Invited contribution to the College of Psychoanalysts – UK International Conference 'Psychoanalysis in Adverse Conditions', November 2020

**LOCATION OF DISTURBANCE: A GROUP ANALYST PERSPECTIVE ON BLM AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE BAME COMMUNITY**

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> "But all our phrasing – race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy – serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscles, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth… You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body," TA-NEHISI COATES, BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME

Foulkes stated *"The individual is pre-conditioned to the core by his community, even before he is born, and his personality and character are imprinted vitally by the group in which he is raised" (Foulkes 1966, p152). This group is not just the family of origin but the social political context we are all born into and navigate throughout our lives.*

According to Freud, '*Since the beginning, individual psychology has also been social psychology'.* (1921) Foulkes built on this with his ideas of man as a *'nodal point'* in a network field of relationships in space and time. (1964) Foulkes was thinking about the matrix, a metaphorical web of conscious and unconscious communication that weaves the group together.

Yalom has written extensively about how to create a positive group culture. He refers to the need for qualities of altruism, group support, acceptance, group cohesion, deep engagement in self disclosure, and capacity for confrontation and conflict as essential to the process of interpersonal learning. (Yalom, 2005; p108)

A core premise within group analysis is how we are all permeated by the social influence of the community we are a part of which leaves a specific imprint on our psyche. (1984) My experience has been dominated by the cultural context of being in the minority, both as a black person and as a woman. The group analytic concept that have been central in my journey in understanding marginalisation have been Foulkes' notion of the "location of disturbance". (1948:127)

Foulkes describes this as psychological disturbance that takes place *between people* that can never really be confined to one person. (Foulkes, 1983:127) The *location of disturbance* is a way of understanding how an individual can become a recipient of unconscious projections, which reflect a wider group dynamic that is a blind spot for that wider group. Foulkes and Anthony consider this to be one form of a group's self-protective function, "to preserve its ignorance of its own wishes which are then projected onto an individual scapegoat". (1965:243)

The concept of the "location of disturbance" has become important in helping me to understand the conscious and unconscious processes taking place both in groups and throughout society. Judy Ryde comments that we cannot dismiss the fact that race is deeply embedded throughout society, therefore we all live within a racialized society. (2009:15)

Critical race theory holds the view that "race" in and of itself does not exist as a biological truth, it is a social and political entity. Although race is not an intrinsic reality, it's a

socially created reality, artificially drawn up. It has become a powerful system that encompasses us all. This begs the questions, where and how are we individually located and how are we complicit, consciously, or unconsciously, in maintaining this status quo. It is a mistake to think that because race is a construct and not a biological reality, that it is not real. Race is constructed and categorises groups of people, within a racialised system which has many far-reaching consequences. Living in a system where white domination of people of colour continues, we need to focus on the reality of racial domination if we are truly to address institutional and structural racism, no matter how uncomfortable or powerless this may leave people feeling.

The working metaphor I have in mind to explain racism is, the marination of food, where structural racism is the marinade, we have all been soaked in. We are all socialised within a racist context and we all need to explore our part in participating in this system. So, the question is how complicit are we in upholding and reproducing the racial hierarchy that underpins this field? How complicit are we in of assuming whiteness is the only framework for progress?

How can we address issues of marginalization and inclusion without openly talking about how the world of therapy and psychoanalysis suffers from a white gaze problem? Toni Morrison wrote that to insist that race does not exist is to announce its centrality, "the world does not become raceless or not become un-racialized by assertion. The act of enforcing racelessness in discourse is itself a racial act".

How can we address this in therapy? We used to use a 'colour blind' approach of not seeing a person race, but this can no longer be viewed as a form of equality but a violent act of denying a central part of someone's identity. The very identity which organises how a person of colour navigates the world. The socio-political context across the globe following the death of George Floyd, which resulted in the worldwide outcry through the campaign of "Black Lives Matter" in response to the acknowledged reality of structural and institutional racism. We are now in a unique time of seeing the systems in place that oppress people of colour and the big question is what do we do about this?

There is no greater evidence of this truth than the devastating number of deaths within the BAME community, I will use the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic1), I want to acknowledge that many people do not like this broad label, as the varying experiences can be lost and many prefer different language to be use. It also calls to question who decided how a group of people are named and how this speaks to the use of the white gaze.

Everyone has been impacted by the pandemic, but there is an inequity in the impact on the BAME community. The social context is one in which simply asserting that 'Black Lives Matter' is a radical statement challenging the institutional and structural racism of government, education, the police, mental health services and all systems throughout the world. I see racism as a virus, which is within our control and requires us all to take responsibility. It has been maintained and continues to spread throughout our society and the world and has caused extreme harm to many individuals and communities.
The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparity of privilege, positioning and power. We know that social inequalities in housing, healthcare, employment, and education, shape every aspect of being. The mantra at the start of the pandemic was one of this being 'the great leveller' this was far from the truth, we were miles from 'all being in it together' structural racism allows an environment where members of the BAME populations are more likely to experience health and social inequalities.

The British psychological society did a report on racial and social inequalities and found that: - BAME people in the UK experience greater poverty and deprivation, Multiple barriers in society impact BAME people's educational and employment attainment. Racism itself has been shown to have negative psychological and health outcomes. The psychosocial stress of stigma and racial discrimination contributes to poorer health quality and higher rates of chronic health conditions for BAME communities (Williams & Mohammed, 2013; Williams, Lawrence, Davis & Vu, 2019)

Joy Schaverien (1998) has written about how unconscious collective memory painfully imprints and continues to transmit through generations of oppressed groups. For me, this often becomes located in my skin, as "an acute sense of colour consciousness". Fanon talks about the 'the black problem' of the historical context of colonialism leaving the legacy of internalised racism in the psyche. (1952) I would expand this to say this is a wounding across races which is deeply embedded within all our psyches and needs attention.

Dick Blackwell a group analysts has written about *Psychotherapists often feeling more at ease in discussing 'difference', the projective processes and so on… what they are more reluctant to discuss is the reality of social power differentials and oppression… as socially structured, institutionalised and psychologically internalised phenomena*. (1994:20) The Black Lives Matter movement has resulted in our world community needing to acknowledge the many inequalities that exist throughout society. We now as a therapy community need to also address how within our profession we also uphold and maintain structural racism throughout our trainings, policies, and clinical practise. There is much work needed to address this especially considering the communities more at risk of COVID-19 -19 are theses within the BAME communities who will need support via mental health services. These services need to be meeting their needs and engaging with their realities of lived experiences.

Foulkes was clear that the distinctions between the inside and outside world, as well as body and mind, constitution, and environment, could not be separated, to do so would be 'artificial isolation' (Foulkes, 1948:10). It is impossible, and ignorant of us to think we can create a bubble in clinical practice that excludes the socio-political context and separates the individual or group therapy from the existing chaos in the world.

This knowledge has been a big shock, and to many led to a desire to learn more and a desire to do something, the question is what. The sense of powerlessness and uncertainty has been a dominant feeling and one I am particularly interested in. Within system centred theory, SCT, they call this the 'edge of the unknown' and this is considered to be a desirable place where creativity and authentic connection can take place if we dare. I have found this model useful in making sense of some of the dynamics at play. The 'edge of the unknown' is the place of being able to learn into the not knowing and to 'build tracks as you go'. I feel we are now in this place of innovating responses to the outcry for support with issues of racism and marginalisation. It's an uncomfortable place as no one can tell you what to do. We are having to stay with the discomfort and find a way to keep talking from this place being present to what emerges moment to moment. The danger is that we fall asleep again and resist staying awake to this uncomfortable truth.