



**Such Stuff podcast**  
**Season 6, Episode 1: Understanding Whiteness and Racism**

[Music plays]

**Imogen Greenberg:** Hello and welcome to another series of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

We've been closed for a few months now, and whilst we're beginning to see a glimmer of hope that we might be able to return to some kind of normality soon, we've been taking this time out to ask: should we really be going back to business as usual?

Our theatre industry is a microcosm of the wider world, a world which is founded on structures of inequality and injustice. As we've seen huge movements and conversations across the world coming to a head, we don't just want to pay lip service to Black Lives Matter and then move on, without making any real changes to the way we operate as an organisation. It is not enough to stand against racism in theory, we need to be actively anti-racist. And as individuals, and as an organisation, we need to learn how to do that.

This podcast series, culminating in an online festival dedicated to Shakespeare and Race at the end of August, is the start of that process of listening and learning.

The next five episodes will be dedicated to the question of Shakespeare and race, specifically Shakespeare and anti-racism. Shakespeare and Race is a topic we've returned to again and again on the podcast, but we'll be looking at it entirely differently this time, through a different framework. So, we'll be asking what if we looked at the world – our own world, the world of theatre and the world of Shakespeare – through a lens of whiteness? The way we talk about race is so often couched in 'otherness', in putting labels on groups based on difference; but different to what, other to what?

In this episode we will be unpicking what that term 'whiteness' means. And over the course of the next few episodes we will look in



depth at the way we read Shakespeare, the way we educate students in classrooms, lecture halls and rehearsal rooms and the way we operate our stages through this presumption that 'white' is somehow the norm.

And over the course of the series, we'll be working towards answering this question: how do we decolonise the works of Shakespeare, the way they are read, the way they are taught, and the way they are performed? As you'll hear in this episode, Shakespeare – the man himself, not the myth that has grown up around him – lived and worked just as his society was becoming the expansionist, capitalist, slave-based, oppressive and colonial operation whose legacy we still live with today. How do we even begin to untangle four hundred years of reading, learning, loving and performing Shakespeare... from four hundred years of colonisation?

Here's our Artistic Director Michelle Terry.

**Michelle Terry:** Hello, my name's Michelle Terry, I'm the artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe and welcome to the first episode of a brand new series of Such Stuff in which we look at Shakespeare and Race. Now many of you know this is a subject we've looked at many times throughout the past few years and in light of recent events it feels more important than ever to not only continue the conversation but also move away from talking and theorising and look at how we can make lasting change.

Part of that change is first getting a better understanding, a better understanding of the systems and structures and frameworks that dominate our society and, for us, it's also about where Shakespeare and Shakespeare's Globe sits within those systems and that society that has dominated culture. And we have decided to dedicate this entire podcast series to the subject of whiteness. Now for many, that might sound like a counter-intuitive prism through which to explore race and specifically racism. Partly because we've never been asked to consider whiteness as a race before. It's worth



saying that all of these terms need unpacking and need defining: what is whiteness? What is racism?

Often we think of racism as something someone does to someone else, acts of prejudice, acts of discrimination done by individuals to other individuals, it's a new idea for many of us to think of racism as a structure in which some people benefit and some people do not. The disadvantage of some also comes with the advantage and elevation of others.

Now of course many of us did not create these structures, we didn't put our name on a dotted line, but if we are not actively looking to educate ourselves about how these systems operate, if we are not actively looking at our own power and our own privilege and how that will always be balanced with disempowering and under-privileging others, if we're not looking to better understand the rules by which we all abide, then we also collude with them, we are also affirming them and if we don't understand the rules, then we also have no chance of breaking them.

As an organisation that sits at the crossroads between the past, the present and the future, it's not only important for us to look at how our cultural authority, our platform has emerged, it's also important for us to understand how that authority has dominated and reduced and excluded, and now how we can use that cultural authority and that platform to have a different and much broader, much wider, much more diverse conversation.

Now in this episode we'll hear from our very own Professor Farah Karim-Cooper talk about how Shakespeare was mired in a society of colonialism, how Shakespeare was at the very beginning of a 'brave new world' that continues to be dominated by white-centric, white colonial power. We'll also hear from Dr Steve Garner, research fellow at Cardiff University who has been studying whiteness for years now and who will help us better understand why whiteness is one prism through which we can better understand how society has and how society continues to operate. There is no doubt that this is a huge, huge subject and we are not going to



completely unpack it in this series. But it is a start. And also it is an invitation for us all to explore further. We hope you enjoy, and we hope you stay curious as we all work together to make change.

[Music plays]

**IG:** To kick off this series, Michelle sat down with our very own Professor Farah Karim-Cooper who is Director of our Shakespeare and Race festival and who has been working tirelessly for years both within our organisation and beyond, in the world of theatre and academia, to make real lasting change. Here Michelle and Farah delve into what the whiteness means and start to unpick the colonial legacy attached to the works of Shakespeare and the now mythic ideas that surround him.

The audio quality on this isn't quite what we would normally offer you, the perils in recording from home, but please do stick with us.

**MT:** I think it would be good for us, for you and I to talk about why we think it's important that at Shakespeare's Globe, whiteness is the prism through which to have this discussion. For so many people, they don't even believe racism is still a thing.

**Farah Karim-Cooper:** Yeah, I mean I'm thinking about the whole controversy around Meghan Markle for example, the way people talk about how she was treated in the media as being nothing to do with race and all of a sudden you had lots of people on TV saying that 'we are a tolerant society, there is no racism, you have individuals who are racist, but we're not a racist society'. And so I think that is a huge amount of history and conversation to sort of try and unpack and I think that really iconic public spaces like the Globe and like the BBC and various other places like that need to have those conversations really publicly because then everyone else starts to think 'well why are they talking about it?'. I mean at least I hope they start to ask that question.

**MT:** I think one of the things that I had naively not, just not understood was that racism is a system, it's not an act. You can



have racist acts, of course you can have discrimination but that racism is a system in which we all either benefit or don't and we are elevated within or not elevated within and it doesn't matter whether you think as an individual you are not racist, unless you are interrupting the system, you're colluding with the rules that that system abides by. And I think there's something that I, certainly as a white woman, again I would... like where do you cut the social justice cake? And I sort of sliced that cake through the prism of feminism, so hold on to that as my narrative. I can only hold on to that as a narrative because of my white privilege. This idea of a system of meritocracy, this American dream that if you work hard enough, that we all buy into, that you're allowed to be an individual, you got here because you did this, this, this and this and well done you... not realising that you're also part of a system that allowed for that to happen because, because I'm white.

**FK-C:** Yeah.

**MT:** And I think that hard working, meritocracy narrative is really hard to let go of when you believe that you have worked so hard, when you believe that where I've come from and what I've overcome... like all those denial things that I've heard myself say when my own privilege has been questioned or where I hear... you and I have heard it, we'll hear it now, like we know that by exploring whiteness we're going to meet great resistance because people will feel like they are personally being attacked?

**FK-C:** Yes.

**MT:** As opposed to understanding that we're part of a much, much bigger system that none of us signed the contract, that amazing quote about maybe you didn't sign the contract but you still live by the fact that it exists.

**FK-C:** It's so interesting what you're saying about meritocracy because meritocracy is absolutely, it is a myth. But it's a myth that people are so invested in. So trying to extract that notion that if you work hard, you'll get what you deserve from the other myth of the



American dream, that is one of the main struggles of trying to make visible that systemic racism.

**MT:** And then we've got that double bind of Shakespeare.

**FK-C:** Yeah [laughs].

**MT:** Where he sits in that system...

**FK-C:** As an icon of white excellence.

**MT:** Of white excellence, the white male genius.

**FK-C:** Yeah.

**MT:** Yeah and I suppose something about tradition? Where do we sit in this idea of tradition which I know... and it's a conversation that's coming up now around how do you decolonise the curriculum or how do you decolonise texts but that it's OK to stand in opposition to something. This idea that we need to serve Shakespeare and I think there's something James Baldwin says in his essay, that you realise that any decent poet actually serves the people not the other way round, that how is Shakespeare serving us now and how is Shakespeare serving our audience now, our makers now, our artists now, our culture now, as opposed to us having to serve the myth of the history, the myth of tradition.

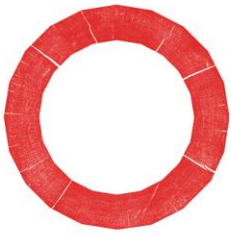
**FK-C:** Yeah I think part of the problem is the notion of canonicity as well and Shakespeare sits at the top of this idea, you know we have an English canon of works and they exemplify that idea of genius and white excellence so it sets a standard that other writers and other artists have to somehow aspire to. That's part of the problem is that who set up that canon, who decided that this literature was the best and of course it's all enshrined in that notion of whiteness. I think it's really difficult because you know, as a Shakespeare scholar of colour I came to Shakespeare because I loved his work, because I loved the poetry, because it dazzled me, because I actually found aspects of myself in his work and that's something



that's really paradoxical because Shakespeare was a white man who was writing primarily for a white audience, as far as we know, and the actors who played all of his parts were white males and so what does a woman of colour have to do with all of that? Well, the Dark Lady, there's dark lady sonnets and Shakespeare's language is filled with imagery that challenges assumptions in his own time period about what is excellent and what is beautiful which is that sort of ideal whiteness. I found things in Shakespeare that I wanted to challenge, so part of the approach to Shakespeare I think is moving away from tradition, that tradition of reverence and how we revere his work and somehow we've got to sort of bow down to it. Rather than revere the texts from the outside, jump in and scratch around in them. You might come across some really uncomfortable truths, you know, you might put on a production of *The Merchant of Venice* and find people laughing when Shylock is spit on. I really struggled with that but you can't walk away from that, you have to confront that and that's what I mean by jumping in and scratching around in the play.

**MT:** And the idea that he was confronting that too, the idea that he was being as provocative as we find it, like it is a provocation. We talk about the universality of Shakespeare and he's for everybody and I think there is... on the one hand, I absolutely agree with that but that comes with a whole heap of interrogation to really understand what's being talked about. That James Baldwin essay about 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare', where he suddenly met himself in the text? That takes really hard work. That takes hard work to know yourself, that takes hard work to stand in opposition to the writing. I know something that you say, we will find a way to meet this time through the prism of Shakespeare, we don't have to get rid of Shakespeare in order to have the conversation, we can have it with the work and we can have it with him.

**FK-C:** Absolutely. Yeah he's a, I mean Shakespeare's a really important site for all of those questions, to kind of skate around in the plays and find a way to answer some of our own questions about the present moment I think is key. What's really interesting about, I would say thinking about Shakespeare through the prism of



whiteness is my own training which was in the white academy. I never, ever had a Shakespeare Professor of colour. Never. And so everybody was trained in that, you know, in that tradition. And so I had internalised a lot of that and had values about Shakespeare that actually conflict with the values I have now and so I'm now also on this really interesting journey, trying to sort of reconcile those two things and I think that's really great that I can look at it and go actually, it's kind of racist [laughs] what I was thinking about myself through the prism of Shakespeare and so I need to unpack that.

**MT:** I mean and you've been doing this work much longer than I have. It's such hard work and you've met so many obstacles. What's the outcome? Like what's the outcome for us? Why is important that Shakespeare's Globe is even having this conversation? Why is it important for you, do you think?

**FK-C:** You know, I'm an academic and when I put together a Shakespeare and Race symposium, I wanted to invite scholars of colour based in the UK to come and share their research and first of all there were no Afro-Caribbean Shakespeare scholars employed by universities and there were very few scholars of colour from various other ethnic backgrounds and some of my colleagues out there who are scholars of colour are not necessarily working on race and you know, we don't have to work on race [laughs]. So my own personal thing was, well I work in this very powerful space, I've got this platform, maybe I could use it to think about why Shakespeare doesn't attract lots of scholars of colour, you know, what is it about the field that has made Shakespeare seem inaccessible in that way. For me it's important to unpack Shakespeare's canonicity, to ask questions about why we have to study Shakespeare in a tradition that he's been studied in for you know, the last two hundred years, I'd say. Because it's important, because we think we know something about Elizabethan audiences for example, well now we know that there were more people of colour living in Tudor England and that they were not all in service and they were not all enslaved and so maybe there were some in the audience! I think the Globe for me has a really powerful role to play in starting to de-colonise Shakespeare. And that for me is what





it feels like to de-colonise Shakespeare in Shakespeare studies.

**MT:** Could you just unpack that word de-colonise?

**FK-C:** Yeah. So, I mean from my point of view, thinking about Shakespeare as a sort of product of colonisation, which he was. In his moment, the colonisation and oppression of indigenous people was beginning, right? And England was beginning to participate in that process at this time, and history hasn't really accounted for that. And then subsequently Shakespeare is this amazing export of Britain and so now he's around the world and we've always talked about Shakespeare's I suppose global identity as something of a virtue. In most respects it is but we haven't really unpacked why he's out there in the first place and how we might have been put to use by various regimes and governments in order to civilise people. As a child of the Raj [laughs], when I was a student I was telling my older relatives I was studying Shakespeare, there was this kind of awe and there is this sort of reverence and love of Shakespeare and that is a direct result of colonisation. And it could be a virtue or it may not to, it just depends which angle you're looking at it from. So in some ways to de-colonise Shakespeare is to really look at him in his moment and what his own awarenesses might have been. So when he writes into **The Tempest** ideologies or challenges to certain ideologies, we might be thinking about the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. That is actually one way of decolonising Shakespeare. The other thing that I mentioned too was thinking about the theatres of his time and the audiences of his time and who is living around there and so enabling us to open our minds to different possibilities of encounters in Shakespeare's own time will change how we think about the plays and that is de-colonising it. And I think also de-colonising is thinking about it in our moment in relation to questions of social justice. So we don't always have to read Shakespeare as the big, white canonical text so we can pluck him out of that and read him as... as my colleague in the University of Texas El Paso, Ruben, whose gonna be on our podcast, reads him in the context of Latinx, you know El Paso Texas experience and encounter and what it means to his students and how to read events in his culture through Shakespeare and that



is a really powerful way of de-colonising him because it's a kind of appropriation which I think is licensed in this moment.

**MT:** It's interesting you say about opening our mind, you suddenly start to think how do you de-colonise your own mind, let alone the justice system, the police system, the education system, which we'll talk about in another podcast, or the theatre industry which we'll talk about in another podcast. When we get the Whiteness on our Stages episode, you know, what is it to like to perform race or perform gender? I only understand it through the prism of gender, or I'm getting to understand it more through the prism of my, the constructed race of whiteness, suddenly going god what does that mean to perform my own whiteness? And so how do we de-colonise ourselves from even just seeing the world through a singular point of view is just... the curiosity of that is really exciting, the work of that is... it can't just be, I mean we've talked before about the need to educate yourself. Who is doing the work, who is doing the labour? And yes, individuals must educate themselves, but an individual educating themselves isn't going to be enough. How do we interrupt the system? And there is a moment in time where, it's not just in response to George Floyd or Black Lives Matter, it's also in response to Covid, it's also in response to climate, there are so many things converging where the consequence of not having this conversation feels too enormous.

**FK-C:** Yes, indeed. I mean to move forward out of this moment without trying to change is unethical.

**MT:** Yeah.

**FK-C:** We can't run educational institutions, we can't run theatres, we can't run businesses without implementing a new way of thinking, a new framework to attach new practices. You know, we can try to change behaviours and practices but it's the framework underneath that needs attention and that is why it's such hard work and there's a really fine balance because yes, white people need to engage in that work and they need to be, they need to educate themselves but also I think people of colour are there to guide that



process. I think the reason why we're doing this podcast series on whiteness is because the first step is recognising that there is another racial category [laughs], right? So whiteness then, if you make whiteness visible, then what you're doing is you are removing that notion that it is the norm, it is the baseline, it is the beginning of experience. I think that this podcast and the conversations we're having is going to help move in that direction.

**MT:** I think that's the other thing is how do you... at the same time as trying to deconstruct, people also want to go what are you constructing? And of course we don't know what that looks like, if we knew what that looked like, it would have emerged a long time ago. I keep thinking about rehearsal rooms, the anti-racist framework, it can be practiced in a rehearsal room, like what does that look like to engage differently, be in conversation, to listen. The framework of theatre is such a microcosm of the macrocosm because it's so built on oppressive systems, it's so built on fear. We see it now in our freelance community in what we've allowed to continue because we're so frightened that if I disrupt it or I go against it, I won't work again or I'll be classed as trouble or... there's also something about our organisation that has a way of practising frameworks that you can then feedback about going this didn't work or that didn't work. It's very, very complicated and very hard to try and offer a new framework.

**FK-C:** Absolutely, because it feels almost, certainly in the US and Europe that there hasn't been a successful implementation of anti-racism because if there had been, we wouldn't necessarily be having this conversation right now.

**MT:** I think the conversation certainly in cultural organisations, realising the power they have around the narratives that they choose to tell and what narratives are you telling now because they do seep in and create the culture and the myth.

**FK-C:** I think what's really interesting is that certainly I've noticed in the US and in British culture that there's this... it's paradoxical, because there's this sort of global facing element of these two



societies, but then there's this sort of severe insularity. And what that breeds and perpetuates is this idea that hang on, this is our culture, this is our history, we don't have to do that because this is white English history, we don't need those stories. It's a failure to recognise the way in which English and more widely European culture has dominated and conquered and colonised that basically made everybody part of British history. This false sense of ownership of history, so history has been segregated and completely washed out, and you know, one of the things that you've been doing is looking at how can we bring these stories to life using art and that's one way of de-colonising the past because it's not just Shakespeare we need to de-colonise, it's the past that he's wrapped up in as well.

[Music plays]

**IG:** As Farah says, we need to examine Shakespeare's own moment and how it coincided with global colonisation. How did that inform Shakespeare's work? And part of changing the way we look at the past is to re-examine what we think we know about Elizabethan society. Here's just one example of that.

**FK-C:** The reading you're about to hear is of a draft warrant written in 1601 that seems to suggest Elizabeth I's privy council was trying to expel 'negroes and blackamoors' from England. The language that is used is powerfully resonant with the kind of language used to discredit the legitimacy of immigrants in the UK today. There is a complicated history behind this warrant, however. Literary critics and historians differ on the terms and the purpose of the warrant. But what is undeniable is that the English crown was defining difference based on colour. In 1596, two other letters or warrants were written, which were an attempt to deport first ten then 89 black people and have them transported by a merchant named Caspar van Senden to Spain and Portugal. All of these attempts failed for a variety of reasons. To be clear then, black people were not actually expelled from England at this time. The project failed. The history of why these warrants were written is tied to the Spanish slave trade



and the role that Caspar van Senden played in liberating English prisoners from Spain. Elizabeth I's government hoped to reward him by giving people that he would be able to trade. So you see, it doesn't really matter that England never expelled the 'negroes', which designated people from West Africa, and 'moors', which designated people from North Africa, though this term is used quite flexibly in this period. What matters is that black people were seen as objects, objects of trade, and that they are described in terms of their colour. What we're witnessing in these documents then is how colour based racism was beginning to make its mark in Elizabethan politics.

[Reading of 1601 warrant]

**Amanda Wilkin:**

Whereas the Queen's majesty, tendering the good and welfare of her own natural subjects, greatly distressed in these hard times of dearth, is highly discontented to understand the great number of Negroes and blackamoors which (as she is informed) are carried into this realm since the troubles between her highness and the King of Spain; who are fostered and powered here, to the great annoyance of her own liege people that which covet the relief which these people consume, as also for that the most of them are infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel: hath given a special commandment that the said kind of people shall be with all speed avoided and discharged out of this her majesty's realms; and to that end and purpose hath appointed Casper van Senden, merchant of Lubeck, for their speedy transportation, a man that hath somewhat deserved of this realm in respect that by his own labor and charge he hath relieved and brought from Spain divers of our English nation who otherwise would have perished there. These shall therefore be to will and require you and every of you to aid and assist the said Casper van Senden or his assignees to taking such Negroes and blackamoors to be transported as aforesaid as he shall find within the realm of England; and if there shall be any person or persons which be possessed of any such blackamoors that refuse to deliver them in sort aforesaid, then we require you to



call them before you and to advise and persuade them by all good means to satisfy her majesty's pleasure therein; which if they shall eftsoons wilfully and obstinately refuse, we pray you to certify their names to us, to the end her majesty may take such further course therein as it shall seem best in her princely wisdom.

[Music plays]

**IG:** Thank you to Amanda Wilkin for reading the 1601 warrant.

[Music plays]

**IG:** Before we delve into the theatre industry and works of Shakespeare, we wanted to take a step back and understand how 'whiteness' operates in society as a whole. So, Michelle chatted to sociologist Dr Steve Garner. Here, Steve kicks off with an introduction to this idea of whiteness in his own field: sociology.

**Dr Steve Garner:** For me, it's a sub section of the sociology of racism and it's one frame that you can use to understand things. And all these different frames give you different slices of a cake, so if you come in with feminist paradigms you cut in a particular direction and you pick up one type of information, if you come in looking at social class you come from another way and you pick up different things so whiteness is one of these little journeys through the social world and it picks up particular things, misses other things but all of them do that, OK? So it's pointing out that there's particular patterns, so it's like a structure. That first question: what is whiteness? Whiteness is a shorthand way to talk about the historically dominant ideas and practices of the west which have driven and sustained these huge historical projects like empire, transatlantic slavery, colonisation, de-colonisation and still organise structures of power within the modern world. So that's like one abstract level understanding of it. And then how it works in different places at different times is kind of the puzzle that people like me are trying to figure out. So you're looking for patterns of the way that people identify with certain ideas, what they do, what they don't do because whiteness is a relational concept. So whiteness without



blackness or Asian-ness or these other identities makes no sense whatsoever, OK? So all of these things are embedded in this big idea that we have of race. Race is a big fiction that we turn into reality everyday and in that big fiction all the groups have interests and have experiences and have positions within hierarchies. So whiteness is to shift the gaze away from looking at minority groups and to fix it on the dominant group and identify that there are particular structures and these give rise to ideas, practices and especially, outcomes. It's really the outcomes that I'm interested in. You can see patterns of outcomes across time and in different places in terms of all kinds of things: health, wealth distribution, employment, housing, criminal justice outcomes, the whole range of the social world you can see there are discrepancies in how people who are racialised as white and people who are racialised as black or Asian etc emerge at the other end of these processes and you see there's always disparities and the dominant group by and large has an advantage in these outcomes. So immediately people say 'what about really poor white people, what advantage could they possibly get out of being white?' It's a good question, it makes you try to think about what happens in these processes and you can say that one advantage is not having to go through all kinds of experiences that other people have to go through. Although it's not an economic advantage, it's an advantage in not having very, very difficult relations with police, getting access to housing, getting differential access to employment, right? So it's an added burden on top of what you already have from social class.

My strand of thought is that whiteness is about two things going on at the same time. One is to do with the white western world and its encounters with people who are not racialised as white in other parts of the world, right? That's one border. The other border the constantly changing line of demarcation between dominant white groups and white groups that are not dominant. Those two things at the same time: white and not white as a border that's constantly being re-made through different ways of enacting power relations and on the other side the different white groups who are placed in hierarchies, locally and nationally. So I would say for the moment you might think of Eastern European migrants, Western European





migrants, Gypsy Travellers for example as groups of not dominant white people because of their immigration status or because of their cultural status. So that's going on at the same time as this other border is being made and re-made at the other end of the scale. I would say the one between white and not white is more important but the other one is clearly there at the same time.

**MT:** And just to pick up on a couple of things. So, you said that race is a fiction. Could you just talk a bit about the construct of race?

**SG:** So I think that the general understanding of race is that it's to do with your physical appearance and it's like a body-centred distinction and you look at the world around you and you can see that there are human beings of all possible dimensions and there are particular sets of things that people identify as being racial, physical things like skin colour, eyes, hair colour, hair type, particular ways of moving, those kind of things that people always think of as racial identifiers that mark someone out as belonging to Group A and these set of things mark them out as belonging to Group B. So for me, this idea that it's all about the body is a blip in a much longer historical pattern where the first ways of identifying difference between people was between cultural groups. So two examples. One, the English in Ireland, the English and the Irish did not look particularly different from one another, the main distinctions were made on both sides were to do with language, religion, social organisation. When the Spaniards encountered the Aztecs in the 1520s, the first things they identified were to do with culture as much as they were to do with them looking different from the Spaniards: all kinds of things to do with their organisation of life and much less to do with them looking different. And at some point round the 17th century, so up until this point, it's to do with religion. So you see in the ledgers to do with slavery for example, people are identified as Christian or heathen. Now, when enslaved Africans start to convert to Christianity, that's no longer a really good way to identify one group from another, first of all. And secondly, you have lots of people who are indentured labourers, which means you work on plantations in the New World and then after a few years, your reward is that you're given some land or some money. So, lots of





people tried to start to a new life in the New World, other people are just kidnapped basically and dumped in the New World, other people who would otherwise serve prison sentences because of crimes committed through poverty end up in the Caribbean. So there's lots of, basically lots of white people in Caribbean plantations and American plantations looking for a new life and they're on the same status as the African people who they're working in the field with for a very short period of time. Then, the line is drawn between people who can get out of that and the people who can't. So the people who can't are the people who are enslaved and more and more, this starts to correspond to colour rather than status and religion. I think from the end of the 17th century onwards, it's pretty clear that people are talking about white and black in terms of the New World. In all of these very complicated hierarchies across the New World, white Europeans are always at the top and Africans and indigenous people are always at the bottom. So this is the idea of understanding whiteness as a pattern, in that whatever circumstances you're in, the system functions to produce advantageous outcomes for white Europeans. Race is not just about bodies and looking difference, it's also about culture. This fiction that we were talking about is how we identify groups as being different from one another and having like particular innate qualities and most importantly, putting them on a hierarchical league table, they're never ever on a level playing field.

**MT:** The minute we talk about whiteness as a race or mention white supremacy, like immediately people start to think of the KKK and they go, 'oh that's not me, so I'm not racist' as opposed to a system in which we all live and consciously or unconsciously collude with and how that system, as you say, is then creating advantage and I suppose that leads on to the next question. We are in a particular moment. This is something that you've been studying, as you say, for decades. The second question is how do we use whiteness, I suppose, as a prism through which to look at this time.

**SG:** I do think that things become easier to understand at particular moments. I think it's much easier to understand what's going on at the moment if you use whiteness as one of your frames. I'd just



identify three things really quickly already. So if you want to understand the disparities in Covid-19 morbidity and mortality between white UK people and minority ethnic groups, you need to have whiteness as one of your tools to understand that otherwise it won't make sense because the disparities are primarily to do with social practices and social patterns and outcomes of housing, health, wealth distribution etc, living conditions, long term patterns of where people end up living, what types of job they end up doing, and all of this adds up to an increased risk in a pandemic situation, so that's one way that it would be easier to understand.

Black Lives Matter protests across the world: really if there's one thing you could point to and say this is a pretty typical experience across countries with large African descended populations, it's very conflictual relationships with police and I think it's no surprise that this huge rebellion across the world starts with people resisting police brutality because it's disproportionately affected on their communities. Part of the other side of it is to understand that white supremacy as a system revolves around de-humanising other groups of people and valuing their lives less. Hence, the Black Lives Matter. The point is that the devaluation of lives which is very evident in police practices across the world against people of African descent and other places as well like Australia, people of native Australian descent, the figures for deaths in custody etc, they're very, very high. And also really a good way to understand this is to look at the types of denial in all of these cases that Black Lives Matter as using as rallying points. The ideas that the people actually deserved their fate in some way because they had some very minor thing on their record or they were behaving aggressively or, you know, all the kinds of denial which are put forward identify that how whiteness functions on one level is to wilfully misinterpret other people's lives and not take them seriously and not take their explanations of their own experiences seriously. So there's always this constant mismatch of interpretations which for me is partly if not totally to do with this very long history whiteness enabling and authorising power to be enacted against people who are identified of being of lesser value.



And thirdly I guess is an interesting one because it's to do with current political ideologies and political practices. For a long time now, we've identified now that right nationalist, populist parties have been developing in Europe, but also elsewhere. Hopefully the high point of that has been reached and we're not going to go any further with this with the election of Trump, Bolsonaro and various other people in European countries. This strand of politics is based primarily around claims that countries are white, Christian and under threat from multiculturalism, alien cultures etc and importantly the other claim is that liberal elites have allowed these groups to have precedence over the indigenous white people. I think you can also say that whiteness helps understand this as well because it's a way to mobilise white voters around a project. Some of them even use explicit language to say this is a white country but typically you use cultural references in organising your claims and your support. So I think in all of those three areas, whiteness is one frame that will help understand it and like I said at the beginning, it's not a theoretical framework that helps you understand everything about everything but it's certainly an important element of all of these three examples I've picked out. Just to stress that it's the, I guess its the outcomes of these things that's important rather than intentions.

**MT:** Having studied this for such a long time and as you say, having studied patterns, you've said that you think we've reached a peak of something. Do you see patterns changing?

**SG:** Well I think the word I used was hopefully. I mean there are things to be hopeful about. These discourses of white supremacy are being challenged in a way that they haven't been challenged publicly and what I mean by that is that African and Asian, for example, groups have been arguing these things for a long time and being completely ignored. But what's different about this moment is that in the public domain, we now have white people being involved in understanding this and educating themselves and taking part in demonstrations. And it's also good that younger people especially are mobilising and being in charge of an agenda and this has meant that institutions have to respond. I think that the key thing about these processes which are painfully slow and not



linear is that you have to get to a certain point in the public debate to put enough pressure on institutions to actually respond. How they respond is the bit I'm less hopeful about because institutions have a history of lacking political will to really change things and on one level I guess, if you just followed the data, you'd say that some things are getting worse not better. So this is never a picture where you can say everything is better than it was in 1965 because some things are actually worse. It's difficult to say at the moment where all this is going to end up because at some point those protests in the street will die down and then it'll be a question of putting pressure on institutions to actually follow through with the change that they've started to talk about publicly. I think that's the kind of thing that will move this agenda forward: how institutions are pushed to respond, not just with lip service but actually change the way that they do things.

**MT:** When you're still having to encounter even what is the definition of racism, what is the definition of whiteness, what do you mean when you say white supremacy. There's such a... when it's still so reliant on individuals understanding in order to make the change...

**SG:** But how would people understand, Michelle? Where would we get such information from? There's nothing in the school curriculum, they do ten minutes on slave trade, Britain abolished slavery, let's move on to the next subject. Where would people actually get information from if they wanted to seriously think about this? It's mainly people whose job it is - like me - or its people who have intimate relationships with people from minority groups who have first hand experience of this who then get exposed to the experience and the discussions that people have around this when it starts to dawn on you that my experiences are not like these people's experiences. So a lot of people... I can't see how they would access this information, even if they wanted to so it's really not a surprise that people are still questioning the details of it. What is a surprise is that people think that racism doesn't exist which is a constant thing, what is racism? 'Oh well, isn't it just class or isn't that just people being oversensitive' or those kinds of discussions which



are really draining and time consuming. That is more surprising than people not knowing details because they haven't got access to details unless they're actually setting out to find them. It's not part of our education in this country to talk about racism in a frank way.

**MT:** I mean do you see that changing? I mean I think about my responsibility in a position of power or cultural organisations that now see themselves as part of this education, how you do that through the stories that you tell, or the plays that you programme or the TV programmes that you choose to commission, like there's incredible power through the cultural narratives that we choose to tell. And again, there's sort of the hope that that is not just gonna be lip service and that will change, and I think in terms in terms of cultural organisations, I think it will. Do you see that shifting in a curriculum, like as a higher education organisation do you see a shift in a curriculum or not really?

**SG:** I don't see a huge shift in the curriculum yet but it is an agenda item, like this term de-colonising the curriculum is now a thing that people talk about in universities and they may or may not take steps to do such a thing. I think that'll be a really long process because de-colonising a curriculum without de-colonising the institution seems to be really hard work. If you want to change things, the people who run it have to be on board and they have to put resources and time into changing. Long term change within an institution doesn't happen without very substantial buy in from people who have decision-making power.

**MT:** Yup. It is hard work and there's a sort of psychological stamina that is required to keep going and keep going and keep going. I think one of my questions as well was is there a question that you wish I was asking?

**SG:** Ha. So I guess the question that we could be asking is: how do we escape from white supremacy? Because that then denotes that we don't think it's only people in pointy white hats and it's actually a system and that we recognise that it's very harmful for everyone in different ways and that getting rid of it would actually be a benefit for



almost everyone in the world. So that's the question that I wish that we could ask, but obviously there's so much background to getting to that point, we're a way off that yet.

**MT:** Maybe that needs to be an outcome. This needs to be the beginning of a process and the outcome for us is to get to the place where I can call you and ask that question [laughs].

**SG:** Yeah. Well they say, don't they, start at the end and work backwards. So if the objective is escaping white supremacy then everyone has to have a plan about how they're gonna do that. That would be so cool. If you sat down in a school or a university or the Globe theatre and said, 'right, our objective is escaping from white supremacy, how are you we going to do that?'

**MT:** Well there it is, that's what we're going to set. That's the hopeful objective that, as you say, from there, we've gotta put the work in though.

**SG:** And engage. I guess the key to this is engaging with people who experience these things on a day to day basis. It's really recognising that their experiences give them expertise in understanding and thinking of ways to overcome this but also realising that white people who want to be part of this movement also have to, in one way step back and listen, and on the other hand be active and take part in all of these changes, they're not going to happen without lots of buy in from us as well because there's more of us and we occupy positions of power so without us engaging in this alliance it's not going to work. But we have to listen to be able to do that. I think and invite people who are not part of your institution into your institution and listen to what they have to say.

**MT:** Is there anything for now, is there anything else you'd like to say?

**SG:** Well I'd just like to talk a bit about how Shakespeare fits into this story of whiteness, really. It can't fail to strike you that

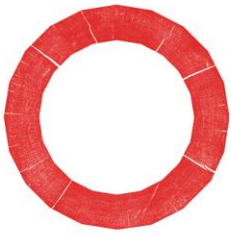


Shakespeare is living and working at such an important moment in the history of colonialism, particularly and the development of capitalism, transatlantic slavery, all of these things are going on in his life time. He's writing at a time when Ireland is being settled and colonised, King James becomes King of Scotland, England and Ireland and Wales, all at the same time, then things become British rather than English. And all of this time there's other European powers already settling and doing different types of exploration and exploitation in the New World alongside the British and Hawkins gets his first permit to trade slaves just before Shakespeare is born and that carries on during Shakespeare's life so he's right at the starting point of British and European colonisation project, so he's right at the period where all of these things which produce dominance across the world and the justificatory ideologies that go with it, Shakespeare's period is when all of those things really start to take off. Most people think, ah race, 19th century, imperialism, mostly 19th century, and forget that the 17th century and late 16th century are almost like foundational moments for all of these things.

**MT:** Thank you so, so much for your time.

**SG:** So do you have some kind of brief at the end of all this to make institutional change?

**MT:** That's my brief. As you say you sort of cut through the cake at a different angle. I came at it as a woman, really loving Shakespeare, sort of growing up with that 'oh he's for everybody, he's so universal' and then going 'oh but why am I not allowed to be on stage'. Like if I'm not allowed in, who else is not allowed in? He says 'hold a mirror up to nature', but what mirror are we holding up and who are we reflecting? It's kind of the brief of the time but I also have arrived at an organisation two years ago at a point where all of this stuff was being, finally being talked about. Intersectionality was being talked about, it's an industry where colour blind casting was something that ... you know the idea that sort of tokenistically you could change what your organisation looked like on the front line, so we have lots of seemingly equal representation on stage, but organisationally it's still systemically, structurally incredibly,



incredibly homogenous, incredibly white. So yeah, the brief is huge. It's a system that we all collude with and if we're not interrupting it then we are still colluding with it.

**SG:** Good luck with that.

**MT:** So good to talk, thank you.

**SG:** Thank you Michelle.

[Music plays]

**IG:** That's it from us for today, but we'll be back next week with another episode in our series exploring Shakespeare and Race, where we take a look at how this lens of whiteness affects the way we read the works of Shakespeare.

You've been listening to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg, Michelle Terry and Professor Farah Karim Cooper.

To find out more about Shakespeare's Globe follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

We'll be back soon with more stories from Shakespeare's Globe so subscribe, wherever you get this podcast from.