoided alluding to developments of, and commentaries on their work. I proceeded in this way for three reasons. First I wanted to try and get as sympathetic a view as I could of each theory – to try to understand each within its own terms, from inside it as it were. Second, I wanted to try to evolve my own interpretation and reading of the theories, informed by the preoccupations of this subject. Third, in as sympathetic a way as possible, I wanted to test the theories against themselves for internal consistency and coherency. I surmised that the points of internal contradiction would be useful as they could be places from which one could begin a process of deconstruction. I speculated that this process would throw up information about the attitude of the theories to 'race', aggression and so forth. This gave a strong recursive impulse to this chapter, in that the psychoanalytic understandings of racism were used to critically reflect light back on the body of psychoanalysis to expose the implicit metapsychologies and ideologies contained therein.

A valid criticism that might be made of the choice of subject matter in the previous chapter, is that the four 'vertical-depth' samples of the psychoanalytic frame constitute a sort of archaeology of theory, and so do not necessarily have a bearing on *contemporary* psychoanalytic thinking on the subject of racism. Chapter three addresses this criticism by taking a series of horizontal slices through the 'culture of psychoanalysis', to see how it deals with 'race' in the treatment setting of the clinic, and the sorts of explanations it offers for the existence of prejudice and racism. This

was done by trawling through the main national and international psychoanalytic journals read by clinicians in Britain (and the USA) for articles relevant to these themes. These articles provide a window onto the 'conversations' taking place in the psychoanalytic community, and in particular the clinical community. This strategy served the supplementary purpose of 'catching' additional ways of understanding racism, ways that might otherwise have slipped the net. Chapter four contains brief overviews of the small number of *direct* psychoanalytic theorizations of racism. These are Adorno, Kovel, Wolfenstein, Rustin and de Zulueta. It is argued that the psychoanalytic theories considered provide explanations of why *particular individuals* might behave in racialized ways because of their individual stories. The chapter concludes with the argument that the individualistic and internalist metapsychology inherent in these theories prevent them engaging with the *social* phenomenon of racism.

Whilst the work of Fanon might more properly be grouped with the authors above, I have given over the whole of chapter five to him. I have done this for three reasons. The first and foremost reason is that in many respects Fanon is the progenitor of this work. When I first read him some twenty years ago, he shattered my complacent naïve world view at that time. This book represents my responses to the questions and dilemmas that were raised in me by his work so many years ago. Second, Fanon focuses on the objects of racism in contrast to the previous psychoanalytic theorizations which focussed primarily on the subjects of racism (the white, the anti-Semite, etc.). The third reason is to do with the paucity of knowledge amongst practitioners of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy regarding his work; thus this chapter also serves as an introduction to his ideas.

The developing critique of the internalism in psychoanalysis leads into the subject of chapter six, the group analytic theory of S.H.Foulkes, as it was supposed that his perspective on the group would overcome some of the previous difficulties. Foulkes began life as a Freudian psychoanalyst, but spent his latter years modifying the psychoanalytic theory of individuals, to develop a specific theory and clinical practice of group-analysis. The chapter begins by critically detailing some of his theoretical work and then draws out Foulkesian readings of race and racism. Although Foulkes goes some way to resolve many of the contradictions found in the previous chapters, particularly with his notion of the social unconscious, he does not quite manage to free himself of his Freudian antecedents, and so generates his own set of contradictions which echo those listed at the end of the previous chapter. (It was decided not to include the work of the other main group theoretician, Bion, because many of the relevant parts of Bion's thinking on hatred and difference are sufficiently found in Klein, and so already attended to earlier in the work).

An overstated criticism can be made of the analytic work previously expounded on, which is that because the theories have prioritised the individual over the social, they have read the manifestations of racism as externalizations of asocial internal psychological difficulties. To counterbalance this tendency, in chapter seven I turned to the work of the sociologist Norbert Elias for several reasons. First, Elias and Foulkes were informal collaborators, and many of the ideas of Elias are already found in Foulkes. So the inclusion of Elias is not really a sea-change, more an extension of Foulkesian group-analytic theory. Second, Elias is unusual for a sociologist in that he is concerned to evolve a true psycho-social theory which promotes the idea of a deep

connection between evolving social structures and evolving psychological structures. His work is central to this book, as it helps show how and why it is that the signifiers black and white, utilized in the organization of society, are bound to be found and similarly used in the organization of the psyche, and how this results in the colour-coding of affects, thoughts and actions. His work not only convincingly dissolves the nature-nurture divide, he also renders meaningless the dispute between psychoanalytic (internal) explanations vs. sociological (external) ones; in effect he brings power and social relations into the heart of the psychological developmental process.

Chapter eight gives full attention to notions of black and white. In common usage, there is often a slippage from white to light, and from black to dark. It is argued that this slippage is one of the routes through which notions of good and bad have migrated across and attached themselves to white and black. The linkages are initially examined from the vantage point of physics, and Barthesian semiotics. This is followed by a critical collation of these words in the Authorised Version of the Holy Bible. It was surmised that as the Bible was used as *the* moral handbook for the majority of the last millennium, its colour-coded language would have infiltrated what we might call the superego, to organize the psyche along colour-coded lines. This in turn is followed by a detailed semantic history of the evolving meanings of black and white in the English language. This 'data' was subjected to an Eliasian analysis to further argue for the linkages between the structures of a colour-coded society and a colour coded psyche.

Chapter nine draws on some of the themes first presented in *Taking the Group Seriously* and develops them further. Initially, Matte-Blanco's theory of thinking is

introduced as it concerns itself with the formation of categories through an interplay between similarities and differences. Following this, the putative radical theory of mind found in Foulkes is made more substantial by giving it a foothold in three interlinked territories – cognition (Matte-Blanco's bi-logic), power (Elias' theory of psychogenesis and sociogenesis), and the emotions (the varieties of psychoanalysis). In effect, the chapter starts building a general theory of difference, which in turn is used to say things about the vicissitudes of identity formation. In particular the chapter describes how it is that the affects and colours of existing 'we's necessarily come to be a part of forming 'I's from the start of the developmental process. This leads to a problematizing of the notion of the 'we' as well as the notion of the 'I'. These theoretical elements are harnessed to formulate a description how black–white racializations traverse the bridge from the outside to the inside and so order and structure a colour coded psyche, and how internal racializations migrate from the inside to the outside and so structure the world also in colour coded ways. The chapter concludes by detailing some of the mechanisms utilized in the maintenance of previously manufactured divides between the 'us' and the 'them'.

Chapter ten consists of the application of this 'general theory' of difference to the domain of race and racism, and particularly to colour racism. It engages with the enigma of the *presence* of a thing called racism despite the *absence* of a thing called race. The chapter details how and why the three interlinked territories of cognition, power and affect, come to work together to manufacture and sustain racialized differences as well as institutional racism. The chapter ends with a brief excursion into the clinical setting where thought is given to some of the modifications required of the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy the light of the preceding arguments. It is

argued that the notion of the transference needs to be extended so that the presence of socio-historical relationships between peoples may be registered in the consulting room.

This whole work is about understanding why the vintner is wrong. The conclusions of the book may be summarized as follows: difference is not the cause of hatred; rather, particular differences are called forth by the vicissitudes of power-relations in order to organize hatreds (and other emotions) in order to achieve particular ends. These mechanisms work by lending the differences and the required hatreds an air of naturalness and so legitimates them. One such difference is that of 'race', which because of its fragility relies on the notion of colour. And finally, it is shown that the structures of society are reflected in the structures of the psyche, and if the first of these is colour-coded, then so will be the second.

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[1] In this work I use the terms psychoanalyst, group analyst and psychotherapist interchangeably (unless the point applies specifically to one or other territory), as the arguments are of pertinence to those of all three persuasions. They are also of pertinence to those who are described as counsellors.

[2] These schools of psychoanalysis have made considerable impact in academia, where the names of Derrida, Kristevia and the like are not at all unfamiliar, but they have yet to penetrate into the syllabuses of the analytic trainings.