

The paper below has recently been submitted as part of a MA in Psychosynthesis Organisation & Leadership Coaching and is in the process of being graded.

## **Thesis Title**

*Colonialism and identity – a psychosynthesis view*

### **Sub-title**

*Using a psychosynthesis<sup>1</sup> coaching methodology to explore psychological impacts on identity, will and awakening, arising from historic colonialism and its contemporary variants, in order to more fully see our clients and ourselves.*

16500 words

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<sup>1</sup> A psycho-spiritual psychology, described by its founder, Dr. Roberto Assagioli (1980 p30), as a 'dynamic, even a dramatic conception, of our psychological life.'

## Introduction

I am writing this paper in London which is both an 'imperial'<sup>2</sup> city and home to millions of diaspora<sup>3</sup> peoples whose African or Asian heritage links them to the British colonising experience. Opportunities here for interaction between people of different nations, ethnicities, races and backgrounds are unprecedented. Sometimes successful trans-cultural<sup>4</sup> relationships develop from these encounters. At other times, however, all sorts of barriers get in the way, ranging from awkwardness to hostility, to fearfulness, recrimination, racism, anger, silence or just plain misunderstanding. In other words while we have many opportunities for being *in relation* to one another – and all the possibilities which that can open up – we can just as frequently find ourselves *out of relation* to one another. British colonialism<sup>5</sup> (the subject of this paper) sustained itself in part through the separation of Black and White, so trans-cultural relationships between people linked to opposite ends of the colonial story challenge this false dichotomy. Additionally they allow for stories to be told, dialogue to puncture the silence, frames of references to be broadened, even perhaps curricula to be rewritten. But they also enable us to talk about identity, and what it is that makes us who we are. Those who have not had the experience of an identity that has been besieged, denigrated, mocked, threatened or marginalised have much to learn from those who have. So the purpose of this paper is firstly to acknowledge the reality of what I call the 'trans-cultural gap' between people on opposite ends of this divide; secondly to psychologise what it is about and why it is still there; thirdly to fill in part of the knowledge gap through the first-hand accounts of experiences of colonial oppression; through this to theorise what identity is and why expression of it appears so important; finally, with reference to Systems Theory and psychosynthesis theory on awakening, to speculate as to what is seeking to emerge in the modern-day multi-cultural cauldron that is the city of London. As we progress, I describe psychosynthesis theory and practice and suggest how in a coaching or dialogical context these can be used to affirm identity and build enhanced understanding between people.

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<sup>2</sup> Capital of the former British Empire.

<sup>3</sup> Literally a scattering, a dispersion of peoples

<sup>4</sup> A term preferred to cross-cultural by virtue of its suggestion of movement 'beyond' a static position

<sup>5</sup> A term used to describe a form of oppressive rule of one territory or people by another

This paper advocates developing a psycho-historical<sup>6</sup> lens through which coaches can more faithfully 'see' their clients and also come to understand how their clients' identity (and indeed their own) may be constituted by power dynamics that hitherto may have escaped their full attention. Wilfully cultivating such a perspective can lead the coach on a parallel inner journey in which long-held assumptions are challenged. Knowing the truth about ourselves, whether this is our childhood story or the collective history of the family, people or nation with which we identify, is necessary for our psychological health. For if the history of a people has been written by their conquerors or has been erased, lost or misrepresented<sup>7</sup> this can have an enduring impact at the level of identity. In order to breach this historiographical 'gap' coaches may need to research beyond their familiar frames of reference. The history of European colonialism and enslavement remains hard to speak about, especially in the public domain, when one side remains substantially in thrall to its 'achievements' (Dahlgreen 2016) and deaf to the other's sufferings. Part of the purpose of this paper is to enter this forbidding territory and demystify it.

We do this in two ways, through exploring first-hand accounts of the experience of colonisation and oppression and also through holding the integral<sup>8</sup> context offered by psychosynthesis. I will argue that in the history of unresolved human relations there is nothing which comes close to matching the contents of the unconscious fields<sup>9</sup> which hold the story of enslavement, its barely containable emotional and psychological impacts and the strained interpersonal entanglement of Black and White. If there is ever going to be a dialogical resolution to this deeply unsatisfactory state then the methodology and practice for working with it needs to be up to the task. As an empathic practice, I will describe Right Relations<sup>10</sup> which is a modality deployed by psychosynthesis practitioners for being in relation both to oneself and to the other. In terms of theory, I will highlight some principles of psychosynthesis psychology, particularly those which concern identity. As we shall see, Freudian<sup>11</sup> psychoanalysis<sup>12</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western psychology are both implicated in Euro-

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<sup>6</sup> A psycho-historical view recognises the diverse ways in which people are psychologically shaped by their history

<sup>7</sup> See Amos Wilson' The Falsification of Afrikan History, as an example.

<sup>8</sup> An integral psychology is one which holds a context of wholeness

<sup>9</sup> For detail on fields of consciousness see Note 48

<sup>10</sup> Right Relations describes a relating between people in which a unity of being is understood.

centric<sup>13</sup> ideas identifying European colonial man as representing a developmental pinnacle (Khanna 2003), while harbouring stereotypical attitudes towards the 'savage'<sup>14</sup> other – a tendency which (along with coloniality<sup>15</sup>) can be traced all the way back to Ancient Greece (Williams 2012). By contrast psychosynthesis, a 'psychology of the human spirit' (Firman & Gila 2002), has emerged as a synthesis-in-making of eastern spiritual wisdom and the European psychological tradition; philosophically and historically it is not at all aligned with a narrowly Eurocentric or egoic worldview but rather holds the holistic and transpersonal<sup>16</sup> context of 'multiplicity within unity'.

The emergence of the transpersonal and psycho-spiritual dimensions within psychology is one of many evolutionary developments that occurred in different fields across the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and which are essentially unitive. Perhaps the biggest shifts came in the realms of science and philosophy with Quantum Mechanics<sup>17</sup> overturning materialist views of objective reality. Systems Theory<sup>18</sup> later evolved to show all systems to be composed, not of separate blocks, but of parts in dynamic relation to the whole, which continually interact with and transform each other. Such open systems are self-organising and self-creative (autopoietic<sup>19</sup>) and, rather than being doomed to entropy<sup>20</sup>, evolve to ever greater levels of complexity at key moments when the system is operating far from equilibrium (Capra 1997). Consistent with this is the great wave of change in human society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which occurred against a backdrop of two world wars, genocide and the dropping of atomic bombs. Out of this 50 years of darkness there emerged inter alia the Labour<sup>21</sup> movements, the Civil Rights Movement<sup>22</sup>, the establishment of the United Nations<sup>23</sup>, the rise of feminism<sup>24</sup>, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>25</sup>, legislation to prevent discrimination on grounds of race, skin colour,

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<sup>11</sup> After Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis.

<sup>12</sup> A method of exploring the unconscious in order to resolve neuroses, trauma or psychological problems.

<sup>13</sup> Eurocentricity presumes the central importance of European thought and action in the world

<sup>14</sup> The trope of the noble savage, an idealized primitive, is a constant throughout European literature

<sup>15</sup> Coloniality is a term used in post-colonial studies denoting legacies and influences from the European colonial period that have impacted forms of knowledge. See Tilley (2015).

<sup>16</sup> The dimension that which exists 'beyond the personal'

<sup>17</sup> Also known as Quantum Physics or Quantum Theory

<sup>18</sup> The inter-disciplinary study of systems

<sup>19</sup> From the Greek meaning 'self-making', a term created by from Maturana, Varela and Uribe in their Santiago Theory of Cognition

<sup>20</sup> The Second Law of Thermodynamics says that entropy increases with time, bringing disorder

<sup>21</sup> The British Labour Party grew out of the Trade Union movement of the last 19<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>22</sup> The Civil Rights Movement succeeded in bringing an end to racial segregation in the US, through significant legislation enacted in the two decades after WWII.

<sup>23</sup> The UN is an intergovernmental organisation formed immediately after the end of WWII in 1945

<sup>24</sup> The broad-based movement for women's rights and reforms across numerous fields including employment, reproduction, suffrage.

gender, disability and sexuality and the Decolonisation<sup>26</sup> movement. In step with these developments a new Western planetary consciousness arose in the 1960s, recognising the rights of an environment whose carrying capacity was under threat<sup>27</sup>. The establishment of the World Wide Web<sup>28</sup> soon followed, perhaps answering human beings' unconscious need for connection. Space exploration, which emerged partly from US-Soviet rivalry, gave humanity a new perspective for understanding its shared inheritance and a sense of awe at the beauty and complexity of the universe. So in the wake of these substantial, unitive shifts perhaps there is cause for hope that the colonised, the coloniser and their heirs can be reconciled.

But, as physicist David Bohm (1991) has commented, human beings for the most part remained locked in patterns of thinking which had not kept pace with these great shifts and which emphasised 'separation' rather than 'wholeness'. In this paper we look at the European cultural roots of dualistic thinking<sup>29</sup>, the myths which sustain this and the psychological structures that tend to accompany it. One of these structures is a 'split' which is, we argue, increasingly being defended in the modern world to keep unconscious material from straying into full consciousness. We explore ways of seeing with reference to the myth of Echo and Narcissus and the works of John Berger (2008) and Iain McGilchrist (2009), which offer further context for understanding the Western psyche. We look at the Enlightenment<sup>30</sup> and colonial era as fulcrum points for the establishment of a suggested narcissistic complex<sup>31</sup> and its inherent tendency to 'objectify' the other, while being necessarily out of relation with itself. We refer to first-hand accounts of British colonialism in Africa (not found in the national curriculum) to get a sense of how consciousness has been impacted by trauma and to get a measure of what may have gone unconscious from this era; we reflect on the work of Barbara Fletchman Smith (2011) who uncovers contemporary impacts on families of Caribbean heritage arising from slavery and colonialism. We explore cultural,

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<sup>25</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child dates from 1989 and is the most ratified human right treaty in history.

<sup>26</sup> This movement began as the anti-colonial movement and then in the post-independence period focused on cleansing all forms of colonial influence and replacing with indigenous alternatives.

<sup>27</sup> Beyond The Limits by Donella Meadows (1972) first articulated this theme.

<sup>28</sup> A virtual information space established by British scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, in 1989.

<sup>29</sup> The tendency to see the world in terms of opposites, rather than unity.

<sup>30</sup> A period of scientific and intellectual advancement in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries

<sup>31</sup> Narcissism is a self-centred view of the world which can turn into a pathology

psychological and intersectional<sup>32</sup> impacts on identity from oppression through the writings of Frantz Fanon (1967), Amos Wilson (2014), Audre Lorde (1984), Malidoma Some (1993 & 1994) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1967). I present findings from coaching interviews with contemporary Black and Mixed Race British people, describing how they view and express their own identity and how this has been shaped by various factors including the racialized consciousness that came out of colonialism. We then examine all these through the lens of psychosynthesis with its theories around ego development<sup>33</sup>, the plurality within the self, transpersonal<sup>34</sup> identity and the way in which Will<sup>35</sup> and consciousness bring about self-expression.

We highlight London's unique potential as a crucible for the alchemy of trans-cultural encounters and suggest that, from a practical vantage point (the multi-cultural organisation) and an evolutionary one (the human collective/family), there is a transformational opportunity unfolding. We suggest this is consistent with the bifurcation point<sup>36</sup> in Systems Theory leading to breakdown or breakthrough. The polarisation around colonialism, slavery and their contemporary variants reflects these two possible pathways – as indeed do 'oppression' and 'expression'. We speculate as to what is seeking to emerge in the macrocosm, as repressed material seeks expression and as new syntheses emerge to challenge the rigidities of polarisation.

We conclude by looking through a psychosynthesis lens at the contemporary pan-Africanist<sup>37</sup> awakening calls of Asa Hilliard III (2012) and Marimba Ani (1993) in which the connection between will and identity is urgent. We explore the broader emergent significance of the Decolonisation movement with its reclamatory expression of cultural identity and collective practical spirituality. We contrast these with the Western Enlightenment and the socio-political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and contextualise with reference to Roberto Assagioli's Theory of Spiritual Awakening<sup>38</sup> and

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<sup>32</sup> Intersectionality is a term arising from Feminism and Critical Psychology which is applied to the experience of multiple forms of oppression

<sup>33</sup> A psychosynthesis developmental take on the Freudian concept of ego

<sup>34</sup> That part of the self that is 'beyond' what is normally understood as the physical self

<sup>35</sup> Uniquely within psychology is the concept in psychosynthesis of Will which is a function of the 'I' or Personal Identity Centre in

<sup>36</sup> A critical but uncertain point of system change

<sup>37</sup> Pan-Africanism was a movement initially promulgated by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana with the goal of uniting the continent.

Joan Evans's Tri-Phasic Model<sup>39</sup> (2007). We link these to Charles Eisenstein's (2013) vision of a transition in humanity from 'separateness' towards 'interbeing'<sup>40</sup> and suggest that the trans-cultural relationship, as a proto-synthesis of sorts, may be emblematic of this evolutionary shift. Our purpose in so doing is to see what these different movements reveal about the evolution of human consciousness and their potential to act as both grounded and transpersonal vehicles for the holding, healing and expression of identity. Back in the microcosm of the trans-cultural coaching alliance the coach can hold the macrocosmic context for the client of psycho-historical awakening, complexity and emergent transformation, while continuing to work in the alliance at a practical goal-centred level.

## CHAPTER 1: PSYCHOSYNTHESIS COACHING, THE TRI-FOCAL CONTEXT & THE TRANS-CULTURAL GAP

*Indeed, we had become skilful at the rhetoric of narrating our tales without experiencing the pain.*  
Lovelyn Chidinwa Nwadeyi

In psychosynthesis coaching we use a Tri-Focal Context<sup>41</sup> to establish where our clients are, where they want to get to and what is the size of this so-called 'Gap'. Fundamental to what constitutes the Gap is the availability of Will and what is currently preventing our clients – in the context of their chosen goals – from expressing themselves to their fullest potential. It is imagined that the gap in a trans-cultural coaching alliance may be more variegated than in a mono-cultural encounter. In therapy one classically seeks to understand the client through the context of their early life and family history whereas in a goal-centred coaching context the family background, while still relevant, may not appear to be such a pivotal preoccupation. However, in a trans-cultural encounter a focus on the client's history in its broadest sense can offer valuable understanding of

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<sup>38</sup> A theory which describes the stages and phenomenological experience of one having an existential awakening

<sup>39</sup> An 'elegant' (Palmer 2010) and sophisticated psychological model, based on psychosynthesis principles, which echoes from a psychological perspective recent findings in Systems Theory

<sup>40</sup> Interbeing is Eisenstein's term describing a state of being in relation to one another, a unity of interdependence.

<sup>41</sup> This unique method was developed by Roger Evans at the Institute of Psychosynthesis in London.

the client's sense of identity and psychological well-being. Developing appropriate psycho-historical awareness is an important means whereby the coach can move *towards* the client and who she or he is most essentially. It is not enough simply to be *present*; one has to have an awareness of what to be *present to* in the client as well as how to handle and interpret a range of potentially unfamiliar transferences<sup>42</sup>.

Psychosynthesis, as an integrative synthesis-seeking psychology, is well-positioned to explore this terrain. Founded by Dr Roberto Assagioli<sup>43</sup>, a contemporary of Freud<sup>44</sup> and Jung<sup>45</sup>, psychosynthesis (in marked contrast to Freudian psychoanalysis<sup>46</sup>) views the human being as possessing a trans-personal higher self ('Self'), an embodied 'I'<sup>47</sup> (which is the reflection of this Self) and an impulse for self-expression of its (Self's) most essential nature.

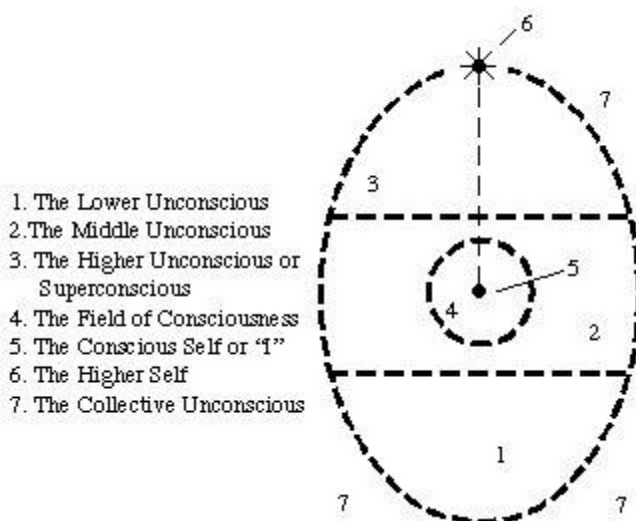


Figure 1

Assagioli's Egg Diagram<sup>48</sup> above is a model of the psyche representing 'a pluridimensional

<sup>42</sup> Energy and emotions can shift in a coaching or therapeutic encounter between participants.

<sup>43</sup> The founder of psychosynthesis 1908-1974

<sup>44</sup> Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis 1856-1939

<sup>45</sup> Carl Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and the inventor of the concept of synchronicity 1876-1961

<sup>46</sup> The method of analysis of the unconscious pioneered by Freud in the 1880s

<sup>47</sup> Readers of this paper who are new to psychosynthesis may find Helen Palmer's (2010) use of the term 'Personal Centre of Identity' a less confusing alternative to the 'I'. The PCI in psychosynthesis is the centre in pure self-consciousness and will.

<sup>48</sup> Assagioli concedes that this 2D diagram is a 'crude and elementary picture that can only give a structural, static, almost 'anatomical' representation of our inner constitution'. According to Palmer the Lower Unconscious contains the elementary psychological activities directing the life of the body and the intelligent co-ordination of bodily functions; as well as the processes charted by psychoanalysis and depth psychology such as fundamental drives, urges, complexes. The Middle Unconscious is formed by psychological elements similar to our field of consciousness that are easily accessible to us. The Superconscious is the source of feelings such as compassion and joy, ethical 'imperatives', higher psychic functions and spiritual energies. The Field of Consciousness contains those elements of our personality of



conception of the human personality'. (1980 p16) The manner and degree of self-expression that emerge depend on two inter-related aspects: the development and quality of Will<sup>49</sup>, and the extent of identification<sup>50</sup> of the 'I' with thoughts, feelings or the body from the past, present or future. Psychosynthesis techniques and reflections are used to help us *dis-identify*<sup>51</sup> from where our consciousness is 'caught'<sup>52</sup> and thus free up our Will to then do the work of expressing ourselves in the world. Where psychosynthesis is relevant to this theme is that colonialism brought about a progressive *disintegration* of the human psyche. This was partly a function of the practices and methods deployed, enslavement being the most egregious, but also a result of the very long, uninterrupted period of colonial domination. Since the psychological damage is still visible and shows up in various ways *on both sides of the divide* an integrative approach to restoring wholeness of the kind embodied by psychosynthesis has a lot to offer.

The story of colonialism is one in which the world of the other was entered with the twin intent to dominate and 'civilize'. As the coach, in a contemporary trans-cultural professional context, prepares to enter the world of the other what, if anything, of that prior entanglement should he or she be mindful of? Indeed is the coach aware of the extent to which the historic dynamics of that era are still being played out in the modern world? Where does the coach stand in relation to the story of colonialism and how might the coach's own status owe a debt to ancestral involvement? It is questions such as these that, if left hanging by the coach, can form part of the Gap in the coaching alliance. The concept of Right Relations<sup>53</sup>, which was developed as a practice by the Institute of Psychosynthesis<sup>54</sup> in London, and is rooted in the 'I-Thou' philosophical approach of German philosopher Martin Buber<sup>55</sup>, describes a state of being in which two or more people share a

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which we are directly aware....The Conscious self of 'I' is the centre of our consciousness, a point of self-awareness and will that is distinct from the changing contents of consciousness...The Collective Unconscious is the psychic environment that we all participate in as sentient beings.' (2010, p17)

<sup>49</sup> Assagioli developed a theory of Will, articulating four kinds of will: good, strong, skilful and transpersonal

<sup>50</sup> This term describes an unconscious absorption of one's attention by an aspect of our self or our environment.

<sup>51</sup> A key concept in psychosynthesis in which the 'I' frees itself from identification with a particular aspect of consciousness, such as a feeling or thought, and returns to a state of pure consciousness.

<sup>52</sup> Being caught is the same as being identified so much with something, consciously or unconsciously, that we do not have access to pure consciousness or Will.

<sup>53</sup> The importance of such a modality cannot be overstated as a means of breaking down polarisation and so-called anti-dialogical positions. (See, for example, <https://mediadiversified.org/2015/03/02/the-logic-of-whiteness/>)

<sup>54</sup> Established in 1970, the Institute trains counsellors, psychotherapists and coaches, offering a range of post-graduate qualifications.

dialogue of openness and authenticity; in this dialogue each listens attentively to the other without interruption or judgment, seeks clarification where required and holds any projections<sup>56</sup> from the other in such a way that these can be worked through without conflict. Trans-cultural Right Relations has these same principles but offers an enlarged context for seeing the other. So for a trans-cultural coaching alliance the coach must be prepared to take responsibility for managing the 'relational gap', which is understood to consist of a range of cultural and psycho-historical factors.

Part of this context can be an understanding of the philosophical assumptions underlying worldviews – what Jackson & Meadows refer to as 'deep, unconscious structures of culture' (1991). Lago (2006) lists three:

**Western** – in which a material ontology is prioritised, leading to value in acquiring objects and external knowledge which breeds preoccupation with external criteria;

**Asian** – which favours a cosmic unity, leading to prioritising family/group cohesiveness; here identity is dependent on being;

**African** – this conceptual system emphasises both a spiritual and material ontology with the highest value placed on interpersonal relations between women and men. Self-knowledge is presumed to be the basis of all knowledge. One knows through symbolic imagery and rhythm.

The logic of the system is diunital<sup>57</sup>.

One may not accept the above definitions as objectively true or complete but nonetheless it is striking how different the Western value system appears through the weight it assigns to things and ownership of them, as opposed the other two systems' gravitation towards alignment with the cosmos or inner-relational states of harmony and being. This does therefore suggest differences in the way identity may be viewed or constructed. As we shall see, the colonial mindset is

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<sup>55</sup> According to Buber human beings may adopt one of two attitudes towards the world: I-Thou (subject-to-subject, unitive) or I-It (subject-to-object, separate)

<sup>56</sup> Projections are frequently described as unconscious aspects of ourselves which we would rather not own, so we 'project' them on to others where we can then see them

<sup>57</sup> 'Both-and' rather than dichotomous thinking. i.e. a union of opposites as in the process of the Bantu philosophy of Ntuology.

individualistic and closely associated with the Western system.

This takes us to the theories of the father and son team, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), around cultural difference. Their research produces four categories which bring out the starkest differentiators between cultures:

1. Power-distance: the extent to which a society accepts that power in institutions is distributed unequally.
2. Uncertainty-avoidance: the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid them...leading to higher level of aggression, anxiety which creates stronger urge to work hard.
3. Individualism-collectivism: loose, immediate family orientation and care as opposed to tighter social cohesion with expectations and delineations and loyalty demanded and offered.
4. Masculinity-femininity: the extent to which dominant values are 'masculine' i.e. assertive, focused on acquisition of money and things rather than caring. The more 'masculine' a society the more men's and women's values diverge.

This framework can be used to give the coach a deeper feel for correctly interpreting observable 'difference' in the client and hence for seeing and responding to the client more appropriately. But the coach is also skewered by the realisation that the psycho-physical conventions of the coaching alliance – two beings seated, engaged in dialogue – are culturally conditioned and speak to a classically Western, individualist, empathic and hence somewhat feminised stance with its own implicit power-distance and uncertainty-avoidant typology!

In the scenario of the Black and White coaching alliance one needs a sense of how well racial consciousness is integrated in coach and client and in their interaction. As Lago says 'the function of race in shaping life chances and influencing real access to power and resources is highly significant in a society that continues to give meaning to racial differentials.' (ibid p206) 'Whiteness,' he reminds us, 'is not a sphere of neutrality.... but clearly occupies a position in relation to others'. (p201)

Moreover White practitioners need to know, for example, that it could be wounding to say to the Black client, 'I don't see colour,' since in our context that translates as 'I don't see you psycho-historically'. Likewise the theme of absent fathers in families of Caribbean heritage (Fletcher Smith 2011) requires not a cultural lens but a psycho-historical one, which affirms for the client an awareness of the colonisers' practise of separating men from their children.

This brings up the important issue of Duty of Care. While this might be a default concern in any therapeutic relationship, in a trans-cultural coaching encounter the coach needs to be aware of the likelihood that the client has, by virtue of their race or skin colour, had some personal experience of oppression. The coach may not need to enquire directly about this but holding a context<sup>58</sup> which acknowledges deeper levels of a client's untold story is important. Included in such a context could be an awareness of the grossly disproportionate representation of people from ethnic minorities sectioned<sup>59</sup> in mental health institutions in the UK (Sainsbury 2002,) on top of which is the profound dissatisfaction, including racist treatment, a majority of them experience. (Kalathil 2011) McKenzie-Mavinga's Black Empathic Approach<sup>60</sup>, as a therapeutic modality for working with Black clients, holds these contexts as well an awareness that something appears to be very much out of alignment in the relationship between those from minorities, especially women (Kinouani 2015), and the host country institutional environment. More recently Critical Psychology<sup>61</sup> has argued for the inclusion of political and socio-economic factors as legitimate determinants of psychological well-being. So in the spirit of 'do no harm'<sup>62</sup> coaches need to educate themselves to anticipate the many ways in which they could – especially through countertransference<sup>63</sup> – do harm to their clients, thereby potentially triggering the colonial re-enactment drama<sup>64</sup> or any complexes that have been internalised by the client from the story of oppression.

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<sup>58</sup> I believe that the holding of a unitive context, and the intent behind this, are perceived by the other at an unconscious, vibrational level.

<sup>59</sup> Sectioning means being kept in hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983. This raises the question of who defines parameters, boundaries of mental illness, and paradigms by which assessments are validated. It also more disturbingly draws attention to what 'sectioning' might be all about psycho-historically.

<sup>60</sup> This approach was developed by Dr Isha McKenzie-Mavinga through her study of Black Issues in Counsellor Training 2002/05.

<sup>61</sup> Critical Psychology examines and interrogates the psychodynamics of power in psychology and other disciplines.

<sup>62</sup> The presumed foundation of medical ethics.

<sup>63</sup> The practitioner's reaction to feelings being transferred from the client.

<sup>64</sup> There is a well-established psychological view that we tend to re-enact the past through unconscious choices and behaviours

Intriguingly the formal apology<sup>65</sup> given at parliament by Kevin Rudd<sup>66</sup>, the former Prime Minister of Australia, which was attended by 200 Aboriginal people, was contextualised by the phrase ‘Closing the Gap’. Here acknowledging the existence of distance between self and other creates the necessary conditions for movement, in this case towards reconciliation<sup>67</sup>. So as coaches we need, consistent with the findings of 5DL<sup>68</sup> (Evans 2016), to be attuned to what distance we are feeling between ourselves and our clients and how much of the gap we may be creating ourselves through our own ignorance or unconscious interaction with the client.

## CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF COLONIALISM, TECHNIQUES, MINDSETS

*I am telling of millions of men who have been skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement.’ Aime Cesaire<sup>69</sup>*

*‘I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimen of human being, what an alteration there would be in them if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence...if there be a God, I think that what he would like me to do is paint as much of the map of Africa British Red as possible...’ Cecil Rhodes<sup>70</sup>*

As can be seen from the few pages of Willie Lynch’s *The Making of a Slave* (2009), *Divide and Rule*<sup>71</sup> was prescribed not just as a means of gaining physical control over one’s slaves but as a durable, psychological strategy. The eponymous Lynch<sup>72</sup> was a celebrity slaver and plantation owner who

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<sup>65</sup> Given in 2008

<sup>66</sup> PM of Australia from 2007-10

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biculturalism> Neighbouring New Zealand has set the tone and moved beyond acknowledgement to the establishment of a bi-cultural state.

<sup>68</sup> The first 2 of Evans’s 5 Dimensions of Leadership are self-awareness and assessment of the impacts that leaders have on their people.

<sup>69</sup> Cesaire was a poet, author and politician from Martinique and one of the founders of the Black post-colonial literary and cultural Negritude movement.

<sup>70</sup> Cecil Rhodes, notorious British imperialist and diamond magnate.

<sup>71</sup> The British *Divide and Rule* policy, which played enemies off against each other, allied to superior navy and munitions, made them near invincible while the enslavement of millions and the commandeering of land to suit imperial interests enriched the British nation and powered the Industrial Revolution. The fact that such success was garnered at the expense of so many (between 1490 and 1899 38m Africans were brought into slavery; 11.7m were exported with a mortality of 12m, 13.8m passing through the Saharan trade; as many as 3m Indians starved to death after Churchill diverted the Bengal harvest for the Allies, with up to 20m thought to have died across the entire colonial period) might, in some nations, be a source of terrible shame. But instead popular historical accounts of this period record it as a triumph of imperialism and a source of pride (Ferguson 2010). From a psychological point of view this raises the question of what has happened to all the shame that the colonisers (or their historiographers) are refusing to own. As we shall theorize, in all likelihood it is resting with the colonised and their descendants; to be shameless is to export and project your own shame onto those you have wronged.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Lynching’ became the term for the hanging of Black people in the US South

travelled to America to lecture his fellow whites to ‘KEEP THE BODY TAKE THE MIND! In other words break the *will* to resist.’ Differences between slaves are to be accentuated: ‘Old is to be pitched against young, male against female, dark-skinned against light-skinned and the white servants are to distrust all Blacks...I USE FEAR, DISTRUST AND ENVY FOR CONTROL PURPOSES.’ He talks of the need to ‘CROSSBREED’ to produce a variety and division of labour and enforce ‘a peculiar new LANGUAGE. Psychological and physical construction of CONTAINMENT must be created for both.’

The intent to subjugate the will (which in psychosynthesis terms is a grave threat to Self<sup>73</sup>) is linked to an assault on language, (‘WE MUST COMPLETELY ANNIHILATE THE MOTHER TONGUE’), a strategy that the British deployed across their colonies (Odinga 1967). Lynch doesn’t use the word ‘internalisation’<sup>74</sup> but he clearly believes in its power. Likewise he has learned that a negative construct such as ‘distrust’ – this time forcibly ‘introjected’<sup>75</sup> – can easily trump its opposite ‘trust’. It gets worse: ‘Whereas nature provides them with the natural capacity to take care of their offspring, we break that natural string of independence... and thereby create a dependency status, so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure.’

We note the interference with what we know of today as the primal attachment system<sup>76</sup> but also the dismissal of Nature’s ways as if these are examples of ‘wildness’ that need to be overcome in order to ‘progress’ – a classic colonialist and Enlightenment worldview. Later he says: ‘We reversed nature by burning and pulling a civilized nigger apart.... all in her [the female slave’s] presence. By her being left alone, unprotected, with the *MALE IMAGE DESTROYED*, the ordeal caused her to move from her psychological *dependent* state to a *frozen independent* state.’ (my italics) This is pure torture but shows a sophisticated awareness of the psychological

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<sup>73</sup> Self, as distinct from self, is the Transpersonal Self, or Higher-Deeper-Wiser Self

<sup>74</sup> Internalisation: a term not in popular use until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe the processes whereby infants passively imbibe learning from their mother

<sup>75</sup> Introjection describes how the process is actively induced by another

<sup>76</sup> This system forms at birth. The theory is that humans are primed for connection, both physical and emotional and the disruption or withholding of this can have a range of impacts through life.

impacts of collapsing idealizing psychic structures<sup>77</sup> in the mind (200 years before Freud) as well as the malleability that can arise from a traumatized, frozen state. Of course there is no hope of the Black achieving parity with the white man. Lynch dismisses that as ‘death to our economic system.’

Lynch is not to be lightly dismissed as a bad apple; almost all of the complexes identified by Fletchman Smith (2011) that affect people of Caribbean heritage in modern Britain can be traced back to these methods. Moreover what the British education system fails to convey is that the Slave Trade<sup>78</sup> and colonialism were not aberrations, representing a brief and temporary loss of moral fibre, nor were they something that burned out after five years, like either of the recent world wars. No. This was a systematic programme of domination by one set of people – mainly white Christian<sup>79</sup> Europeans (admittedly preceded for some few centuries by brown Muslim Arabs<sup>80</sup>) – and justified by parliament on the basis of the spreading of civilization, financed by the commercial vested interests of Empire, which proceeded *for literally hundreds of years*. So when we speak of enduring psychological impacts this is the context.

Secondly, while it is technically true that Britain ended the Slave Trade, due to an earlier change in the law<sup>81</sup>, ‘the societal status of women was passed onto their children’ (Coleman 2015). This allowed for the process of slave ownership and thus slave *breeding* to quietly replace the Slave Trade. An even more egregious sleight of hand can be seen in American **laws** which abrogated land rights to those in the New World<sup>82</sup> who had ‘discovered’ it – **disregarding** the claims of those who lived on the very same land. Also missing from the curriculum is that sexual abuse and rape of men and women was part of the system of **slavery**. And sterilisation of first nation women in Canada, the subject of a recent book, only ended in the 1970s (Stote 2015); this also took place in the USA and

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<sup>77</sup> There are believed to be various structures in the psyche, such as archetypes and parental imagos which, when activated or affirmed, help us to develop psychological health

<sup>78</sup> The Slave Trade was established by Royal Charter in 1672 by the Royal Africa Company

<sup>79</sup> Sanctioned by the highest levels of the Church on the grounds of race

<sup>80</sup> The Islamic Conquests began in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century and spread from North to West Africa by the 11<sup>th</sup> Century

<sup>81</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partus\\_sequitur\\_ventrem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partus_sequitur_ventrem)

<sup>82</sup> A historic reference to the Americas post-Columbus

Australia.<sup>83</sup> Under the UN charter<sup>84</sup> such dehumanising crimes amount to genocide. Evidence has been forthcoming from Kenya for some decades that during the brutal suppression of the Mau Mau<sup>85</sup> rebellion British forces committed many acts of sexual violence, including the rape of women through the use of broken bottles. More recent events at Abu Ghraib<sup>86</sup> in Iraq therefore probably need to be seen in a wider historical context as part of a continuum of oppression. Native American students suffered from the colonisers' habit of jamming pins into their tongues when caught speaking their own dialect (Yellow Bird 2014). The British used a variety of methods of punishment in East Africa, designed to humiliate and thus deter anyone from speaking in their tribal language (Wa Thiong'o 1981). While it is plain that the colonisers sought psychological advantage through suppressing the use of indigenous languages there is an implicit – and in Lynch's words explicit (2009) – understanding of what language holds. As we stated at the outset, psychosynthesis identifies an innate yearning within the human being for self-expression: the traditions of oral poetry, songs and dance which invoke ancestors, ancient warriors or the mythological realm – all of this is held in the language which becomes the living thread that binds a people together.

As part of the business of degrading existing power structures, including native religions and local chiefdoms, it was common practice for the colonisers to humiliate those in senior positions or to set lower level but well-paid informers against them (Odinga p24). In their place missionary schools were set up whose curriculum was geared to celebrating the achievements of white settlers, blotting out the indigenous peoples from their own history. The moral contradictions of invaders taking over the lands of others and violently forcing their religion<sup>87</sup> on them were reflected upon by Malidoma Some (1993) at his Jesuit school in modern-day Burkina Faso<sup>88</sup>. Perhaps the priests were in service to a mindset in which Africa appeared as 'the other world...the antithesis [of the West] and therefore of civilization' that is crying out for Western 'enlightenment' (Achebe 1988

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<sup>83</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/10/un-examines-australias-forced-sterilisation-of-women-with-disabilities>

<sup>84</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocide\\_Convention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocide_Convention)

<sup>85</sup> The Mau Mau rebellion was a revolt against British colonialism by Kenyans, mainly from the Kikuyu tribe.

<sup>86</sup> The prison in Basra where the British and American military were guilty of sexual crimes against their Iraqi prisoners.

<sup>87</sup> Unlike in Hinduism and Judaism, with their emphasis on cultural knowledge or genealogy, there is a marked tendency within Christianity and Islam towards forced conversion. Being 'made to believe' seems both irrational and at odds with Western individualism.

<sup>88</sup> A land-locked West African nation that won independence from the French in 1958



p2). But sometimes the imperative to shut out competition took over. The East India Company<sup>89</sup> stands accused of cutting off the thumbs of Bengali textile workers in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century to protect their cotton industry back home (Robins 2003).

Wangari Maathai (2006) writes of the wholesale destruction of the indigenous tenancy farming system which had previously allowed the community to share the land. The British replaced this in Kenya with a land and property rights<sup>90</sup> system and then proceeded to overhaul the entire agricultural economy, forcing a cash crop system to be established which ensured the easy flow of produce to Britain. This fundamentally shifted the orientation of the local economy with ongoing implications for the current era, in which more focus is arguably paid to paying off debt to foreigners than to restructuring the economy to work in favour of indigenous interests. It was possible at the time to see in this approach a 'commodifying' mindset (Amin 2006) which sought to exploit and extract rather than revere or respect. Dr Maathai wistfully recalls the way in which the British mocked the native Kikuyus<sup>91</sup> belief in the sacredness of Mount Kenya<sup>92</sup>, whose fertile lowlands they industriously replanted (with lacklustre results). Then there was the Allies' co-opting into WWI of as many as 4 million colonised people whose sacrifice and contribution, even while being treated on the battlefield as inferiors (Olusoga 2014 p424), has never been adequately acknowledged.

And then there is geography. As the saying goes, there are no straight lines in Nature. But all over the map of Empire we find the British have drawn them. There appears to be at best an arbitrariness or even in the African colonies a deliberate British policy of forcing a co-existence in a new nation between peoples lacking the desired ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic homogeneity. This high-handed policy has been described as 'an incendiary bomb for generations' (Akono

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<sup>89</sup> A company formed in 1600 for trading with the East Indies which was dissolved in 1874.

<sup>90</sup> The fundamental basis of western power is based on this principle.

<sup>91</sup> The largest tribe in Kenya, representing about 20% of the population

<sup>92</sup> Celebrated landmark in Kenya

2004/05) not least because it speaks to the difficulty of creating a distinctive and inclusive national identity in these newly independent nations. Post-independence institutions that the British bequeathed were young and weak and were not aligned with pre-existing indigenous power structures; moreover the education system had been geared towards creating a servile bureaucratic class not a legion of future leaders (Odinga p57, 63); additionally the orientation of the economy was outward rather than inward, with newly formed borders and a nation-state which had been hurriedly created to suit the administrative and extractive purposes of an outside power. It is not hard to see the Lynch philosophy of enforced dependence being played out in the post-independence scenario, with Africans' low bargaining power and dice loaded against them at the World Trade Organisation.<sup>93</sup> Some onlookers took the failure and stagnation of the post-independence years as evidence of the very innate failings that the colonisers had cited as justification for their 'involvement' (Stow 2015). This then created an enduring inferiority complex, which we shall look at in Chapter 4.

Here in 2016 Lynch's boast that his methods would last 300 years appears chillingly accurate. When we hear outgoing President Wade<sup>94</sup> of Senegal attacking his rival Macky Sall<sup>95</sup> for alleged ancestry to slaves and cannibals or observe Kenyan politics polarised by ahistorical animosity between Luos<sup>96</sup> and Kikuyus we can almost hear Lynch whispering in the wings. It is tempting to see the colonial 'Divide and Rule' policy still being deployed but firmly and tragically internalised in post-independence African governments (Ihonvbere<sup>97</sup> 2000, p5).

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<sup>93</sup> The WTO was formed in 1995 but negotiations between rich and poor countries have foundered ever since over the issue of farm subsidies, high tariffs and inequitable representation in a body that is nominally pro-free trade.

<sup>94</sup> Abdoulaye Wade was President of Senegal from 2000-12.

<sup>95</sup> Macky Sall defeated Wade in the Presidential Election of 2012

<sup>96</sup> The Luo tribe is Kenya's second largest. Oginga Odinga (1967) asserts that tensions with the Kikuyus were low pre-colonialism – the tribes hardly knew each other - but have been rising since independence.

<sup>97</sup> '...the state in Africa was never structured or composed by imperialism to promote growth, development, peace, stability, harmony or law and order. It was structured to continue the imperialist project of class domination, exploitation and elite collaboration with foreign capital as part of the international capitalist order. In this project the African state has been a huge success.' J.O. Ihonvbere.

## CHAPTER 3 FIELDS OF CONSCIOUSNESS – TRAUMA & METHODS OF TRANSMISSION

*‘Every man of any sensibility, whether he be Christian or heathen, if he has any discernment at all, must think that for any man or any class of men to deal with their fellow creatures as with the beasts of the field; or to account them as such...that those men, that are the procurers and holders of slaves, are the greatest villains in the world.’* Quobna Ottobah Coguano<sup>98</sup>

*‘The price in grief and guilt which ordinary African people had to pay for these excesses has not even begun to be imagined.’* Barbara Fletchman Smith (2011)

*‘Violence on the body is world destroying, returning it to the primal scream anterior to language, meaning and agency.’* Bibi Bakare Yusuf (2015)

In this chapter we look at the Fields of Consciousness<sup>99</sup> which arise from the experiences of colonialism and what Ackbar (1996:3) calls ‘the shattering realities of slavery’. We see these fields as the repository of all the unconscious traumatic material emanating from this historical period and which awaits full expression. We encounter pioneering theories which explain transmission mechanisms for trauma down the generations and speculate about the relationship between trauma, the body, the unconscious and expression. We then look at the destruction of the African family under enslavement and try to imagine the implications. We then step back to examine the consciousness of the colonisers. We observe that even after the emergence of the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis within Europe her practitioners and philosophers, rather than being moved at the plight of their subjects, seemed intent on subjugating them further. We attempt a brief psychohistorical analysis of this state of affairs and conclude that the chasm it gave rise to is itself a large constituent of the Fields of Consciousness.

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<sup>98</sup> A philosopher and former slave who won his freedom and wrote *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*

<sup>99</sup> We hypothesise that these fields form part of the Lower Unconscious (see Egg Diagram above) with some parts in the Higher Unconscious

From the work of Fletchman Smith there is an overarching sense that ‘the younger generation is unable to take care of their own business because they are burdened with business they don’t understand from previous generations’ (2011 p7). Working very much in a European post-war context, Schutzenberger (1998) has documented cases of parents who ‘could not metabolize’ the suffering they had been exposed to. This highlights the body-mind connection (Mate<sup>100</sup> 2003), situating the body as the container for all the experiences of the owner. In Schutzenberger’s cases, however, physical illness of the traumatised is not where the story ends. Instead so overwhelmed is the body that it apparently cannot contain the traumatic material in the psyche. This then needs to be exported and housed elsewhere. But where and how? Schutzenberger shows that the trauma finds a new home through being passed down to the children.

The implications of this are huge. Previously the profession of psychotherapy had adopted the Freudian understanding that mental distress has its origins in childhood trauma. Here was evidence saying something entirely different<sup>101</sup>, in which the child seems to be willingly carrying something for the parent. Through language we speak of ‘bearing in mind’ or ‘processing’ what has happened. But can we hold another’s feelings too? A century’s worth of observations of therapeutic transference would suggest we can.

What defines trans-generational transmission<sup>102</sup> is its reliance on the withholding, silence, exclusion or lack of something. This unnamed ‘something’ then passes, in the form of an unconscious psychological imprint, down to the next level in the family tree. Here we must differentiate this form of transmission from intergenerational transmission<sup>103</sup> in which family stories, sufferings, births and deaths etc are *consciously* communicated by family members to each other. In

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<sup>100</sup> American Doctor and counsellor Gabe Mate has written eloquently about the body-mind connection and the mass of ignored evidence supporting this unity in *When The Body Says No*.

<sup>101</sup> Stranger still is the anniversary effect (note) in which, with remarkably strong statistical effect, ‘repeat’ events, always linked to commemoration of something of emotional import to the family system (a death in the family, a hospital operation, a car accident) recur on the same date. All this is strongly supportive of the hypothesis of a systemic field in which expression at a certain point becomes super-ordinate to structure (note) even if – or perhaps precisely because – what needs expressing is so hard to do. So I am wondering if this is actually a fundamental property specifically of complex biological systems that have consciousness, free will and speech, such that if we disobey this evolutionary imperative we do not evolve.

<sup>102</sup> The process whereby trauma or other unconscious material is passed down the family tree.

<sup>103</sup> The method whereby information is passed down the family tree consciously, openly and healthily.

this case there is no withholding or exclusion, and therefore no trauma, and the younger family members grow up with a secure sense of who they are and where they came from, their identity safely embodied.

In the case of trans-generational transmission, which is always about *unconscious* transmission, the cycle can continue through parents perhaps being unable to respond to or hold the passions of their children. This may be because what they experienced themselves was overwhelming or, according to Gerson (2009 p1343), took them to a 'world constituted by absence', completely lacking in safe structures (what we might call 'external unifying centres'<sup>104</sup>). With the traumatic story of colonialism in mind, we are left to reflect on the inability of human creativity at times of enormous crisis to respond adequately to destruction – where the world feels not only unsafe but hopelessly out of balance. This is where psychosynthesis has something vital to interject with its view that human beings are inherently drawn to express their essential natures. The double tragedy of trauma, however, is that the accompanying shame or grief tends to inhibit such expression. As we have seen with the colonial story, what is unspeakable can become entombed in silence. So how can expression be 'willed'?

The family is the normal container for early life experience and communication. But what happens to the family system in extreme cases where what has occurred has never been spoken about – not for hundreds of years? Or if the shame has been too great, the agony overwhelming or, as so tragically was the case in slavery, because the family system was crushed and its members cruelly dispersed to different plantations? We know from neuroscience (Schore 2001) that in cases of very early trauma psychological integration can be biologically impossible<sup>105</sup>. So just imagine the trauma of five family members being split up, dispersed to different parts of the colonised world and sold into slavery? And imagine that a million times over. Deprived of the natural

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<sup>104</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>105</sup> When we are fearful the body diverts energy to protect against a threat and so produces stress hormones and inflame agents such as cytokines instead of dopamine, oxytocin and growth hormone. In contrast to a state of fear, love leads to healthy brain chemistry. (Lipton,B. The Honeymoon Effect 2014)

companionship offered by a family, how does the horror of that story of loss ever get spoken of<sup>106</sup>? Add to this the legions of male slaves who lived in fear of castration, who felt shame at being unable to prevent the rape of their womenfolk, female slaves who felt scorn towards their men who couldn't protect them, and who were drawn into dangerous dependency on the white slave-master. How does this get spoken of? And the injustice of such a dehumanising system which persists in Africa from the early Islamic conquests all the way to the end of European colonisations. How can one speak of such timeless injustice?

It is material of this density, this ineffability, from the vast untold story spread across continents, spanning hundreds of years – it is this that coalesces in these Fields of Consciousness that stalk the Black and the White, awaiting resolution, deliverance. And yet this energy remains locked in, unvoiced by one side, evaded by the other.

With the birth of psychoanalysis and the 'discovery' of the unconscious by Freud it might have been hoped that Europeans would discover what they themselves had been unconscious to for rather a long time. Africans had already endured 200 years of physical and psychologically-administered trauma at their hands; the psyche had clearly been found to be profitably malleable. From this point of view not only was Freud late but his preoccupations seemed parochially Eurocentric rather than universal (Khanna).

But it appears that for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Europe – and Britain in particular thanks to the triumph of its Industrial Revolution<sup>107</sup> – was captured by an idea conflating progress with dominance over the 'uncivilized'. Notwithstanding the brave outspoken voices of Quakers<sup>108</sup> in England and abolitionists<sup>109</sup> in the US, until the arrival of heavy-hitters such as Jean-Paul

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<sup>106</sup> Joan Evans speaks of the developmental role of the family system in promoting differentiation and the process of individuation. One can thus see the fracturing of the family system as being inimical to self-realisation and impeding development on various levels.

<sup>107</sup> The transition to industrial manufacturing that occurred from about 1760 through to about 1840.

<sup>108</sup> Quakers were initially English Christian dissenters who broke from the Church of England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. They began pressing politicians to abolish slavery from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and some objected to the worst excesses of the East India Company in India.

Sartre<sup>110</sup> and Edward Said<sup>111</sup>, the absence of a robust anti-colonial counter-narrative during the colonial period had left the stage free for the racist outpourings of philosophers such as Hume<sup>112</sup>, Eyzenck<sup>113</sup>, Jensen<sup>114</sup> and Malthus<sup>115</sup>, eugenicists such as Spencer<sup>116</sup> and others – including psychologists.<sup>117</sup> So in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we find the Nazi party<sup>118</sup> employing psychologists and the architect of apartheid,<sup>119</sup> no less, being a psychologist (Professor Hendrik Verwoerd<sup>120</sup>). The genocidal policy of enforced sterilization for Black and indigenous people in at least three colonial nations was overseen by psychologists. Psychology thus became arguably the bag carrier and executioner of explicitly political projects, all informed by the uncontested fallacy that history was a progression from barbarism<sup>121</sup> (Diop 1991) to civilization<sup>122</sup> (Yellow Bird 2014) – an idea that we see, in Chapter 5, to be very old and very European. Black and indigenous people were thus deemed inexorably and permanently inferior (or, as Fanon put it, ‘in the slow evolution from monkey into man’ (1967 p17). To reinforce such theories psychologists advanced suggestions such as ‘prison will help develop the super ego of the Black man<sup>123</sup>. This is known as a projective identification strategy. In a distortion of Ubuntu<sup>124</sup> philosophy (‘I am because you are’) projective identification<sup>125</sup> insists upon your inferiority as a pre-requisite for my superiority.

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<sup>109</sup> Abolitionists were active before the American Civil War

<sup>110</sup> Celebrated French philosopher and existential post-colonial thinker 1905-80

<sup>111</sup> Prominent Palestinian intellectual, author of Culture and Imperialism. 1935-2003

<sup>112</sup> David Hume, Scottish philosopher and atheist, 1711-76

<sup>113</sup> Hans Eysenck, psychologist and author of Race, Intelligence and Education. Devotee of the IQ test. 1916-1997

<sup>114</sup> AR Jensen Professor of Educational Psychology, 1923-2012

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Malthus, English cleric and proponent of natural selection 1766-1834

<sup>116</sup> Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) interpreted the Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ to mean the poor were born inferior and therefore were not deserving of social reforms. He called for ‘pragmatic eugenics’ in his Principles of Psychology (1870)

<sup>117</sup> For a hard-hitting analysis of this see Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1996) Psychology also gave us Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel at the University of Bristol in the 1970s, in which hostility to other racial groups is considered natural and so justifies disparaging them; and the hugely disproportionate sectioning of minorities in the UK under the Mental Health Act of 1983 has also to be laid at the door of this profession.

<sup>118</sup> The National Socialist Party under Adolf Hitler

<sup>119</sup> Literally ‘separateness’ or ‘being apart’

<sup>120</sup> Verwoerd was PM of South Africa until his assassination in 1966. Born 1901

<sup>121</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop’s Civilization or Barbarism challenges European claims to civilization. For Sayed Hussein Nasr (2014) civilization is always plural.

<sup>122</sup> The Indian Civilization Act of 1819 was one of the most offensive laws imposed by settler colonialism in the USA.

<sup>123</sup> Then we have pronouncements made without any evidence by psychologists such as McDougall (1908) to the effect that ‘sexual over-indulgence [is] responsible for the position of blacks’ i.e. degeneracy; the tyranny of testing based on the western (and you could say colonial) idea that abstract intelligence is the only intelligence that counts. Black people’s reactions were tested and found to be too slow (to do quick thinking) and then too fast (to be properly reflective). (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah 1994)

<sup>124</sup> Southern African humanistic philosophy from mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century

<sup>125</sup> Projective Identification is a psychological technique to make someone believe in their utter uselessness to the extent that they act it out to validate your judgment. It has been described by Duffell (2015) as an essential means whereby the British elite classes sustain their position.

In a fascinating critique, Ranjana Khanna writes of Freud's 'false unified and unifying theory of history' (2003 p63) and describes Freudian psychoanalysis as a colonial project, linked to the imperial disciplines of archaeology and anthropology. Its emergence in Europe synchronous to the Berlin Conference<sup>126</sup> of 1884 – the peak moment in European colonial history – is both significant and problematic. And the putative conflation of the term 'self' with a normative (but temporal and acquisitive) 'nation state' suggest that the early endeavours of Freud, however heroic, should be seen as inescapably conditioned by a Eurocentric worldview; in this the colonisers were champions of civilization and European nation states spearheading the developmental project of the human being. But as Robert Williams (2011) has convincingly shown, the trope of the 'savage' (or 'primal horde'<sup>127</sup> to use Freud's phrase) over 2,500 years of European history is continually advanced, even by Popes<sup>128</sup> (ibid p183) as justification for conquest and the requirement to civilize. And absent from this mythos was any awareness of the relationship to this other being intrinsically constituted by 'strife and violence' (Khanna 2003). Freud also borrowed the term 'dark continent' from H. M. Stanley<sup>129</sup> to refer to the sexual life of adult women (ibid p48). In his era women were excluded from the field of psychology, a 'split' which in itself merits psychologising. But Khanna's deconstruction of Freud's projections towards the female 'other' deserves to be read in full, with its clear implications for the othering of the inhabitants of that continent.

Recall, however, that this was Europe in which the Divine Right of Kings<sup>130</sup> had been overturned, in which for many God had been dethroned from the sky through the findings of Copernicus<sup>131</sup> and Galileo<sup>132</sup> and in which many prosperous merchants and landowners now viewed the world through the genius of Isaac Newton<sup>133</sup> as a perfectly calibrated machine – an object, no less. Over a very

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<sup>126</sup> This is where Europe's colonialist competitors met to kickstart the Scramble for Africa.

<sup>127</sup> Freud: 'These peoples possess no tradition and no historical memory.' (Khanna p73)

<sup>128</sup> The Pope in question was Alexander VI. 'The Indians of the New World became the embodiment of the idea of the savage in the Renaissance Discovery era, endowed by God with natural rights, and subject to conquest, colonization and conversion for violating a higher law enforced by the warrior heroes of a superior form of civilization – in this case Conquistadores from Christian Spain.'

<sup>129</sup> Victorian explorer of Central Africa, Henry Morton Stanley 1841-1904

<sup>130</sup> The doctrine that monarchs derive their authority from God. This died in England in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>131</sup> Nicolas Copernicus. Renaissance mathematician who placed the sun at the centre of the universe 1473-1543

<sup>132</sup> Galileo Galilei, Italian polymath and scientific pioneer. 1564-1642

<sup>133</sup> Celebrated physicist, mathematician and alchemist 1643-1727



short space of time enormous wealth had arrived through conquest and huge swathes of the world had been opened up for trade and cultivation. The new civilization was further emboldened by stunning scientific progress. This heady combination did not predispose one to equivocation. On a psychological level the era was demonstrably a time of ego inflation and even perhaps ‘deregulation’ of Super Egoic<sup>134</sup> structures that had lain in place in the psyche for millennia. The sudden appearance of an entirely new level of personal freedom and dominance amongst a tiny minority is not consistent with psychological stability, which perhaps explains the cold embrace of rationalism during the Enlightenment. As we shall see with reference to the ancient European myths of Oedipus<sup>135</sup> and Echo and Narcissus<sup>136</sup>, one can detect here a tragic or even wilful blindness underlying the colonial misadventure, which does not even now appear to have run its course.

In our discussion of these Fields of Consciousness there remains one important area of theory which we need to examine, and that is Jung’s idea of the Collective Unconscious<sup>137</sup>. While the suggestion is that Jung conceived it as of universal applicability, according to Fanon (1967 p188) ‘it is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group.’ The basis for shared archetypes<sup>138</sup> is plausible but when it comes to Black and White<sup>139</sup> and how they are culturally understood then we are surely moving from the universal to the parochial. As Fanon says, Jung<sup>140</sup> ‘wanted to go back to the childhood of the world, but...he went back only to the childhood of Europe.’ (ibid p190) This for Fanon and for Williams is a place that is anything but innocent. Jung became caught up in Eurocentric ideas of racial superiority; it required the humbling of the European project after two world wars and the rapid loss of the

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<sup>134</sup> A Freudian term for internalised parental authority

<sup>135</sup> Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex was first performed in 429 BC.

<sup>136</sup> The myth of Echo and Narcissus comes from Ovid’s Metamorphoses, written around 8 AD.

<sup>137</sup> The idea of a universal, collective unconscious suggests shared psychic structures and unconscious beliefs.

<sup>138</sup> Structural concepts in the psyche

<sup>139</sup> Thus whiteness to a certain Western sensibility is equated with virginity, purity, goodness and, of course, God too (despite being Middle Eastern), whereas in Asia whiteness may be linked to death (and worn at funerals) and in Africa white people are still described as ‘ghosts’. To Africans, heirs to the great Nile Valley civilization, ‘blackness’ doesn’t – or didn’t – carry any of the pejorative associations that the European psyche imputed to it (evil, uncleanness, what is fearful etc) and yet Africans found themselves seen through this unconscious, pejorative lens before they could have the chance to establish right relational contact with the Europeans.

<sup>140</sup> Even Jung can’t see beyond his own projections, ‘equating the foreign with the obscure, the tendency to evil’, seeing within every human being ‘an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man.’ (Fanon 187)

colonies for Europeans to begin to see the possibilities for reconstructing a world from multiple perspectives.

According to Khanna (2003) in the white Western psyche 'repression becomes the prerequisite for the construction of a white culture' (ibid p68) so what is repressed becomes culturally *normalised*. What is normalised becomes synonymous with values, which in turn determine the level of consciousness at which the culture can operate. So the tragedy for a culture whose unconscious values<sup>141</sup> are built around a need to repress, conquer, separate is that it cuts itself off from connection with interior and exterior sources of feedback<sup>142</sup> which could potentially transmute its inertia into new movement, its knowledge into wisdom. To the despair and incomprehension of the colonised and enslaved, this and the distractions of new-found wealth and power must account for the absence of empathic response to the victims of their oppression. Given the vast array of unresolved traumatic historical material we have touched on in these last two chapters, the very deliberate psychological techniques deployed, the very long time period involved and the new findings about trans-generational trauma it is my view that there is probably nothing in the collective human experience to compare with these fields of consciousness. But these fields are experienced differently by people, depending upon their positions within them. And so now we move on to exploring impacts on identity through first-hand accounts of oppression.

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<sup>141</sup> The unconscious need to conquer and be separate is really about conquering the ego with its primitive need for control (see later discussion on Triphasic Model)

<sup>142</sup> A principle of Systems Theory is homeostasis in which a system self-manages dynamically through information imparted by its feedback loops. Separation as a strategy converts an open system into a closed one.

## CHAPTER 4 IDENTITY

*'If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process...primarily economic – subsequently, the internalization – or better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority.'* Frantz Fanon

*'...the acknowledged historical project is being hindered by a false consciousness of our identity, our history and our capabilities.'* Chinweizu

In this chapter we try to assess the impact of the assault on identity that occurred during the colonial period and connect this to the ways in which impacts persist, often covertly, in the (largely) post-colonial world. We observe how identity is understood and experienced under oppression through first-hand accounts of African, Caribbean and African-American sources. We observe how unconscious or forgotten aspects of the story surface from underground in the modern world in the form of complexes and behavioural 'acting out'<sup>143</sup>. We listen to what psychosynthesis has to say about identity, particularly in relation to Will. We look at the importance of ego development<sup>144</sup>, touch on the theory of sub-personalities<sup>145</sup> and discuss transpersonal notions of identity. We also examine the psychological process and survival strategy of 'splitting'<sup>146</sup> from a Freudian and psychosynthesis viewpoint. We conclude by listening to contemporary British Black, Asian and Mixed Race accounts in which the importance of affirming and expressing one's identity shines through.

An assault on identity is of a different order to an assault on a person. There is the sense that identity possesses a hinterland, some deeper fabric which contains the story of the individual human being and the position he or she holds in relation to others. Attacking identity, especially a collective identity, seeks strategically to unpick the threads of this fabric. In Figure 2 we illustrate the

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<sup>143</sup> This is a term to describe unconscious behaviour

<sup>144</sup> Without adequate ego development we cannot function coherently in the world, and will be disconnected from our Will

<sup>145</sup> Sub-personalities are limited and not fully integrated components of the 'I' which nevertheless seek to express their particular perspective. They often emerge out of an adaptive need to survive and may become embedded and not always helpful to a deeper synthesis of identity.

<sup>146</sup> The psychological strategy of cutting off from an aspect of consciousness, usually something painful.

many different sub-strategies.

### FORMS OF OVERT & COVERT OPPRESSION

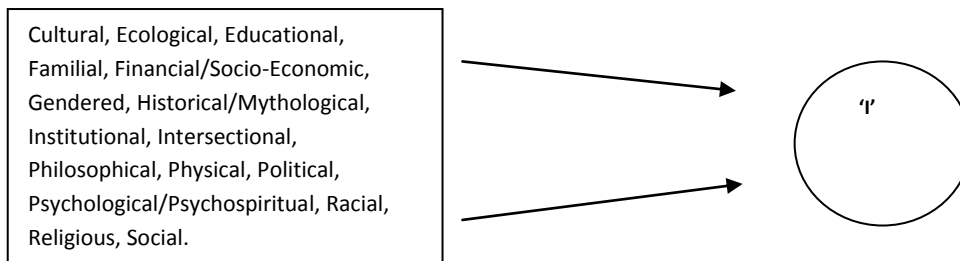


Figure 2

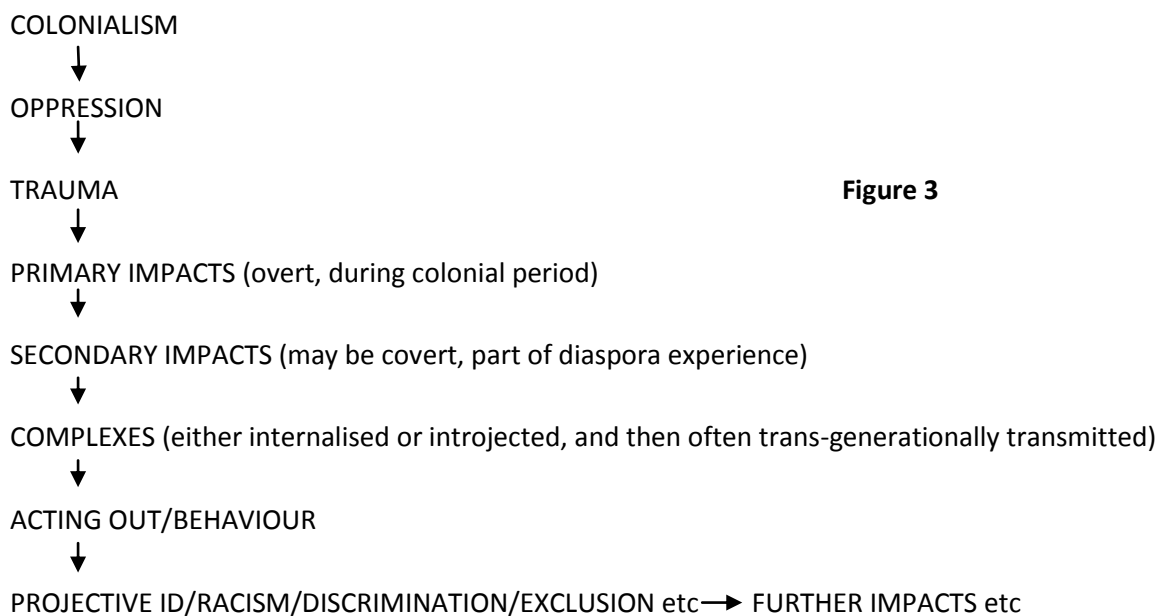


Figure 3

In Chapter 2 we described some of the methods of colonial oppression and in Chapter 3 we concluded that the enormous human cost of colonialism is yet to be adequately understood and that the psychological mechanisms for trans-generational transmission of trauma are barely known.

Figure 3 simply sketches out the chain of impacts over time, showing that further impacts are still occurring through a combination of ignorance, poor education, decontextualised policy frameworks, as well as the persistent influence of the Fields of Consciousness.

Some things are changing for the better. As a result of the Human Rights movements of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century there is legislation in place which outlaws<sup>147</sup> many forms of oppressive and racist behaviour. But despite anti-racism<sup>148</sup> campaigns, covert forms of institutional oppression may be harder to deal with. The Metropolitan Police's Stop and Search policy, for example, claims to make the streets safer but ignores the harmful impacts of deliberately targeting young Black men<sup>149</sup>. And University College London's BME<sup>150</sup> students (2014) searingly identify academia as the primary environment for reproducing inequality: 'The white curriculum<sup>151</sup> (re)produces hierarchies of knowledge, but never in isolation from other structures of power.' Black academics are thus seen as 'bodies out of place' (Tate 2014) and to complain against covert racism risks further alienation and re-traumatisation. Contemporary institutional racism can thus be seen, through its regressive reassertion of hierarchies of control and division, as an adaptive response to the emergent complexity<sup>152</sup> of an evolving multi-cultural society.

So the experience of being under attack is far from over for many people. In the US the Combahee River Collective speak of an 'interlocking' of the major systems of oppression and that a 'synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives'. (Nayak 2015) And it is those who find themselves at the intersection<sup>153</sup> of different forms of oppression, very often Black women, who bring a huge amount of experience, pain and wisdom to this subject.

To enable the flourishing and self-expression of the individual, identity needs to be contained and affirmed by family, language or community. The institution of Black History Month<sup>154</sup> is an implicit recognition that the 'loss of history leaves us stranded from our identity.' (Wilson 2014) He states that 'to take away a people's history is to degrade their sense of shared identity, is to remove the

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<sup>147</sup> The UK's Race Relations Act of 1965 & 2000 is one example.

<sup>148</sup> Campaigns such as Kick Racism Out Of Football are held back by lack of contextualised awareness or communication of the underlying issues.

<sup>149</sup> My own son was stopped 20-25 times over a 3 year period during which his white friends were never stopped. See <https://www.gov.uk/police-powers-to-stop-and-search-your-rights>

<sup>150</sup> Black Minority or Ethnic is a category term in common use in the UK; another is BAME, which includes 'Asian'.

<sup>151</sup> A term which describes the disproportionate presence of White lecturers, sources, citations in academia and the denial of space and tenure for the representations of other worldviews from non-white sources

<sup>152</sup> A phenomenon of Systems Theory we examine in later chapters.

<sup>153</sup> Intersectional oppression speaks to the challenge of both surviving and existing authentically while at risk of attack or even annihilation.

<sup>154</sup> This was pioneered in 1926 and formally adopted in the US in 1976.

basis upon which they...reach their goals collectively.' Wilson is talking about a 'manipulation of consciousness' (p2), which in psychosynthesis terms amounts to an undermining of the Will.

But what if the twin containers for identity of family and history are fractured or deeply damaged? A sobering and detailed account from a Caribbean perspective is given by Fletcher Smith (2011) in which she examines the *formation* through enslavement of male and female identity. She shows how a sexualised male identity emerges in which paternity is entirely dissociated from procreation. The status of slave children belonging to their masters and not to their parents has introjected a crisis of belonging and 'hurdles of repossessing individual and parental authority'. (ibid p51) She describes the phenomenon of Babymothering/fathering<sup>155</sup>, the hardening of the feminine in the absence of the father figure, the erstwhile hostility and suspicion between Blacks and mixed race (especially) women; she also psychologises 'robbery'<sup>156</sup> and the existential need among young males to 'equip'<sup>157</sup> themselves with knives. The intolerable historical burden of keeping the family alive gave rise to stereotyped identities such as the 'strong black woman'.<sup>158</sup> Then there is the enduring tension between African and Caribbean people on the basis that the former supposedly sold the latter into slavery. In short slavery broke the family system, creating a trail of widespread and ongoing internal identity and social disruption.

Meanwhile the lack of strong, secure male family containers for identity, and with whom to attach, contributes to the acting out of neuroses. Such everyday complexes run deep and encompass the sense of inferiority of self, of language, of culture, of beliefs, the internalised labels of primitiveness, backwardness, ugliness and the projective identifications of wildness ('savageness'). There is the phenomenon of bleaching – and its curious white counterpart tanning – which speaks to an internalised view that Blackness is undesirable and/or a socio-economic calculation that it jeopardises life chances. And the work of Lynch ensures that one is not even safe with one's own

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<sup>155</sup> The phenomenon of babymothering and babyfathering refers to the practice of teenage relationships which produce children within the internalised family structure inherited from slavery

<sup>156</sup> The act of robbing unconsciously acts out the being robbed of parents or grandparents.

<sup>157</sup> Equipping oneself with a knife substitutes for the feeling of being existentially unequipped for life.

<sup>158</sup> This stereotype may conceal the underlying individual story of struggle and may also encourage repression of feeling and clinging to the archetype (Mckenzie-Mavinga 2002/05).

kind: one may be not black enough/light enough and thus just ‘wrong’ and very visibly so. Within the whole field, arising from the longevity of slavery, there may be the disempowering unconscious belief that ‘nothing is ever going to change’; or internalised shame about identity, as when Fanon writes ‘must he all his life be ashamed of what is most real in him, of the only things not borrowed?’ (1967 p167)

There is thus the challenge of freeing identity up (dis-identifying in psychosynthesis terms) from all this unconscious trauma. However, ‘it is easier to deal with the external manifestations of racism and sexism than it is to deal with the results of those *distortions* internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another.’ (Lorde 1984) Such complexes can be re-activated through the experience of everyday racism and microaggressions<sup>159</sup> whereas in colonial times they were habitually reinforced through projective identification<sup>160</sup>.

But destroying the family system was evidently not the end. The cycle only completes with erasure. Professor Asa Hilliard III is among those who have reclaimed the ancient name of Kemet<sup>161</sup> for the great civilization of the Nile Valley<sup>162</sup> as a political and historiographical attempt to reverse the catastrophe of erasure<sup>163</sup>. Hilliard also refers to long-forgotten African terms denoting ‘deep thought’<sup>164</sup> as evidence of pre-Greek African philosophy. Dr Nathaniel Coleman<sup>165</sup> (2015) highlights the erasure from history of African philosophers, citing the former slave Cugoano<sup>166</sup> (1999) who, on the basis of John Locke’s<sup>167</sup> assertion that every man owns himself, affirmed the impossibility of his own enslavement. On an individual level nowhere can this be more painfully seen than in the

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<sup>159</sup> Acts of varying hostility, such as being blanked or disrespected, which can occur without warning or justification and which can impact one’s sense of identity and security.

<sup>160</sup> Thus oppression justifies itself by oppression: the oppressors produce and maintain by force the evils that render the oppressed, in their eyes, more and more like what they would have to be like to deserve their fate.’ (Sartre *ibid* p22)

<sup>161</sup> The indigenous name for what the Greeks called ‘Egypt’.

<sup>162</sup> The Early Dynastic Period is believed to be from 3,500 BC to 3,100 BC

<sup>163</sup> Erasure in archaeology: The efforts of the archaeologists Champollion among others to claim Egyptian civilization as white. (Diop 1974)

<sup>164</sup> Hilliard mentions as evidence of pre-Greek philosophical traditions ancient words for ‘deep thought’ in different languages: Nommo in Bantu; So in Dogon; Cinni in Songhai; Sankofa in Akan

<sup>165</sup> Coleman signs his surname with a line through it to represent the persistent erasure of Black representation in the higher strata of academia.

<sup>166</sup> Cugoano and Sons of Africa [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sons\\_of\\_Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sons_of_Africa)

<sup>167</sup> John Locke [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Locke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke). According to Fryer (1984), Locke and [David] Hume articulated ‘a strident pseudo-scientific mythology of race that would become the most important ingredient in British Imperial theory’. (p165). We learn that ‘virtually every scientist and intellectual in nineteenth century Britain took it for granted that only people with white skin were capable of thinking and governing.’ (p169)

practice through which original slave surnames were replaced by the surnames of their purchasers. This is obliteration<sup>168</sup> of identity and makes tracing one's lineage all the harder today. As for collective erasure, Justice Daniel in the Dred Scott<sup>169</sup> decision of 1854 (Smith 2014), surpassed himself: '...the African negro race never have been acknowledged as belonging to the family of nations.'

Paradoxically identity in its uniqueness tends to manifest in plurality; the 'person' who we are will tend to differ, depending on who we are with, the circumstances and the environment. There are even times when our personality (or a sub-personality) does not express our identity, adapts away from it or even betrays it. Equally there are times when we may become very identified with particular aspects of our identity – whether we want to be or not; these may be intrinsically unimportant to us but, in the case of skin colour or race, peculiarly significant to the other.

Here it is unlikely that the coloniser could have anticipated the psychic confusion caused by his interposition of racial categories. 'For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man....Overnight the negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself.' (Fanon p110) One sees Fanon's growing sense of his identity being constituted<sup>170</sup> by the other. But his 'yearning for authentic being' (ibid p8) was denied him in his 'new status as object....I am unable to react as I am – to be authentic...I am who they think I am – and I can't do anything about it.' (ibid p112)

With these expressions of disempowerment, non-being and the yearning for authenticity we have begun to see how identity is affected existentially by the circumstances and particular relational state imposed by colonialism. It is time to see how Assagioli's theory of the Will can be applied in the coaching alliance.

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<sup>168</sup> Literally being 'written out'.

<sup>169</sup> A landmark decision that "a negro, whose ancestors were imported into [the U.S.], and sold as slaves", whether enslaved or free, could not be an American citizen (Wikipedia.)

<sup>170</sup> In retaliation, the term heteropatriarchy is a clever use of the Master's linguistic tools to attempt to constitute the identity of the Master.



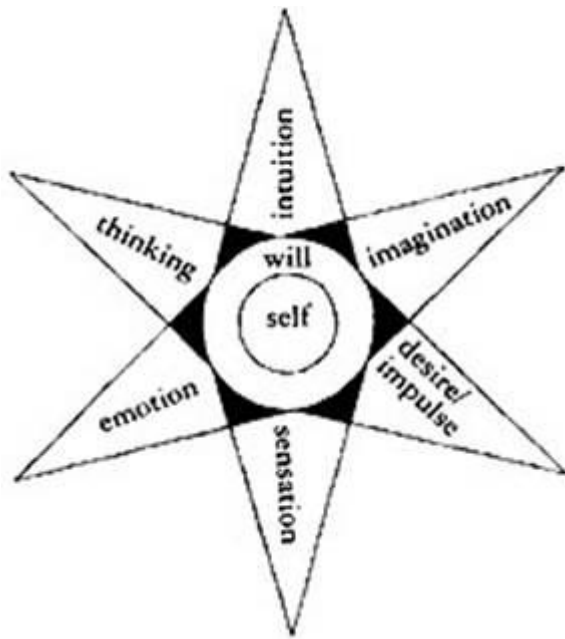


Figure 4

A psychosynthesis approach reminds us that human beings have a yearning to express their true essence but that their ability to do so is determined by the availability to them of Will<sup>171</sup>. According to Evans and Evans (2010) Will is ‘the means whereby spirit or life expresses itself.’ Uniquely in the psychological tradition Assagioli (p33) identified the Will as both an ‘intelligent energy’ and also a key function of the Personal Centre of Identity. But there is also a high degree of variability in Will.<sup>172</sup> The psychosynthesis practice of dis-identification<sup>173</sup> is designed to free up the client’s Will wherever it has been existentially caught or is otherwise unavailable.

Colonialism, as we have seen, appears as an assault on identity, on the mind, on the body and on one’s sense of a coherent reality. So how does one establish an inner foothold in order to withstand this assault? Here is what Assagioli has to say about the exercise of dis-identification:

<sup>171</sup> Assagioli breaks the Will down into its component parts in order for us to become more aware of – and so more readily able to identify with – this invisible force which plays an essential role in our self-organising and self-actualisation. While we can learn to temper and modulate our Will, get the right balance of expression or inhibition, bring forth what is right and apt for the moment, ultimately we can synthesise these many and sometimes conflicting aspects (of which the above diagram lists six) to become most fully who we are.

<sup>172</sup> Assagioli differentiates four key aspects of the Will, (Strong, Skilful, Good and Transcendent), necessary qualities such as Mastery, Concentration and Discipline as well as Stages of Willing which move us from Intention through to Realization.

<sup>173</sup> ‘The Body Feelings Mind [dis-identification reflection] is a window into the functioning of the personality, a way of assessing the degree of balance and harmonisation between different aspects of the personality and understanding how the individual can develop certain aspects more or adjust the balance between them so as to come closer to achieving his/her potential as a spiritual being.’ (Evans p102)

‘Every time we “identify” ourselves with a weakness, a fault, a fear or any personal emotion or drive, we limit and paralyze our selves. Every time we admit “I am discouraged” or “I am irritated” we become more and more dominated by depression or anger. If instead we say, “A wave of discouragement is trying to submerge me” or “An impulse of anger is attempting to overpower me,” the situation is very different.’ (2000 pp19-20)

But if the situation the colonised finds himself in is one of physical torture<sup>174</sup> then the only identification on offer is pain itself, which occupies one’s entire world as ‘an annihilating negative’ (Scarry p34). In this extreme situation identity fragments and all self-expression is limited to pre-verbal cries and shrieks. There may well be Will (transpersonal or strong), which enables the victim to survive, but it is significant that the torturer projects onto the body the role of last-ditch preserver of identity.

The other facet of enslavement already seen with Lynch is the goal of subjugating the Will. The colonised must choose between ‘assimilation or petrification. Planning and building his future are forbidden.’ (Memmi 2003 p146) And here is Malidoma Some: ‘at the mission I never knew what my goal was supposed to be...the institution assumed that its goal was my goal. The result was... the *slow death of my identity*.’ (1994, p98) Chinweizu (1987) rails against the ‘identity crisis’ that has struck the African continent and the ‘lack of autonomous will’ caused by the subjugation of its people. From a psychosynthesis point of view, the closing down of opportunities due to discrimination creates an impact on the (Higher Unconscious qualities of) imagination as well as the Will, sapping the belief in what is deemed possible. According to Memmi: ‘Racism appears then not as an incidental detail but as...the *highest expression* of the colonial system and...lays the foundation for the immutability of this life.’ (ibid p118)

This is bleak indeed for assimilation<sup>175</sup> arguably requires a *willing loss of parts of one’s identity* and

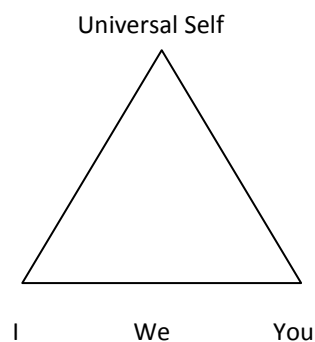
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<sup>174</sup> On torture: While as coaches we are unlikely to be working with current victims of torture it is important to be aware that the trans-generational memory and experience of torture is a reality and this may manifest in our clients.

assumes a welcoming host to assimilate into – which is not always available. In the impossibility of navigating the existential crisis, breakdown looms. ‘I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together by another self,’ says Fanon. (p109) There is an estrangement from Self: ‘I am not seen for who I am. I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed...they objectively cut away slices of my reality.’ (ibid p116)

Lombard’s work on ‘culture shock’ (2012) addresses impacts on identity for students moving to foreign countries but has broader applicability. Under conditions of shock ‘adaptive’<sup>176</sup> identities may become prominent, while other unmirrored<sup>177</sup> parts recede. This introduces the important psychosynthesis concept of sub-personalities which are driven by varying underlying wants and needs. A practitioner can help rein in a dominant sub-personality, modulate an identity crisis in which there feels like a ‘revolution inside’ (Nwadeyi 2015) or initiate a dialogue between parts which acknowledges their deeper needs and origins. Lombard describes the process of Recognition-Acceptance-Coordination-Integration-Synthesis (see Figure 5) which, through moderating acts of Will, leads to a harmonious synthesising of these elements (p41).

Figure 5



In Figure 5 the ‘we’ on the horizontal axis only comes into being through authentic relation between ‘I’ and ‘You’. The tension in the new ‘we-ness’ is that in order for a new higher level shared identity to come into being both ‘You’ and ‘I’ have to be prepared to surrender our own egoic identities. This

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<sup>175</sup> Assimilation by the immigrant is often cited as a cultural requirement; but this seems at odds with Western values of individualism, freedom and so-called tolerance. Consequently it may be experienced as a double-bind or Catch-22.

<sup>176</sup> Adaptation is a frequent requirement for survival but may lead one away from an authentic relation to Self.

<sup>177</sup> It is part of the practitioner’s role to mirror the authentic aspects of the client’s identity, thereby affirming their existence as part of the essential nature of the client. For a discussion of mirroring and unmirroring see Firman & Gila p147.

synthesis Assagioli defines as ‘a higher unity endowed with the qualities which transcend those of either’. (2002 p101)

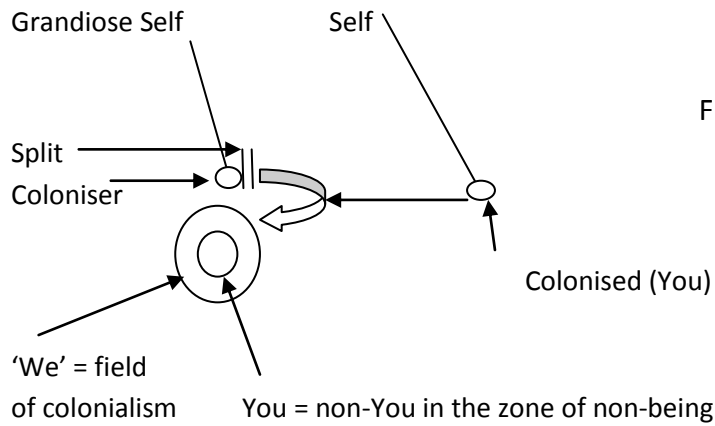


Figure 6 (see explanation)<sup>178</sup>

The state of non-relation depicted above denies the possibility of authentic expression. So when Ngugi wa Thiong’o was banned from writing in his own language in pre-independence Kenya his ‘struggle for cultural identity’ really began. For him self-expression – a fundamental need – when enforced in the language of the coloniser meant alienation from his traditional audience and the collective identity. ‘Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self,’ but an ‘inherited colonial educational system interposes another consciousness<sup>179</sup>...It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person.’ (1981 p28)

A similar fate befell personal identity with indigenous names<sup>180</sup> (Odinga p55) changed to ones that were both recognisably Christian and, to a tone-deaf British ear, more readily pronounceable<sup>181</sup>. The

<sup>178</sup> The right-relational connection between colonised and coloniser, however, is never established (see Figure 6). While the colonised remains initially connected to Self, the coloniser appears in thrall to his grandiose, egoic self. Unlike in Figure 5 there is no possibility of union or higher level connection developing. The colonised makes a movement towards the coloniser, who sits behind his fortress (the split, represented here by the two short lines) and does not reciprocate. Instead the coloniser emerges to meet the colonised on his terms, namely in the Field of Colonialism. This is where the ‘we-ness’ is located and where the ‘you-ness’ of your identity as a colonised person falls under attack. You have entered Fanon’s ‘zone of non-being’ and need to find a way out. Colonialism thus presents itself as antithetical to the idea of Right Relations but is also split off from all transcendent possibilities than can emerge from an authentic connection between ‘I’ and ‘Thou’.

<sup>179</sup> This is akin to an attempted external break of the ‘I’-Self connection, in psychosynthesis terms (note). For him ‘Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one’s environment.

<sup>180</sup> In Kenya this process has been reversed by the present generation.

colonisers also created a pseudo-parental authority for themselves in relation to their subjects which was psychologically strategic<sup>182</sup>, infantilising and damagingly inauthentic<sup>183</sup>. There remains the disrespectful and sometimes deliberate practice of mispronouncing<sup>184</sup> foreign names by the dominant monoglot<sup>185</sup> culture.

In the contemporary world the Aid Industry's<sup>186</sup> economics seem to require the perpetuation of a dependency culture<sup>187</sup>, which of course re-enacts colonial dynamics. The descendants of the formerly colonised are viewed (in Western advertisements) as existing in a seemingly permanent state of illness, pestilence, poverty and malnutrition. From a psychosynthesis point of view there is clearly a danger of the collective Will being dis-intermediated with decisions made by Western NGOs<sup>188</sup> on the basis of presumed or projected needs.<sup>189</sup> It is safe to say that Aid may be of valuable practical help on the one hand but also lead to the deepening or perpetuation of unseen internalised complexes on the other, such as deferral to white authority and initiative; and Aid is not reparations.

And a further poignant example of secondary impact arises from the positioning of people of colour as minorities in the dominant, majority white culture. The comment from a schoolboy in East London that 'stories have to be about white people' (Chetty 2013) speaks to the continued colonisation of psychic structures that arises when one is existing within the cultural narrative of the other. Tony Morrison (2012) has spoken of her experience of reading literature which was clearly written not for her but for a white, male reader. This evokes and re-enacts<sup>190</sup> a time when Black men and women were not presumed to be part of public discourse. Likewise the focus on the recent all-White Oscars<sup>191</sup> or whitewashing<sup>192</sup> really needs the full contextualising<sup>193</sup> which, as we saw in

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<sup>181</sup> In Indian call centres the Anglicization and Christianization of workers' first names is a modern re-enactment of identity theft.

<sup>182</sup> Through the practice of projective identification

<sup>183</sup> Traumatized clients need the support of authentic parental figures, not their tormentors

<sup>184</sup> This can for many diaspora Africans still be an everyday source of trauma and humiliation.

<sup>185</sup> What is lost on the monoglot is the way in which, through studying the language of the other, we enter into mindsets, patterns of thought which might include abstracted, secularised worldviews that do not mirror and hence may challenge our sense of self.

<sup>186</sup> Aid is the institutionalised transfer of funds from the 'developed' North to the 'undeveloped' South.

<sup>187</sup> Writers such as Moyo (2010) have described the damage done to Africa from this industry.

<sup>188</sup> Non-Governmental Organisations are frequently organisations engaged in running Aid programs under the auspices of the UN.

<sup>189</sup> This is the classic psychological underpinning of co-dependent relationships.

<sup>190</sup> And thus subtly traumatises.

<sup>191</sup> The Academy Awards: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-oscars-so-white-reaction-htmistory.html>

Chapter 3, currently evokes too much 'discomfort'<sup>194</sup>.

Creating a safe<sup>195</sup> space for identity thus becomes paramount. Psychologically we attempt this through the process of 'splitting', which Freud described as 'a very ingenious solution' (1981d, p275-277) for maintaining relationship and being in the face of trauma. 'In forming a stable sense of identity, both the depths of wounding and the heights of perfection are to some extent eliminated from consciousness over the course of normal development.' (Firman and Gila 1997 p111) But at the same time the psyche needs positive material within the unconscious to balance the trauma of what is referred to as 'Primal Wounding'<sup>196</sup>. It seems very likely that music<sup>197</sup> played a key psychological and spiritual balancing role<sup>198</sup> in the process of holding identity during enslavement and subsequently. The concept of external unifying centres<sup>199</sup> speaks to the need for our identity to be affirmed by others, the tradition of the griot<sup>200</sup> being a relevant example. This is because in the absence of such affirmation we may experience fear of annihilation, Fanon's 'zone of non-being'. But such centres do not have to be good (Firman and Gila p101); simply being acknowledged is enough. 'At last I had been recognized,' says Fanon. 'I was no longer a zero.' (ibid p129)

To examine modern British perspectives<sup>201</sup> on trans-cultural identity, race and belonging, I inter-

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<sup>192</sup> The illogical and hence discriminatory casting of white actors instead of actors of colour in historical dramas: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/13/gods-of-egypt-posters-anger-whitewashed-cast-twitter-exodus>

<sup>193</sup> Diversity programmes, Affirmative Action and quota systems, stripped from this context, may thus further divide and backfire

<sup>194</sup> The entitlement to racial comfort is, especially in the US, viewed as part of the psychological anatomy of white supremacy/fragility.

<sup>195</sup> As psychosynthesis coaches we monitor the ego strength of our clients, recognising that a certain amount of this is developmentally necessary in order to access Will, navigate life's challenges and enable self-expression. But a safe space in the coaching alliance is a pre-requisite for helping someone struggling at the level of identity to build that strength. This implicitly recognises that safety is not necessarily available in the public domain. The safe spaces movement on university campuses, such as at Goldsmiths College (Goodfellow 2015), offered members of a (in this case white) majority group a rare experience their racialised identity and exclusion on the grounds of it. While this evoked discomfort and was countered with complaints at the undemocratic nature of their exclusion these are the stirrings of new consciousness. Arguably 'safety' requires two things: a compassionate and more contextualised understanding of the position of the other and a dialogical modality (such as Right Relations) for exploring this.

<sup>196</sup> This is the authors' term for psychological wounding that occurs to almost all human beings as a result of early childhood 'empathic failure'.

<sup>197</sup> Mentioned by a disproportionate number of my interviewees as a means to reach or find their identity.

<sup>198</sup> Certain forms of music speaks to the transpersonal dimension of the human being.

<sup>199</sup> External Unifying Centres are regarded by John Firman and Ann Gila (2002) as holding and affirming important parts of our identity. These centres are usually other human beings but may include animals.

<sup>200</sup> Griots in their important social role in West Africa as singers and social commentators and custodians of local history could be seen as playing the part of 'external unifying centres' for the culture.

<sup>201</sup> Avatar Brah (1996) writes of the 'changing enigma of identity', shifting 'from instability to coherence' in the modern world, subject to the whim of the state, police and officialdom (see Undoing Border Imperialism, Walia 2013). The author arrived in the UK from Uganda with a secure sense of self only to be outraged, mortified, and temporarily silenced by the racist onslaught. She sees 'reality' as socially constructed, understood and perceived differently by all, but the connecting threads provide an individual with an ongoing sense of self; culture and identity are thus inextricably linked. Resisting projective-identification becomes an act of political consciousness and self-

viewed six participants (see Appendix). I conclude from this small but interesting study that those who withstand attacks on their identity and whose identity has multiple points of identification are likely to develop several advantages, including self-awareness, resilience, empathy and enlarged capacity to relate to the other, a disinclination towards dualistic thinking and also an ability to hold complexity and contradiction, for which their lives have given them rich training. They also will speak languages and understand cultural nuance. From an evolutionary standpoint they have much to contribute in the increasingly monocultural world and as a group they are growing fast.

This detailed focus on identity aimed to convey the cognitive, experiential and imaginative distance that someone who has not been subject to such oppression must travel in order to meet the other as he or she is. Gill Tuckwell (2002) writes that ‘the search for identity...leads to differences in the intrapsychic development of black and white people as a result of the collective memory and experiences of oppression. The traditional white belief in black inferiority and white superiority has had a particular function for white groups in obscuring the need to look more deeply at unresolved feelings and issues about self and other.’ In this vein the phenomenology of white anxiety<sup>202</sup> at navigating ‘Black issues’ has been usefully documented (Mckenzie-Mavinga). And I would argue that the white Western unconsciousness around non-equivalent experience of identity can on its own act as a potential everyday source of re-traumatisation for the other. Added to this is the ‘craziness’<sup>203</sup> (Nayak 2015 p95) that the oppressor cannot seem to see the wrongness of his position. We have spoken about the coach’s need to develop a psycho-historical lens to better view the client. But the white coach also needs to explore his or her own psycho-history in more depth. In the next chapter we peer through this lens to better contextualise the actions of the coloniser.

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awareness. This raises the issue of which parts of your identity are permanently yours to possess, and which are vulnerable to being lost, controlled or rendered invisible. For feminists there may be the struggle to define and communicate politicised categories which are really vital to one’s sense of identity. In psycho-synthesis, crucially, there is always Self. So a practitioner who holds the context of the client’s transpersonal identity will work to locate and mirror missing or vulnerable parts of the whole identity.

<sup>202</sup> Mckenzie-Mavinga (2002-05 p149) ‘There is something in the term black that creates confusion in the white listener about whether the knowledge will be accessible to learn.’

<sup>203</sup> The Combahee River Collective states that Black feminists often talk about their feelings of ‘craziness’ before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly feminism.

## Chapter 5 WAYS OF SEEING



**Figure 7**

'India offering her pearls to Britannia'<sup>204</sup>. A painting by Spiridione Roma<sup>205</sup>, 1777, commissioned for the East India Company. Foreign and Commonwealth Office<sup>206</sup>. (Compare to Figure 6)

*"Men of all the quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your prosperity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature."* Johann-Gottfried Herder<sup>207</sup>

*"Those involved in this ludicrous case should recognise that the British Crown Jewels is precisely the right place for the Koh-i-Noor<sup>208</sup> diamond to reside, in grateful recognition for over three centuries of British involvement in India, which led to the modernisation, development, protection, agrarian advance, linguistic unification and ultimately the democratisation of the sub-continent."* Andrew Roberts<sup>209</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Britannia is the female personification of the island so named by the Romans, later becoming an emblem of British imperial power.

<sup>205</sup> Italian painter 1737-81

<sup>206</sup> Formed in 1968 out of a merger with the British former Colonial Office.

<sup>207</sup> German philosopher, poet, theologian. 1744-1803

<sup>208</sup> This celebrated diamond, property of the Sikh empire, came into the possession of the East India Company following the British capture of the Punjab in 1849.

<sup>209</sup> Self-confessed 'very right-wing' historian, born 1963.



In this chapter we step into the fields of neuroscience, behavioural psychology, art and literature to broaden our enquiry and furnish ourselves with a deeper contextual background for understanding cognitive and cultural roots of Western colonialism. If our hypothesis of a split in the European psyche is correct we would expect to find corroborating evidence for it in other fields. We observe the nascent egoic power of materialist mindsets through John Berger's deconstruction of the oil painting (2008); we look at Iain McGilchrist's theory of the Divided Brain (2011); we touch on some of the founding works of Western classical literature for missing clues about identity; we explore the phenomenon of splitting with reference to narcissism; and we look at the modern multi-cultural organisation to see what is going on at a behavioural level that relates to our subject. We end with a summary of what Systems Theory has to say about the nature of open systems and why this is important. We link these to important psychosynthesis concepts around the Will.

We have already noted that the study of trauma was long neglected in Western psychology, which can be partially accounted for by the fact that, when viewed through an Enlightenment perspective, trauma clearly fell outside what could be *objectively* known. In the culture of the 'stiff upper lip'<sup>210</sup> 'irrational' feelings were, like Nature<sup>211</sup>, there to be conquered and 'mastered'. Africans, being seen as closest to Nature, were thus similarly bracketed. Dark-skinned peoples were all too recognisable as fitting the category of the 'savage' which had been carved into the European unconscious since the days of Ancient Greece. European identity, I suggest, was long ago substantially formed through the unconscious identification with *not being* this other, while egoic defences were part of the colonialist mindset 2,500 years ago. It is notable that in the secular Western world we cling to an ancient Greek term 'hierarchy'<sup>212</sup> when there is nothing sacred about such structures any longer; but they have become the vital 'untouchable'<sup>213</sup> modes by which egoic separateness can be assured and perpetuated both socially and organisationally.

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<sup>210</sup> A term from the early 19th century onwards to describe products of the English public school system, many of whom went on to become part of the colonial edifice). It refers to an imperviousness to emotion, especially fear. But in 'steeling ourselves' in the conquest of the other or even of our emotions we risk dehumanising ourselves.

<sup>211</sup> According to Hobbes in Leviathan the 'natural condition of mankind is warre...a life nasty, brutish and short' (1651). Civilization was deemed impossible without land rights.

<sup>212</sup> 'Hierarchy' from the Greek is literally 'sacred' or 'priestly rule'

<sup>213</sup> From the Latin 'sacere' with the connotation that what is sacred is that which may not be touched.

Williams carefully shows that portrayal of the savage in European literature from Homer<sup>214</sup> onwards relied on dehumanised stereotyping. But there was a political dimension to this too. As he says, 'the savage was destined to be surpassed by a superior form of civilization'.<sup>215</sup> George Washington<sup>216</sup> and Thomas Jefferson<sup>217</sup> were among those who 'readily adopted that language, virtually unchanged from its ancient Greek roots', in order to 'identify and isolate the savage as an irreconcilable enemy to civilization.' (2011 p210) Power relations between the coloniser and the colonised thus came to be seen as an artefact of natural law.

Iain McGilchrist has written in extraordinary depth about the two hemispheres of the brain and what brain structure and hemispheric function have to say about our evolving world. Our experience of something takes place primarily and holistically in the right hemisphere, then is passed to the left hemisphere for refinement and recalibration, before being re-presented to the right for a 'final take'. There is thus a co-ordination and synthesising of experience (which evokes the role of the Will in psychosynthesis). However, the left hemisphere's specialty is narrow focussed attention on parts, whereas the right's is on broader attention to a holistic context. He believes that decontextualised left-hemispheric modes of thinking have been on the rise in the West since 5<sup>th</sup> Century Greece, were interrupted by the Renaissance (with its reconnection to ancient Egyptian and Neoplatonic<sup>218</sup> cultural sources) and then became more deeply entrenched by Enlightenment rationalism. (2009 p266) In the early years of Greek civilization etymological analysis of verbs meaning 'to see' shows that 'seeing had not been extracted from its context within the lived world' and so was still relational. This matters hugely because, as McGilchrist points out (ibid p167), 'seeing is the main medium by which we enact our relationship with the world.' Scientific *objectivity* by contrast involves a 'detached... disengaged relationship...which enables us to do certain things more easily, to use things, to have power over things'. (p166) It is tempting to see this linguistic shift as both

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<sup>214</sup> Presumed author of The Iliad and The Odyssey, which originated somewhere between 760 and 710 BC.

<sup>215</sup> To be 'civilized' means in this context to have had contact with Western culture. In a telling example of projection, the Fore and Dani people were not presumed to have the ability to recognise emotions. (Howitt, D and Owusu-Bempah. J. 1994 p75)

<sup>216</sup> The First President of the United States.

<sup>217</sup> Principal author of the Declaration of Independence and Third President of the United States.

<sup>218</sup> The city of Alexandria was the setting for an extraordinary synthesis of Egyptian ancient wisdom with more recent Greek philosophy. Plato himself believed he was living at the end of a golden age, rather than its beginning.

centering the illusion of separation and the normalisation of 'othering'<sup>219</sup>. More worryingly, given that 'the aim of the left hemisphere is power' (ibid 350) such othering loses claims to innocence.

John Berger writes that from 1500-1900, a period which largely contains European colonialism, 'a way of seeing the world, which was ultimately determined by new attitudes to property and exchange, found its visual expression in the oil painting.' (2008 p81) Intriguingly 'oil painting.... reduced everything to the equality of objects...everything became a commodity... Oil painting contained a vision of total exteriority.' (p82) In line with McGilchrist's view of the 'grasping' left hemisphere, 'oil painting....defines the real as *what you can put your hands on*... celebrated a new kind of wealth which...found its only sanction in the supreme buying power of money...and its visual desirability...tangibility.' (ibid p84) Of the innovation of the European nude Berger says: 'the spectator in front of the painting is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there.' (p48) This is most surely about the imperial or colonial male gaze. So through Berger we see the emergence over the colonial period of a very self-confident, dominating and possibly narcissistic materialism.

Ovid's<sup>220</sup> tale of Echo and Narcissus<sup>221</sup> is one of the founding myths of European literature. As Berger says, 'a certain moral value was ascribed to study of classics' (p95) which 'supplied the ...ruling class with a system of references for the forms of their own idealized behaviour.' But how carefully were they read? I suspect, for example, that not many public school boys read the Oresteia<sup>222</sup> as a cautionary tale, as does Coles (2011), of the '*blinding*'<sup>223</sup> effect that ignorance of the past can have upon emotional development.'<sup>224</sup> (Duffell 2014) Ovid's tale, however, describes the relationship

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<sup>219</sup> As in the earlier discussion of Right Relations and Buber, 'othering' is a means whereby the other is seen and addressed as less than human – an 'it'.

<sup>220</sup> Publius Ovidius Naso 43BC-17AD

<sup>221</sup> The myth is from Book III of the Metamorphoses and describes the unrequited love of the talkative nymph, Echo, for the handsome youth Narcissus. Echo is made to disappear by the Goddess Aphrodite but she becomes a voice that is 'heard by all'.

<sup>222</sup> A trilogy written by Aeschylus (525-456BC)

<sup>223</sup> Coles says that Greek tragedy reminds us 'that 3,000 years of child-rearing have ignored the emotional life of children.' How ironic it would be if these ancient tragedians were to have been fundamentally misinterpreted by their supposed cultural heirs running the British Empire 2000 years later.

<sup>224</sup> The future colonial administrators of the day would have been brought up on the Classics traditionally at boarding schools which, echoing Coles, were hardly known as centres of 'emotional development' for children. Duffell's Entitlement Delusion (2014) refers to a 'Strategic Survivor Personality' which creates an early split in the psyche of the young boarder, carving out a space for permanently

between the self-absorbed youth Narcissus, who falls in love with his own reflection, and the nymph Echo, whose attentions he rejects. McGilchrist reminds us that ‘attention is a moral act: it creates, brings aspects of things into being, but in doing so others recede.’ (ibid p133). Thus Narcissus is stuck, an immature, amoral figure, sociopathically dependent on his reflection for his own authority and worldview. But there is also no depth in the gaze of Narcissus; as James Hillman points out, in the Renaissance, with fear of death all around, ‘psychologising was.... a matter of survival; one had to *see through* into the depths of everything and everyone.’ (1992 p205); gazing with depth – psychologising – thus allows for *multiplicity* of awareness. This addresses the question of what is *excluded*<sup>225</sup> from his gaze; Narcissus doesn’t see the other or the relational context that exists between them but instead is *exclusively* identified with an *image* of himself. There is no self-reflection, no awareness of a dimension beyond the egoic.

Conventionally a narcissist is one who sees people as objects for fulfilment of his own needs. But psychologists variously see the condition as a ‘defensively regressed character disorder...whose entire effort is to maintain admiration, depreciate others and avoid dependency.’ (Kernberg 1975); or as ‘fundamentally the central expression of the alienation from one’s true self.’ (Almaas 1996) Interestingly Memmi (p109) and Fanon (p10), both psychologists, had characterised the colonial project as narcissistic. Sartre went further: ‘Since he [the colonizer] denies humanity in others he regards it everywhere as his enemy. To handle this, the colonizer must assume the opaque rigidity and imperviousness of stone. In short, he must dehumanise himself as well.’ (ibid p24) So, in the context of Echo who represents the colonised other, the narcissistic lens is the lens that doesn’t see.

The myth of Admiral Nelson<sup>226</sup>, the blind eye and the telescope is treasured by the British as evidence of implacable conviction in the business of war with the enemy. Choosing not to see the other sustained the colonial experience. Common sense tells us this is an unnatural state, and in the

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repressed vulnerability and feeling. Even way back in 5<sup>th</sup> C BC in the Oresteia there is the very modern psychological idea that conflict in the outside world is a mirror of an internal warring of the psyche, prefiguring the Freudian super ego (Coles p7).

<sup>225</sup> Exclusivity is one of the mantras of the advertising world and consumer society, which exhorts us to see our identities as somehow ‘more than’ through the ownership of objects that are beyond the reach of others.

<sup>226</sup> Lord Nelson 1758-1805 who defied orders in refusing to see with his blind eye the signal of his commanding officer at Copenhagen in 1801.

20<sup>th</sup> Century Quantum Theory and Systems Theory emerged to show that everything is relational. As Sartre suggests, there is something dehumanising about assuming a disengaged relational state. In light of new theory, that early childhood wounding is the source of narcissistic neediness, one wonders about the cost to the coloniser of his colonising – the loss perhaps of his own humanity.

The other characteristic commonly associated with narcissism is grandiosity. The theory is that, to deflect from the bottomless neediness, the narcissist presents a dazzling exterior. In our enquiry about the psychological health of British colonialism we really must ask ourselves why Britain felt the inclination – or indeed the need – to add the epithet ‘Great’. No other country has chosen to do so. Nor does any language other than English capitalise the personal pronoun, which has the awkward effect that ‘I’ am always more important than ‘you’ or indeed ‘them’. It is certainly not a statement of humility; nor is it right-relational. And the preoccupation with pomp and public ritual (of which the British are notable exponents) has been singled out as inauthentic expressions of a ‘show-off culture<sup>227</sup> that intimidates’ (Some 1993 p39).

One of the tragic ironies of oppression is that for every act there are, it seems to me, two different experiences of consciousness. Fanon seems to see it this way too. ‘Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to “make it unconscious.” The white man, on the other hand, succeeds in doing so to a certain extent,’ (ibid 150) in Fanon’s view through guilt, but, I would suggest, through the interior psychological defence of the split<sup>228</sup>. But tragically, according to Washburn (1994), this instinctive (because trans-generationally transmitted) splitting, if not healed, comes to represent a splitting of our relationship to Ultimate Reality – the ‘very context of our consciousness’ (Firman and Gila ibid p107). This is why looking at identity through the context of centuries of colonialism is so critical.

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<sup>227</sup> For Western people the suggestion is that identity (see Chapter 1) is frequently bound up with material factors.

<sup>228</sup> What generates the colonialist split is the illusory sense of separateness in the mind of the coloniser, his use of racism to reinforce it and of projective identification by which the oppressed is seen to be deserving of and fit only for his subservient position, which is then continuously normalised to fortify the split still further.

The narcissistic split is a more pronounced variant of this and stands like a fortress in the psyche. With its mindset of separateness, 'difference' easily manifests as 'threat'. While warding off this difference gives the ego some sense of perceived security, in so doing it screens the 'I' from its more variegated, complete sense of self. Thus for Schwarz-Salant (1982 p43) 'there is a narcissistic defence which prevents authentic spiritual development and cannot sustain any true sense of identity.' The phenomenon of 'white fragility'<sup>229</sup> (D'Angelo 2015) becomes a symptom of the unconscious activation of these defences around this split; alternatively, viewed from the level of Self, the fragility can be seen an opportunity to experience vulnerability, change and one's own plurality.

We are touching here on a very important principle in regard to splitting. In psychosynthesis, departing significantly from Freud, a more inclusive view of the human being is described. Whereas the Freudian lens became misted up from an attenuated focus on sexuality and early childhood memories, the transpersonal dimension emerged from phenomenological study. This dimension holds what exists for us at the level of meaning, values, inspiration, creativity. Enlightenment rationalism, modern militant atheism and even mainstream psychology have all split off from admitting the existence of an elevated part of the psyche, for two reasons: one because it takes one back into dangerous territory that has been already abandoned as primitive or irrational i.e. the absurdity of divinity; but also the activation of Superconscious aspects of the psyche can trigger an unconscious awareness of the repressed contents of its relative, the Lower Unconscious, which have, at all cost, to be 'sectioned'<sup>230</sup>. This is the anatomy of the collective, cultural split. The good is to be kept safe from the bad. Self-expression becomes dangerous.

In thrilling contrast to all this and, according to Systems Theory developed by Capra (1997) and others, open systems are characterised by a wholeness in which all parts of a system are in relation

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<sup>229</sup> The acute discomfort perceived in white people's responses e.g. when accused of racist behaviour, or in relation to racialization of their identity.

<sup>230</sup> Sectioning is the process of hospitalizing those who are deemed to be psychologically too unwell for society. The suggestion here is that, given the high correlation with race, there is either some projection afoot or the challenge of holding one's identity is existentially too demanding.

with and transform each other. Such systems, as noted, are self-organising and self-creative. At moments known as bifurcation points, which occur when the systems are operating far from equilibrium, the systems attempt to evolve to a new level of complexity. 'Complex plurality is the way of nature.' (Nicolescu 2002) The colonial model with its divisive dualism and its exporting of complexity beyond the boundaries is surely no longer fit for purpose in a world which has begun to theorize beyond these redundant and non-empathic states of relations.

For corporations, financially incentivised to function at optimal levels, Systems Theory offers transformative possibilities. Kilmann's Quantum Organization (2001) speaks to the future of the workplace where human beings have evolved beyond the default modes of 'might is right'<sup>231</sup>. But recent findings from neuroscience and behavioural<sup>232</sup> psychology tell us that we humans still have a long way to travel when it comes to dealing with issues such as 'difference' and 'race'. The danger is that these inter-personal difficulties metastasise as blocks in organisational flow, disrupting the feedback function and thus threatening the vital process of autopoiesis. According to Mooney (2014), 'in order to rid the world of prejudice, we can't simply snuff out overt, conscious, full-throated racism. Nor can we fundamentally remake the human brain, with its rapid-fire associations and its categorizing, essentializing<sup>233</sup> ... Instead, the key lies in shifting people's behavior, even as we also make them aware of how cultural assumptions merge with natural cognitive processes to create biases they may not know they have.' So an educational process awaits. But there is also more complexity. 'The capacity to discern 'us' from 'them' is fundamental in the human brain,' says neuroscientist David Amodio (2010). 'Although this computation takes just a fraction of a second, it sets the stage for social categorization, stereotypes, prejudices...' Echoing McGilchrist, neuroscientist Carmit Tadmor (2011) cautions that 'essentialism appears to exert its negative effects on creativity not through *what* people think but *how* they think.' She suggests that 'stereotyping and creative stagnation are rooted in a similar tendency to over-rely on existing category attributes.' This speaks to a certain closed-mindedness which is not self-reflexive and so goes back to the drawing-board

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<sup>231</sup> The old notion that those who have the power determine morality

<sup>232</sup> Behavioral Psychology pre-dated psychoanalysis and remains very popular in its place of origin, the USA.

<sup>233</sup> Essentialism is a view that for a given group of people there is a set of attributes necessary for its function and identity.

(what it 'knows') rather than seek out new possibilities or alternative views which could lay down new neural pathways. Amodio further says that 'most forms of implicit learning are resistant to extinction,' such as racial bias, which is very hard to change especially in the face of regular reinforcement through media stereotyping. Meanwhile Gutsill and Inzlicht (2006) present evidence that the amount and empathic quality of attention paid to work colleagues is indeed dependent on race<sup>234</sup>. Finally corporate disinclination to rock the boat and discomfort shareholders or clients is likely to constrain boldness around issues of 'difference'<sup>235</sup> (Bushe 2010). So when advertisers began responding to the demographic reality of the 'pink pound'<sup>236</sup> or more recently the Mixed Race couple, there is some normalising shift in the collective consciousness even if what is being acknowledged is only a consumer identity. In summary there is significant inertia in altering perceptions around race and difference, following centuries of colonial programming, internalisation and the lack of multiple perspectives available through educational systems and corporate media.

The findings of this chapter suggest that developments in 20<sup>th</sup> century science are propelling humanity towards a state of inter-relational being which is more open and aligned with Nature's ways but which requires us to hold greater complexity and perhaps also develop greater levels of empathy to counter some of our neurological programming. This paper has highlighted the potential for London to act as the container for inter-relational learning conversations of the future. In order to assess the prospects for such transformational dialogue we need to look more closely at what is emergent in these transitional times and engage with it.

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<sup>234</sup> This may be based on unconscious presumptions that someone from one race is less organisationally 'important' than someone from another, but still a sort of internalised racism.

<sup>235</sup> 'The strongest force in [US] organizational behaviour is the avoidance of one feeling: anxiety'. Gervase L. Bushe (2010 p114)

<sup>236</sup> A term for the purchasing power of gay people that emerged in the era before the legalisation of gay adoption.



## CHAPTER 6: AWAKENINGS

*'The strategy for decolonising...history is to remove the West from the central place it occupies in our image of the world and its history.'* Chinweizu

As coaches we work at the microcosmic level but at times may be conscious of macrocosmic currents which impact our clients and ourselves at deep levels. Bohm's Implicate Order (1980) acknowledged that the microcosm is always 'enfolded' into a greater whole; Capra's Systems Theory (1997) speaks of the interconnectedness of all; Maturana and Varela's Santiago Theory of Cognition<sup>237</sup> reveals all living systems as self-organising and self-creating. Joan Evans's Triphasic<sup>238</sup> model from the field of psychosynthesis psychology seems a natural and 'elegant' partner (Palmer 2010 p27). I believe that the Triphasic Model along with Assagioli's Theory of Spiritual Awakening<sup>239</sup> can illuminate the current post-colonial stasis while providing a transpersonal vision for mutual understanding.

Evans's model is complex but we will confine our attention to two key aspects of it. First that what characterises it is not just interaction between but *interpenetrability* of Will and consciousness across the three human developmental levels of pre-personal<sup>240</sup>, personal and transpersonal. Secondly the Freudian ego is the psychological structure which in psychosynthesis is a temporary organising one or 'a set of boundary conditions serving to create a vehicle for one's distinction' (Evans 2007 Vol 5 p13), corresponding to the identified, reactive (and largely unconscious) 'I'. In psychosynthesis 'ego development' is seen as a necessary power-seeking phase in which the 'I', having negotiated separation anxiety, wrestles and practises with both Will and Consciousness, the interplay of which can have regressive or progressive outcomes. So the ego is seen as *both temporary structure and maturational process* that generates the individual psyche of a conscious person acting with intentionality in the world.

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<sup>237</sup> The Santiago Theory of Cognition originated in 1978 and holds that 'mind and world arise together'.

<sup>238</sup> The Triphasic Model explores the psychodynamics of Will through the human being's experience of three levels of consciousness: pre-personal, persona and transpersonal.

<sup>239</sup> This is a theory based on the phenomenological assessment of human beings undergoing dramatic experiences which impact them at the level of meaning.

<sup>240</sup> A term for the period of development that precedes egoic formation.

This model helps us see how the Enlightenment view of human development was not wrong per se, but rather based on a horizontal and linear conception of human development. Colonial man, far from being a developmental pinnacle, was very much stuck at the egoic stage and his contemporary version is in danger of making the 'temporary structure' into a permanent walled fortress, thereby putting in jeopardy the maturational process that he is coded for. As Evans clarifies, unfoldment of the encoding process does not emerge by default but depends on the interplay of individual and collective Will and consciousness in their transitional state.

Meanwhile evidence suggests that the experience of hundreds of years of colonial oppression in many different parts of the world has awakened something in the collective, which is not going to be silenced. Listen to this from Asa Hilliard III (2012): 'It makes no sense for an African to begin an intellectual quest from somebody else's standpoint. We are either African or we are nothing. We cannot claim our heritage when it is expedient for us and ignore it when it is not....we must understand not only the role played by white supremacy in our subjugation but also the role we ourselves have played in not practising self-determination.' In psychosynthesis terms this is an attempt to rally the collective Will, misplaced in the search for 'temporary comfort', and realign it at the transpersonal level with 'ancient African socialization processes [which] show us that communities can function and be productive when everyone, young and old, has a purpose and value that contributes to the community's wellbeing.' Or this from Audre Lorde (1984): 'It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.' Alongside this is Marimba Ani's *Yuruga* (1993), in which Kiswahili<sup>241</sup> is adapted to create resonant terms to describe the pan-African cultural seed, worldview and collective vital force. She also assigns a name to the genocide suffered by African people, *Maafa*<sup>242</sup> which repossesses the memory of collective suffering, while invoking a shared inviolable, cultural identity. Ani speaks of the necessity of conceptualising one's self-consciousness as a people in one's own language, and thereby connecting to a deeper truth of one's essence to head off 'cultural and psychological extinction'.

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<sup>241</sup> Kiswahili is the language of the coastal peoples of East Africa and was promoted as the pan-African language of choice.

<sup>242</sup> Literally 'disaster'.

(2014)

Peering through the lens of Spiritual Awakening, such rallying cries bear the hallmarks of genuine awakening movements. But there is more. Looking beyond an exclusively African renaissance, we find the Decolonisation<sup>243</sup> movement, embracing indigenous people the world over. Following African independence realisation dawned that the actual processes of colonisation penetrated deeply into each and every discipline, including, as we have witnessed, the mind. So nowadays the philosophy of Decolonisation is addressing legacy issues in fields as diverse as health<sup>244</sup>, anthropology and education<sup>245</sup> while reaching back deep into indigenous values to rebirth ancient wisdom in modern society. In psychosynthesis terms this is a healthy and inspiring process of *dis-identification* from imposed, alien practices but also a wholesome reconnection with the transpersonal dimension of collective indigenous values and wisdom. As Paulette Regan confirms (2010), 'Decolonization is not "integration" or the token inclusion of Indigenous ceremony. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a *culture of denial* to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting cultural perceptions and power relations in real ways.' These movements are about the search for authentic expression and representation and they are joyful<sup>246</sup>.

Back in the coaching alliance, coming to terms with 300-500 years of unacknowledged but culturally normalised inhumanity may require a shift in consciousness in the coach akin to an awakening. This further unfamiliarity may evoke deep discomfort and cognitive dissonance as the psyche tries to contain conflicting beliefs or impulses. Fortunately there is a map for this condition.

Unique amongst Western psychological literature is Roberto Assagioli's detailed Theory of Spiritual

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<sup>243</sup> See McGregor (2012 p4) for definition of decolonising framework.

<sup>244</sup> 'While developing a critical consciousness aimed at understanding precisely how colonialism has affected our health and mindset, we can begin to reaffirm the richness and wisdom inherent in our traditional ways.' Angela Cavender Wilson, 2004, p. 72.

<sup>245</sup> 'Cognitive imperialism' (Battiste, 2000) is the imposition of Euro-centric/Western ways of knowing, teaching and learning as being 'superior'. Decolonizing pedagogies refers to...teaching and learning approaches that both acknowledge and deconstruct structures of power associated with colonization in an effort to create space for, and give legitimacy to, Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. (McGregor 2012 p13)

<sup>246</sup> In the words of one awakening activist: 'I can testify that it is also the most exciting, powerful, intellectually stimulating and emotionally fulfilling journey I have ever undertaken. It has impacted every aspect of my life - personal and professional.' (Nwadeyi 2015)

Awakening. Essentially all human awakenings, political, intellectual, sexual and so on are processes of change which tend to be accompanied at different stages by discomfort, wonder, disbelief, excitement, denial, pain, epiphany, ungroundedness and peak experiences<sup>247</sup> as the psyche adjusts to accommodate new learning and experience. One of the peculiarities of the awakening experience is a sense of something breaking and something else emerging in its place. One awakening decoloniser describes a 'sort of continuum of identity, narrative, pain, anger and dissociation.'  
(Nwadeyi 2015)

There is no set time period for the duration of an awakening but different stages need processing time. Assagioli's theory was intended to demystify a hidden dimension of human experience and show people that they could use their Will to turn the awakening into a new personal synthesis, grounded in a deeper experience of reality. It goes without saying that a coach who has experience of this phenomenon will be better placed to hold awakening potential in the client.

Personal awakenings can so easily founder through lack of supportive understanding from one's environment or as the newness of the experience overwhelms. Reading the work of Audre Lorde<sup>248</sup> through this lens is inspirational. With Lorde there are both the heights and the depths, but they are not split off – all are declared. And when she writes – 'My fullest concentration of energy is available to me...allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves' or 'the energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience (1984) – then we see her as someone who has created a new synthesis of her identity, recognising the multiplicity within and co-ordinating it to create an empowered, harmonious unity (1980a).

But difficulties arise when awakening involves challenging a hegemonic culture of denial. The route

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<sup>247</sup> A term coined by Stanislaw and Christina Grof to describe moments of great joy, bliss or wonder (see Grof and Grof 1990). For discussion of peak experiences see Firman and Gila 1997 p145.

<sup>248</sup> In *Sister Outsider*, unconsciously evoking Memmi and the colonised's choice of 'assimilation or *petrification*', Lorde says, 'in order to withstand the weather we had to become *stone* and now we bruise ourselves upon the other who is closest.' But Lorde's words speak to a wrestling with energies from the Lower Unconscious. So it is that she later writes of living in 'unexpressed fear' of the judgment of the group, inhibiting herself from being 'outstanding' (suppressing the Higher Unconscious energies as a balancing exercise) in case it shames her African American sisters for being 'less than', and re-inflaming the old internalised wound of inferiority.

to empowerment demands expression of one's truth, which under the terms of slavery or colonisation, was impossible or dangerous. In systemic terms we could say that humanity's current system appears, in terms of its relationship to the past, to be under enormous stress and operating 'far from equilibrium'. This holds out the very real possibility of a *breakthrough*; but the forces which see themselves as in charge of the system, and that seek to preserve the split and the denial, interpret this awakening of other parts as a *breakdown* – a loss of everything. And the history of denial runs deep. As Fletchman Smith says, 'thinking about it [slavery] is still defended against in order to maintain psychic integration.' (ibid p11) Dominant power structures seem reluctant to face up to their responsibility for the consequences of persistent denial, the noted cases of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia<sup>249</sup> being exceptions in modern times. The egoic Western self, believing in the pre-eminence of its own awakening, which it immodestly calls The Enlightenment, is not listening and believes it has a more important, imperial need to defend itself and the world from such dangerous pluralistic incursions into its private space. The loss of the colonies was, after all, a massive psychological blow so any talk of further 'decolonisation' inflames this wound.

I would argue that the Enlightenment, notwithstanding the extraordinary achievements of the Industrial Revolution, was a false awakening in which the rationalists unconsciously tried to occupy, even colonise, the transpersonal terrain and make the light of reason create its own narcissistic myths around progress, civilization, refinement, education. The Enlightenment elevated reason over other forms of knowledge-seeking and simultaneously asserted man's dominance over Nature, creating a separation and an opposition between man and the external world. True awakenings, by contrast, are interior, self-interrogating and ultimately, if all goes well, integrative. In an egoic, materialistic world with the monotheistic sky god banished from the heavens, there is no greater whole to become part of; so the ego just gets more grandiose. The autonomous, individualist tendencies of colonial man were effortlessly accentuated through the Enlightenment, deepening his sense of inner estrangement and distancing him yet further from the notion, affirmed by the African

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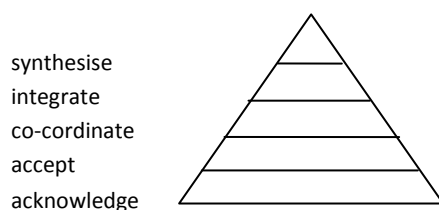
<sup>249</sup> Kevin Rudd, former PM of Australia said: 'you would have to be a 'narc' to deny the Aboriginal people were not 'fundamentally wronged'. 'Narc' is short for narcissist.

philosophy of Ubuntu – the primal interdependence of humanity. This is, I think, the wounding that Charles Eisenstein refers to in his Age of Separation (2013).

## CHAPTER 7: A WAY FORWARD

*‘We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.’ Audre Lorde*

We have noted that psychosynthesis coaches are trained to hold contexts which acknowledge both higher and deeper levels of the client and can train themselves psycho-historically and empathically<sup>250</sup> (Bennett<sup>251</sup> 1986) to learn what to be present to in the client. Systems Theory and psychosynthesis both prompt us to be alert to the emergent, cautioning us that dualistic thinking, if not transcended by use of the Will, can only lock us into our illusory sense of separateness, an anti-‘evolutionary cul-de-sac’<sup>252</sup> – in short, a ‘closed system’.<sup>253</sup> So a helpful additional context coaches can hold is one articulated by Eisenstein (2013), in which humanity stands in transition between two ages, one of ‘separation’ and the other of ‘interbeing’.<sup>254</sup> The story of colonialism and the relationship between Black and White hold this same tension.



**Figure 8**

So if change is seeking to emerge how can it be assisted and what would it look like? Figure 8 shows

<sup>250</sup> See McKenzie-Mavinga’s Black Empathic Approach 2002/05

<sup>251</sup> Bennett (1986) ‘Empathy approximates a shift in cultural worldview.’

<sup>252</sup> Gregory Bateson in Steps to an Ecology of Mind (2000 p509)

<sup>253</sup> One in which interaction with the environment does not occur.

<sup>254</sup> ‘The new story – of Interbeing – draws together the disparate: self and other, money and play, humanity and nature, discipline and desire, matter and spirit, justice and compassion.’

the model for synthesis of sub-personalities used by Lombard (2012), which I believe is a good map for visualising the pathway for inter-relational change discussed in this paper. We have seen that self-expression is a fundamental property both of human beings and of open systems. But the Fields of Consciousness that hold the story of colonialism and enslavement are so constricted that expression is limited or very often regressive. For now three different pathways suggest themselves: as an evolutionary imperative ways must be found to encourage expression (leading to acknowledgement – the crucial first step in the process of change) and then before each subsequent step in the pyramid. Moving from the macrocosm to the microcosm of the trans-cultural encounter, the ‘radically undefended’ stance advocated by Dr Anton Hart (2014) is an approach which can serve energetically to counter the well-defended trans-generational split. And for people of Caribbean heritage Barbara Fletchman Smith (2011) sees in the act of marriage ‘a healing act of defiance’.

The purpose of this paper was firstly to explore the magnitude, intensity and complexity of impacts on identity that have been occasioned by slavery, colonialism and their modern-day variants. This required providing some contextual historical background, supplemented by first-person accounts of the experience of oppression. It has been noted that the colonial experience was characterised inter alia by the ‘oppression’ of ‘expression’ and that these terms are not just etymologically connected but exist at opposite ends of a continuum; and that healthy bi-hemispheric brain function uses a reflexive process of inhibition and disinhibition<sup>255</sup> to reach a synthesis of understanding in the mind (McGilchrist 2011). Hence what is being played out in the outside world has its own internal neurological correlates. We have suggested that the highly charged fields of consciousness (which connect the unconscious experience of coloniser and colonised) contain material that, on one level, appears ‘ineffable’, reflecting the extent and duration of injustice, separation and violence and the impossibility of processing this emotionally; but that any healing process cannot start until there is authentic expression.

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<sup>255</sup> Disinhibition is the process whereby the modulating function of inhibition of expression (as in Tourettes Syndrome, for example) is impaired in the brain.

I have mentioned that the city of London has a potential role to play in this process as a geographical container for so many people connected to both sides of this story. From a systemic point of view it is clear that there are organisational and even evolutionary advantages from freeing up pathways for expression provided that such conversations can be safely contained. There are dangers in speaking, but there are also dangers in silence (Dion 2009<sup>256</sup>). It is also evident that, for as long as the story is not told, a psycho-historical and experiential gulf will continue to separate those connected to the two contrasting sides of the colonial encounter. Currently, I've argued, a deeply-held 2,500 year-old split is maintained in the mainly white, western psyche as a defence, which projects out 'separateness' and sees this where it may not even exist. On an egoic level the split defends against 'breakdown' which, on a transpersonal level, may actually be a potential 'breakthrough-in-waiting'. The movement beyond one's own fortress towards the other is also towards an embrace of 'difference'. The resultant synthesis, however, is absolutely not about an undifferentiated, assimilated 'melting pot' but about a celebration of difference – a recognition that humanity fundamentally consists of multiplicity enfolded into unity and this multiplicity seeks expression through myriad cultural pathways and identities. The Triphasic question then is how can humanity learn to adopt systems and borders that allow the world to be interpreted through the lens of 'interbeing' rather than separation, and embrace a broader understanding of freedom that can transcend the ego's narrow horizons.

For the largely white, western consciousness there is in the current system-wide crisis an opportunity here which may be difficult to perceive. By definition it is very hard to be aware of what one is not aware of. And yet that is the first task, according to Evans (2016), for any leader: developing awareness. From there one needs to work out what impacts one is having on the organisation or community one is leading and understand difference and dynamics. The next skill is to build up a whole picture of the challenge in question and learn to think systemically. Having both the freedom and the strength of inner conviction to drive through immensely complex decisions is a

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<sup>256</sup> "Talking about traumatic events and one's connection to the suffering of Others is "dangerous" work. However, we cannot use our fear of saying the wrong thing as an excuse for not doing the work..." (Dion p55)



further requirement. Last and not least is the need to be able to ask for appropriate help and support. This is nothing less than a call for awakened leadership.

We have used Assagioli's Theory of Spiritual Awakening as a model for informing this process of change. The crises which occur in systems at points of maximum disequilibrium are also found in the Personal Centre of Identity at moments of transition<sup>257</sup>, awakening or integration of new learning. But this has two implications, first that something in the system is seeking transformation (through the process of autopoiesis), but also that the system is seeking to evolve to a new level of complexity. In terms of human consciousness, there is nothing more in need of exploration than the fields which mediate the socially constructed fiction<sup>258</sup> that is Black and White. The findings from Transgenerational Trauma seem to suggest that some things do not belong in the unconscious at all; memories or experiences of a certain depth of meaning need to come up for air to play their transformative role within the overall human eco-system. Our role therefore as coaches is to be a bridge between the current place in which our clients find themselves and the place of transformation and complexity which appears to be tentatively under construction.

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<sup>257</sup> A breakthrough experience for the 'PCI' can be a synthesizing one. Awakening could therefore be seen as an emergent property of the collision between open systems and human consciousness.

<sup>258</sup> Blackness and Whiteness are socially constructed terms which have no scientific validity as terms descriptive of race.

## Appendix

Interviews on Trans-Cultural Identity with British men and women

Subjects (four are currently UK-based and two overseas)

**MAO** Black African Male aged 50-60

**FAF** Mixed Race African Female aged 20-30

**MMA** Mixed Race Asian Male Aged 40-50

**CF** Mixed Race Caribbean Female aged 20-30

**MAY** Black African Male aged 30-40

**MAS** Asian Male aged 30-40

### *Objective of Study*

1. To explore the phenomenology of trans-cultural identity through the lens of a psychosynthesis coaching modality.
2. To prepare the ground for further research in this area.
3. To introduce the modality and methodology of psychosynthesis coaching for trans-cultural clients interested in exploring issues around identity, while seeking a more integrated sense of self.

### *Questions asked*

When did you first become conscious of your identity?

How does consciousness of your difference manifest in your life on a daily basis?

Which parts of your identity are you able to express freely?

And which parts are you aware of sometimes becoming hidden or getting lost?

What happens to you in a situation where you are experiencing racial abuse?

What are you aware of that might be internalised from your history?

What are your feelings around belonging?

### *On experiencing and locating identity*

Of our 6 subjects 2 see identity located 'in the heart' (CF and MMA) and 2 in knowledge: 'knowledge of culture' (MAS) and 'knowledge of history' (MAO). CF says further that for her it is 'not in the land or the skin.' For FAF integrating her identity is 'my life's work'. For MMA identity is 'undefined' ('I thought I could be all things to all people'), 'mutable' (depending on whether his identity was 'construed positively or negatively') but also developmental, 'conditioned and conditioning'. He remembers registering grief at the arrival in puberty of a hairy, masculine identity but later in life found sanctuary in a transpersonal identity, by which he means one not circumscribed by cultural definitions. Two of the mixed race subjects experience identity as complex. MMA began to see his emergent identity as 'potentially massively complicated and edgy' and noticed a shift at university where the primary marker of his identity changed from 'racial to gendered'; class was also appearing by then as a category of difference. FAF has even 'declared war on authenticity' in response to the perceived 'bind' to co-ordinate a seamless version of herself (which she has now let go of). She notes that 'in the UK we talk about class; we don't talk about race.' For CF it is great to be seen and appreciated in different ways by different people; she described a moment where she prepares for the night out in the knowledge that, depending on which group of friends she is with, certain aspects of her identity will be brought to life. MAY is in a trans-cultural relationship himself with a Black woman. 'I look around, read history, ask questions. I meet others, notice difference.'

In the view of MAO, 'it's a question of how knowledge of history is created, accessed and re-internalised'. Africans, he says, need to respond to the 'wiping out' of their history by 'making it available and readable' to counter the 'confusion that there was never anything that we did that we could be proud of except in sports'. Making one's own curriculum is vital but he notes many African would-be academics have to live abroad to get tenure and contribute. This perhaps explains the rising status of griots<sup>259</sup>, the 'living custodians of our [West African] history' who 'are unafraid, have no inferiority complexes and no qualms over identity...they have acquired wealth and they know where they come from.' For MAS identity involves a pro-active ongoing enquiry into knowledge of the culture and of the land of one's origin. If you don't make the effort to engage with this material your identity can weaken. His father has been very helpful in giving MAS a strong foundation for his identity within the family but he recognises that, with time and distance and loss of the ability to read or write the language of origin, 'things start to fade away'. He credits the Hindu oral tradition for preserving the kernel of the culture (disseminated widely through mantras).

#### *Experience of identity across the generations*

A key aspect of trans-cultural identity is the shifts in experience between generations, which in the modern world seem to be becoming more marked. Parents who are not mixed will almost certainly have a very different consciousness of their identity from their mixed race children. MMA felt he 'needed external non-family models to integrate' parts of himself. FC enjoyed the 'silent understanding' amongst other mixed race people – the fact that they could identify each other (even if, as in her case, her mixed heritage may not be perceptible to a less culturally attuned eye). The shifts between generations are also witnessed by MAO who says that those of his generation who emigrated to study or work abroad found themselves becoming far more proficient in the languages of the colonisers than in their language of origin. There is thus an alienation (from a sense of fully belonging to the indigenous culture) which may be experienced anew when the émigrés return 'home' to the less than warm embrace of those who never left. There is also a sense that the identities of older generations were more fixed while those of the present generation are less rooted and so more fluid. MAO is not sure how 'secure' these new identities really are. MMA noted that his mother's identity was 'very much bound up with Islam' but because his father only reluctantly identified with his native land 'she never really arrived'. He also once witnessed his younger brother racially taunting her, 'so I punched him'. MAY said that, when he arrived in the UK, his parents were trusting in his 'friendliness' to get him to 'push through barriers'. Their vote of confidence in him may have been proved right but the divergent experience of the child and the adult in such situations is worth researching. MAY knows, for example, that some of the racist experiences his parents went through they decided not to share with their children.

#### *Claiming or finding identity*

In terms of claiming one's identity, MAY's inherited belief is 'nothing is given to you' (which in psychosynthesis terms sounds like a call to the will) although he himself is 'laid back'. FAF, on moving from Europe to the UK and struggling with the language, remembers the frustration that 'I could not claim my identity'. However, in a 'thrilling and...defining experience' at Sixth Form College abroad, she established a 'community identity...which grounded me'. It taught her that she is 'not alone in straddling identities', while she also witnessed other trans-cultural pairings that seemed more challenging than her own. CF, who has lived all her life in the UK, has had 'no struggle' in this respect. She has had the advantage of finding in her mother a 'strong, successful [Black] female role model'. She does not feel she suppresses any part of herself but remembers vividly 'finding my identity' in her late teens through exposure to Black music and a (partly racially) different group of friends that she was drawn to. This gave her an 'expanded' sense of identity. MMA also found music

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<sup>259</sup> See note 197 in thesis

a big draw but his foray into Heavy Metal<sup>260</sup> ended when a can of beer was thrown at him by a white man at a rock concert and he realised that this music was not tribally aligned with his identity. Then, wilfully searching for a more resonant container for his identity, he embraced Public Enemy<sup>261</sup> as a 'bridge for the disenfranchised'. But an experience of rejection from young Black men at Carnival<sup>262</sup> (his choice of clothing was not appreciated) ended that dalliance; MMA's exploration of identity, affiliation and belonging through music shows how adolescent experience of polarisation helps establish boundaries from which authentic attachments can later emerge. Music from his country of origin has played a huge part in the life of MAO and is also valued by FAF as one means whereby she can show 'all her parts'. Music's transpersonal role in 'holding' identity, which has been mentioned as a key source of psychological sustenance in the age of enslavement (Chapter 4), seems just as important today.

### *Culture and identity – gains and losses*

There was widespread agreement that trans-cultural identity confers a sense of 'more than'. CF enjoys the celebration of food and culture, which comes with her identity. MAS says that culture means that 'you get to shine' and celebrate it. He contrasts that with 'externalised Western culture' where people get 'lost'; Westerners are 'losing their religion and losing their guidance'. But nowadays he sees Indians adopting Western consumer identities in their big cities 'outdoing the Westerners' at their own game, although some of the 'smaller cities manage to preserve their identity'. He and his partner see a 'fundamental difference' where identity is held by community as opposed to being individually centred. He remembers his Dad refusing to pay his younger son to wash the family car: 'Is it not yours? Do you not get a benefit from it?' At the same time he appreciates the fact that he has internalised in his identity 'being free to think and express myself', which other Indians around him in Singapore do not have. 'They lack solutions.'

### *On racism*

When it comes to racism there is a wide range of responses. Everyone has experienced it, MAO more than most (mainly perhaps because of his age). Recently, he was mocked by customs officials (of French Caribbean extraction) on the presumed grounds of his inferior African status and the sound of his name. The hyper-visibility of his Blackness in very white environments can evoke 'being made to feel like a chimp all one's life'. Then there are the presumptions when in certain countries, thankfully less frequent nowadays, so he says, 'that one must be uneducated'. He describes the resistance he repeatedly met with when trying in London to arrange a business meeting using his real name; eventually he dialled the same person using a made-up Anglophone name and was put through straightaway. MAY, on arriving in the UK aged 11, used his sociability ('I don't judge people') and resilience to 'push through barriers' but found some of the racism 'malicious but mostly people were just oblivious'. Now, 20 years on, when his white friends get angered by racism directed towards him, he registers 'relief' at seeing things going 'full circle'. MAY's philosophy is to 'keep things moving' which may owe a lot to his (not necessarily discernible) mixed race heritage. For him racism is there but is 'illogical'. It dismays him that relations between Blacks and Asians are 'not as good as they should be', and hardly helped by recent geopolitical tension. 'We are staying in our own circles' and whites on the whole are 'not engaged'. And the efforts of anti-racism, in football, for example, have not come to much, he feels. CF, being quite 'pale', was not really conscious of her racial identity until a sixth form school-friend who had come to her house 'horribly' abused her at Assembly the next morning, using the words 'fat and ugly'. FAF has 'no patience' for those in the white majority who do not see her or appreciate her. 'The tide of history is going my way,' she says. 'There are only going to be more of us!' But in her working life she does feel that she has to 'fight for respect'. She is particularly angered by talk of 'British values', institutional racism and its predilection

<sup>260</sup> An aggressive, masculine, yang genre of Anglo-American rock music with heavy, often distorted sound.

<sup>261</sup> Critically acclaimed 1980s US hip-hop band with strong focus on African American concerns

<sup>262</sup> London's Notting Hill Carnival, which has been held every year since the 1970s, is a late-summer celebration of primarily Caribbean music and culture.

for the Poster Child<sup>263</sup> approach to defending its image. For MMA, having mud thrown at his windows by neighbours, being verbally abused and then spat at (all before he was 12) seemed 'perplexing' and 'absurd' rather than painful. But in late teens a nasty act of racial abuse at a rave drove him into hibernation for a couple of years. Nowadays he sees racism as a 'socio-genetically inherited' condition. CF 'can't fathom' it and wishes that a particular white friend of hers could apologise for a recent slight; her own strategy of patience and understanding ('I had to be – I chose to be') does not always get a reciprocal response. Of this white friend she says, 'I wish the friendship could be different. She is a very good friend in other ways. I just want something to click.' But she has come to realise that 'people are not always kind and accepting' and, as a result, she is 'less naive'. Then she adds, 'I want an acknowledgment, and an apology and a realisation of the impact<sup>264</sup>.' Meanwhile MAS in Singapore found himself defending a white man on his (mainly white) football team from being told to 'go back to where you come from' by another Asian. MAS says he is so 'adjusted to always being in a minority – nothing's bothering'. He recalls an experience of not being served in a Northern pub some years ago. While in those days his younger self hung around 'seeking attention' these days he would 'walk out, complain and seek redress'.

#### *Let down by one's own side*

Bullying or being judged by 'one's own kind' is a separate category and can be confusing and extremely painful. MAY is very conscious of his good fortune in being able to emigrate but also of the envy of some of those left behind who were no less deserving of the opportunity. FAF, aged 5 or 6, didn't enjoy being called names by some of the children of her tribe on account of her lighter colour, and loss of the tribal language through emigration still denies her one way to re-establish this part of her identity. ('I didn't like being treated like a tourist.') CF has had two very painful and confusing experiences of being attacked by African women with whom she had been close friends (perhaps unconsciously re-enacting the drama of interracial politics in slavery referred to in Chapter 2 and 3) and so is 'very wary' of re-establishing close friendships with females 'of African descent'. She came to see how beset these young women were with complexes around their hair and heritage and general 'insecurity', even though in regards to one of them she 'had looked up to her and found her beautiful and a great dancer'. She then says: 'She pummelled me. I didn't defend myself. It made me sad for her.' She dated an African man for a time and heard unkind comments from distant relatives about 'contaminating the gene pool' even though 'my family loved him'. She says that in her experience 'conflict is always there' between these two groups. MMA found the Muslim speed-dating sub-culture bewildering and realised he was being excluded from a category ('British Asian') that he had previously regarded as holding his identity. So this is an example of the way one's identity can be denied by the other who one might automatically have considered an ally. MAO says that in terms of our African leaders 'we are our own worst enemies' and the mismanagement of these countries ('plundering their own people') is all down to an 'identity crisis' where 'we look outside for validation. We need to develop our own collective ways of thinking.' He links 'information to knowledge and power'; in that regard he is troubled by fatalism within Islam. Meanwhile the 'intellectual elites,' he says 'are Frenchified...lost souls and not patriotic,' suggesting that their identity has decisively shifted through the colonial experience. A part of him looks sadly around at his fellow citizens and wonders 'how has it come to this?' MAY finds the dating scene quite confusing. While he himself has 'no preference' he says that sometimes 'I feel the eyes' of Black men on him when he's dating white women (his white friends confirm this). CF has also observed this phenomenon and says that Black men are expected to 'tire' of white women which leaves mixed race women as 'more of a threat'. She says 'hatred and negativity over the politics of dating is a big issue'. She is confused: 'who am I supposed to date?' On US campus FAF was taken aback at being presumed to be African American – which was not part of her identity – and thus

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<sup>263</sup> A poster child originally was the face of a child on a charity advertisement, used to attract sympathy and hence donations.

<sup>264</sup> Realisation of impacts is the second dimension of leadership in 5DL (Evans 2016) and, I believe, a critical one in trans-cultural interaction.

expected to be expressing her 'solidarity'; at other times and with other people the 'Britishness' of her identity was winning her attention.

### *Adaptation*

FAF adapts to the tensions engendered by her mixed identity by 'over-compensating'; this can take the form of being overly 'self-righteous' in asserting her position or in attempting to manage the way others see her, by feeding them 'tokens' – familiar co-ordinates – so they can, as it were, map her. She admits to being 'stuck on' this pattern for now. She has come to appreciate the 'richness' of her identity but at the same time sometimes finds herself 'trading off this currency' in order to 'get access' – which she sees as possibly 'cynical'. At other times she can find herself 'censoring' parts of herself even though she knows 'how to make people comfortable'. MMA adapted into a role of Joker or mimic, finding a way to transmute the hostility of a classroom into mirth. He admits that this may have been a device for deflecting attention from an exposed part of his identity and reproves himself for the 'cowardliness' of this tactic. On one occasion, having been thrown in a skip full of garbage by six bullies, he still emerged with a smile for his tormentors which earned their 'grudging respect'. However, even now he feels he 'could have been more heroic'. He admits to having to go through a process of working out 'if it was about me or about them.' In MMA's case perhaps a contributory factor is that he always felt that he was somehow being protected from far worse: 'I didn't do too badly. I was never beaten up.' More familiar forms of adaptation are through following the parental command to work harder at school. For MAY and MAS it was continually drummed in to them by their fathers that, from their starting-point, they would need to 'excel' to compete with the white students, although at the first time of hearing this MAY was confused at what his 'disadvantages' were supposed to be. MAY admits to being 'less open' these days compared to where he used to be, acknowledging the everyday psychological need for defences.

### *The challenge to identity*

There is something about being challenged at the level of identity that, in the case of this study sample, has arguably facilitated the emergence of some consciousness and strength which otherwise might have lain hidden. This from FAF: 'I like who I am and how strong it makes me.' Or this from MAO: 'With lack of self-knowledge you cannot build. Know yourself, then you are unshakeable.' MAS also says, thinking of what his family has given him, 'you can't rock my foundation.' CF says that 'belonging means knowing who you are' and 'feeling at home in oneself'. That said, she doesn't want to move away from England and her friends. For FAF there has been the sense back in West Africa that 'I don't fit' which leads her to becoming 'irritated, upset, feeling judged and defensive'. In her circumstances 'language is a key access point' to shared identity. So nowadays she is more assertive in her efforts to 'align' culturally and asks those who tease her why they don't speak English.

### *A psychosynthesis perspective*

This study looks at the experience of trans-cultural identity in which the common denominator is a British identity. The deeper context which informs the study is the thesis topic which looks at enduring impacts in modern Britain that arise from the experience of (mainly) British colonialism. Such impacts include unconsciously internalised beliefs and projections, a struggle to be seen and accepted for who one truly is, a tendency (both conscious and unconscious) in the majority culture to separate and divide and a perpetuation of the evaluation and diminution of the other based on skin colour, facial features or the sound of one's name. It is possible to see all of these phenomena reflected among the first-hand accounts submitted above. The psychosynthesis lens adds further context to the study through its conception of the stable transpersonal Self as a unifying holder of

personal identity, which seeks expression through the personality in a multiplicity of ways. The concept of the 'adaptive self'<sup>265</sup> is well-established in psychosynthesis, as is the journey or struggle towards self-realisation and the experience of authentic being. Because a psychosynthesis methodology holds the context of multiplicity within unity in relation to the identity of the client the coaching approach operates on a number of levels: acknowledging the struggles the client faces in relation to identity; facilitating dis-identification<sup>266</sup> from these; attuning to sub-personalities and emergent qualities representing different parts of the whole and working with the will in order to help build an authentic, new synthesis of identity.

### Conclusions

So as a psychosynthesis coach, I am looking at the relationship between identity and will as well as the developmental pathways described in Joan Evans's Triphasic Model<sup>267</sup>. In this study two key elements of identity are widely referred to – the collective and the individual: that which is inherited and consists of cultural and historical factors; and that which is unique to you to express in your own way. While the majority culture reproduces itself effortlessly through publicly funded channels it may, as we have seen, require an act of will and inner resources to resuscitate and regenerate a culture that has been all but erased or to perpetuate one which sits within the narrative of the host majority. Such repeat acts of will, I believe, create consciousness and further hold identity. Moreover there is something about the mixed race experience in particular that is indicative to my mind of *more identity* – and therefore more possibilities for being and for expressing, more points of connection to the whole. This seems to me extraordinarily healthy from an ecological i.e. systemic point of view, even if the integration of all parts may be demanding. And from a psychosynthesis perspective this in practice means the Personal Centre of Identity<sup>268</sup> is free to choose from a broader array of possible identifications. This surely predisposes the individual to gravitate away from dualistic thinking, which is seen as the cause of much of our modern crisis of civilization (Hutchins<sup>269</sup> 2014). It could be further argued that – also from an evolutionary point of view – the increase in genetic variability<sup>270</sup> for a population with rising numbers of mixed race people creates positive *psychological* variability.

I would hypothesise that mixed race and trans-cultural people, if content and congruent within their identities, are likely to be able to hold greater complexity which, as I have suggested, is set to become an evolutionary quality in high demand. All the subjects in this small study are habituated, if not inured, to the phenomenon of racism such that their consciousness expands to compensate for the limitations of the abuser. This is not a solution to racism, of course, but being able to do thinking for the other is a sophisticated act of consciousness and, as such, is an interpersonal skill that can meet an emergent need in multi-cultural society and organisations. Additionally those whom life has educated to be conscious around identity are likely to be more oriented to collaboration and unity (what MAY above calls 'world ethics') rather than separation and silos. Implicitly this study locates trans-cultural people as potential bridging points between groups that self-identify very differently. This universalist consciousness and attunement to the subtleties of interpersonal communication,

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<sup>265</sup> The adaptive self is a term used to describe the part of the personality that, in a bid to ensure survival, deviates from its authentic trajectory. If the adaptive parts become dominant within the personality then a misalignment emerges between the 'I' and the 'Self' which will trigger some kind of crisis.

<sup>266</sup> Dis-identification needs to be differentiated from dissociation or denial; in the former one becomes aware of the contents of one's consciousness in order to let go of the identification whereas in the latter one does not acknowledge the degree to which one's consciousness may be caught by such unconscious identifications.

<sup>267</sup> See Chapter 6

<sup>268</sup> This is Assagioli's 'I', which is a reflection of the Higher Self. See page 8

<sup>269</sup> The Illusion of Separation by Giles Hutchins

<sup>270</sup> Genetic variability is a measure of the tendency of individual genotypes in a population to vary from one another. In a population it is important for biodiversity because without variability it becomes difficult for a population to adapt to environmental changes and therefore makes it more prone to extinction. Source Wikipedia

not to mention linguistic ability, are qualities that are very valuable. Further research in the above areas would, I feel, be very worthwhile.

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