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The Project(ions) of 'Civilization' and the Counter-Transferences of Whiteness: Freud, Psychoanalysis, 'Gender' and 'Race' (in Germany)

This article will focus on psychological dynamics and the economy of racism. I am interested in the relation and the interdependence of whiteness and racial otherness, that is, whiteness as invested in constructing and producing racial otherness assuming that one makes no sense without the other. I will thematize the intersections of race and gender in the sense of Judith Butler and others who have made clear that 'race' is always gendered just like gender is always racialized. Generally speaking, psychological research on racism in Germany until recently focused on the racialized subject or delinquent adolescent white Neo-Nazis or white supremacist groups but not on the 'inconspicuous' white subject. While scholars of the critical study of whiteness have made it clear how 'intellectual work on whiteness (...) might contribute to processes of recentering rather than decentering it, as well as reifying the term and its 'inhabitants,'" (Frankenberg 1997, 1) for Germany we have to see that 'whiteness' has not even become acknowledged as a social factor and as a subject position in society linked to dominance. Despite its primary importance in Germany's colonial and fascist past, in particular its ideologies of 'Rasse' (race), the 'whiteness' of subjects in Germany, unlike in the US, England, France, South Africa, India, or Australia - to name just a few countries - is simply not a subject matter of political or public discourses and is just beginning to be debated in the academic realm.

For facility's sake I will spare the reader the quotation marks to point to terms related to 'race' and 'gender' as constructions, hoping that readers will keep in mind that I, by no means, wish to promote any essentializing notions of race or gender. I will for the same reason not capitalize either 'Black' or 'white'. However, I will use the term 'Black' with capital 'B' in its political sense, indicating that anybody who experiences racial discrimination and is excluded from the privileges coming along with whiteness in the system of race is marked as Black. Generally speaking, for a majority (white) German subject race comes to mind only when non-white subjects, non-white subject matters, or identified racists (e.g. Neo-Nazis

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or right-wing extremists) enter the conversation or the room. German life as such is experienced as 'free of race' - for members of the dominant culture. With regard to my own research on the relation of gender, whiteness and racial othering in Germany, it is notable that the majority of my interviewees (white female and mostly feminist psychotherapists of whom many identified as 'interculturally competent') were perplexed, if not shocked, when I first asked them anything concerning their being white. Indeed, an expert of qualitative methods who has done elaborate psychological research on right-wing extremists in Germany and with whom I took a methodology workshop, called it 'ridiculous' for an interview to call for a white German to speak about the question of whiteness in relation to her/his biography.

While I will use excerpts of interviews with therapists in Germany as examples of reproductions of racism, it is rather the violence of structural racism that I am focusing on. The interviewees reproduced racisms against their will because, like most white Germans, they were unaware of the racist matrix they live in. As a white researcher I am not positioned outside this matrix - the racist structure which privileges whites collectively. Despite the generally assumed distance between researcher and research-subject, in the case of racism, a disciplined investigation does not undo a white researcher's structural complicity with a racist structured society, neither does it excuse her of her responsibility for it.

The Epistemological Centrality of Whiteness in Psychology and its Reproductions of Marginality

Psychological and social science research on racism which is conducted by members of the dominant culture in Germany follows this pattern and usually focuses on either the Black subject or blatant white racists. Race, then, is associated with non-whiteness, as ethnicity is associated with non-Western-European and even non-Christian. Given that race is a social construction, neither 'blackness' nor 'whiteness' can be clearly defined. They are fluid ideas which change tremendously over time and geographical space. Racism, despite its developing different shapes and realities within different political situations, remains a system of signification with whiteness as its reference, its primary signifier.

US immigration history is marked by debates and discourses on whether Irish, Greeks, Italians or Jews count as white (Horsman; Back and Solomon; Kincheloe; Guggenheim). Sander Gilman, for example, has shown how the Jewish body was marked by blackness in the German context (Gilman 1999; 1991). Ruth Benedict argues that the term 'Aryan' depicted by the Nazis to name the preferred race is in fact a term that names a group of languages which includes Sanskrit as well as Old Persian. The term makes no reference to a particular German racial heritage (114). Growing up in Germany in the 1960s, I remember the so-called 'Gastarbeiter' from Italy, Yugoslavia or Turkey were being referred to as 'blacks.' Even my father, who was expelled from Hungary after World War II as an ethnic German, was associated with 'blackness' in Germany; members of my mother's family, when angry about him, disparagingly called him a 'gipsy' and 'black.' Needless to say, he has no relations to Sinti or Roma. 'Blackness,' as a racial and/or ethnic marking, has therefore been attached to very different bodies, depending on the need for a creation of difference and legitimation for exclusions in Germany (and elsewhere). While whiteness was generally not named in Germany post World War II and thereby remained racially unmarked, white people could always be racialized by association with blackness or darkness.

However, my focus here is not on the racialized body/person. It is rather on the person who is invested in the activity of marking otherness, thereby creating the normative but neutral center of whiteness. I want to argue that the terms 'race,' 'whites,' 'Aryan,' or 'Jew' trigger even more discomfort in the majority of Germans today than among members of other white dominant cultures. The association of these terms with National Socialist ideology of race makes them taboo for German discourse today; and yet the notion of race is omnipresent in Germany. It is therefore the case that most Germans at once resist seeing themselves as whites while finding it easier to talk about 'blacks,' 'Turks,' or 'Arabs' as racialized subjects. I assume that the ease of naming the racial other, compared to the uncertainty surrounding the white self, leads back to German colonialism in Africa and its Orientalism, both often less often problematized in comparison to the Holocaust. Therefore, whiteness as a signifier of race works similarly to any dominant white culture (including the US) and, as elsewhere, allows white members of German society to claim a position outside of the system of racialized apportionment.

Privileges that accompany whiteness in a racist society are taken for granted by whites. These privileges define normality; those who do not profit from them appear as outside the norm. Their placement outside the norm renders them as 'different.' The 'difference' of those outside the norm is necessary to maintain the normality inside; in other words, the term 'normality' would not make sense without conceptions of what is 'not normal' or of ab-normality. Most Western sociological epistemologies are based on the Enlightenment notion of a core at the center of a self/subject - in fact it is a parasitic white self, dependent on marked difference as its constitutive outside. Hence, center and periphery are interdependent; the center constitutes the periphery and vice versa. With her description of the tendency or danger of whiteness to recenter itself despite efforts of critical whiteness discourses to decenter it, Ruth Frankenberg points to the very structure of the problem: center and periphery. Whiteness constructs its periphery by way of building boundaries and defining racial difference from whiteness. Frankenberg in her study of white women in the US (1993) deals with the discursive dimensions of whiteness and how discourse is reproduced in individual narratives. Theoretical psychoanalytic work has emphasized the symbolic and structural dimensions of racism and whiteness. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks in her Lacanian analysis of whiteness for example argues that
the structure of racial difference is founded on a master signifier — whiteness — that produces a logic of differential relations. Each term in the structure establishes its reference by referring back to the original signifier. The system of race as differences among black, brown, red, yellow, and white makes sense only in its unconscious reference to whiteness, which subsumes the binary opposition between “people of color” and “white.” This inherently asymmetrical and hierarchical opposition remains unacknowledged due to the effect of difference engendered by this master signifier, which itself remains outside the play of signification even as it enables the system. (20)

The interconnectedness of discourse as well as the symbolic and individual social practice of whiteness allow for white people in Germany or in other countries with a majority white population to construct a normality free of race, even if — or because — they are the producers and profiteers of the system of racism. While they inhabit the absent/empty center and thereby define normativity, they are in denial of the normativity of their self in the system of race. The obvious consequence — that whiteness is essential for the system of race to work when blackness is the target of racism becomes veiled and obscured over and again. The argument that whiteness should not be naturalized, for fear that it (re)manifests notions of race, is typical for the German context, and is of course a perversion of the situation: the de-naturalization of whiteness prevents work against racism.

Whereas much research in Germany explores the relationship between self and other, for example, by examining the meaning of the other/stranger for the psychological development of the self (generally assumed to be a white and often male self), the history of seizure of that self over the other as one of enrolling, colonizing, dehumanizing, and exploiting the other is hardly addressed. Subject theories of Western philosophers who engage the relationship of self and other (such as Hegel’s lord and bondsman in the Phenomenology of Spirit) as between two arbitrary subjects who happen to be in a power-balanced relationship, are taken as a point of departure in order to conceptualize racism in Germany. In such a logic, racism is a pathology rather than the white — normativity.

Judith Butler, however, has shown how the relationship between self and other, as shown between Hegel’s lord and bondsman (1997), or equally between male and female, white and Black (1993) is one of interdependency, and yet:

The bondsman appears as an instrumental body whose labor provides for the material conditions of the lord’s existence, and whose material products reflect both the subordination of the bondsman and the domination of the master. In a sense, the lord possesses as a disembodied desire for self-reflection, one who not only requires the subordination of the bondsman in the status of an instrumental body, but who requires in effect that the bondsman be the lord’s body, but be it in such a way that the lord forgets or disavows his own activity in producing the bondsman, a production which we will call a projection. This forgetting involves a clever trick. It is an action by which an activity is disavowed. And then in order to disavow one’s body, to render it “Other” and then to establish the Other as an effect of autonomy, is to produce one’s body in such a way that the activity of its production — and its essential relation to the lord — is denied. (1997, 33)

In a similar fashion, whiteness and maleness reproduce their gendered and racialized other over and again, for if it weren’t for the racial and gendered other as inferior, there would be no whiteness and maleness that can claim superiority. The construction of racial purity as whiteness needs to be framed by racials, meaning ‘racial otherness.’ Butler (1993) discusses these relations using the characters in Nella Larsen’s novel Passing Clare, a African American woman, passes as white, and in the racist atmosphere of the 1930s US is continuously threatened to be exposed as black. Her white husband Belowe does not know about Clare’s blackness, while at the time he invested in persistently securing the “ambiguity that he must subordinate and deny” (173). Belowe indicates by his calling Clare “Nig” a “kind of knowingness in the language he speaks” (171). He knows and at the same time claims not to know about their violation of the segregation taboo. Butler argues that Belowe’s calling Clare “Nig” sustains his desire as a kind of disavowal, one that structures not only the ambivalence in his desire for Clare, but also the erotic ambivalence by which he constitutes the fragile boundaries of his own racial identity” (172). Clare is fetishized by Brian and the violation of the taboo fuels his desire for her, “the uncertain border between black and white is precisely what he eroticizes” (172). This literary example may be seen as one of the extremes of ‘white amnesia,’ the capacity of the white subject to derive pleasure out of something that s/he simultaneously negates.

It is the power of whiteness to designate, to give and take subject or object status to the racial other. What the lord — the master — forbids himself, s/he projects onto the other, creating through racialization and/or engendering thereby producing a territory, a playground, a periphery to be visited, to be enjoyed, rejected and disavowed. With Hegel’s text Butler shows the assimilation of the bondsman’s labor by the lord, but for the price of the lord’s dependency on the bondsman and the need to disavow this dependency over and again. In discussing Larsen’s text, Butler argues that

(…) to coin Marx, (…) the reproduction of the species will be assimilated as the reproduction of relations of reproduction, that is, that the collectived size of a socialized version of the species in pursuit of hegemony through perpetuity, that requires and produces a normative homosexuality in its service. (197, 167)

Subject, Object, Abject: White Amnesia — whose History — whose Memory Work?

Julia Kristeva offers another insight into the constitution of a subject, according to which a subject or a social being is constituted through excluding. In order to become social the self has to expunge the elements which society declares impure and dirty, such as excrements, menstrual blood, urine, semen, tears, masturbation or incest. Kristeva calls this process ‘abjection.’ Following her theory, Anne McClintock explains, that these expelled elements “can never be fully obliterated; they haunt the edges of the subject’s identity with the threat of disruption or even dissolution.” McClintock continues:
The object is everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social; it is also a symptom of the failure of this ambition. As a compromise between “condemnation and yearning”, objectification marks the borders of the self; at the same time, it threatens the self with perpetual danger. (…) the expelled object haunts the subject as its inner constituent boundary: that which is repressed forms the self’s internal limit. The object is something rejected from which one does not part. (71) Kristeva, however, fails to pay attention to the power relations of the subject she discusses. She works with Freud’s notion of the subject, one that is not universal but male, white and heterosexual, a notion that was developed in a time when modern colonialism was at its peak. In Ranjana Khanna’s work *Dhark Continentalism on Psychoanalysis and Colonization* she notes that “the idea of sustaining a modern self (…) is constitutionally invested in creating a primitive and colonized other.” She suggests an understanding of psychoanalysis as “a product of a time when nationalism was being theorized, when the self was understood increasingly as a national self, and when nations were being formed and formulated in tandem with the expansion of colonial interests.” (100). For McClintock therefore certain groups are expelled and obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity: the slum, the ghetto, the garrison, the brothel, the convent, the colonial bus and so on. Abjected peoples are those who “cannot be internalized by the self” and “cannot be contained within the Jewish ghetto, the Arab block, the Indian village, the Victorian garrison and the kitchen, the squatter camp, the mental asylum, the red light district, and the bedroom. Inhabiting the cage of domesticity and industry and empire, the abject returns to haunt modernity as its constitutive, inner repudiation: the rejected from which one does not part. (72) Seshadri-Crooks not only sees whiteness as the master signifier of ‘race’ (and not blackness) but argues that the notion of ‘race’ and racial visibility “is related to an unconscious anxiety about the historicity of Whiteness” (21), a historicity which is absent. ‘White’ identity is the illusion of wholeness, of ‘self’, autonomy and freedom and the denial of the psychic and any other (e.g., political, economic) interdependence. Instead of acknowledging this interdependency, whiteness provides those outside the system with “the illusion of” autonomy, freedom and independence. Over the centuries white communities and discourses have developed multiple mechanisms to maintain this structure. Clare Pajaczkowska and Lola Young argue that “the absence of Whiteness in the European historiography” (202) is caused by the denial of whiteness and that has resulted in a blank spot in recollections of the destructive effects of seizure and of welding power. (202). The Western history of constructions of difference shows how the dualistic system of self and other as center and periphery is at the core of any hegemonic structure. Racism and Sexism/heteronormativity as strategies of the enlightened self to other and exclude, are as constitutive of most (dominant white) societies as are the enlightenment premises of equality; therefore, a constant contradiction needs to be dealt with. The sciences employed in the colonial projects delivered biologic racisms as legitimations for such contradiction, the dehumanization and thereby exploitations of the colonized body/society. Racism, from that perspective, is the preeminent instrument for exploitation, the seizure over the other. Modern forms of scientific racisms work more subtly than comparing brain size or fertility (Kaupen-Hass and Saller; Jahoda; Gould), the underlying re-establishment of norms and deviations, however, continues. A way to appear enlightened while stabilizing the system of inequality is to transfer internal conflicts (e.g., the contradictions within a society) on others. Some of the psychological research, while claiming to work on/against racism, tacitly approves the system of racism as normative. The problem is projected on to right-wing extremism and defines racism exclusively in terms of its blatant forms, while trivializing any institutionalized and everyday racism, calling it unproblematic or as derived of something other than racism. The focus on adolescent right wing extremists by one strand of the German, predominantly psychoanalytic discourse on self and other, advances the view of racism as a deviation. Case studies in this field argue that the racist speech and violence of these adolescents is a product of inter-familial relationship experiences (Kingsley, Streich). Another strand normalizes racism by claiming that xenophobia - fear of the stranger - is a trans-cultural, universal phenomenon (Selldoms). None of the authors arguing from these positions, however, explains how it happens that only certain subjects become victims of this “hostility toward strangers” (Fremdenfeindlichkeit). Hardly any of these scholars seem to notice that Afro-Germans, as well as Germans whose great-grandparents migrated from Turkey, become regular targets of racist attacks or victims of everyday racisms, whereas white Canadians or white South-Africans rarely encounter this kind of hostility in Germany. The explanation of racism by way of applying theories based on power-balanced relations between self and other/stranger trivializes the consequences of racial othering. Such an approach diverts the focus from the white dominant culture which the researchers are usually part of and limits the problem of racism to a minor group of deviants - mainly white lower/working class adolescents who are socially very distant from the researchers. I want to suggest that it is the disingenuous “neutralität” of the white standpoint that sets the norm and thereby mimics itself from self-questioning. Foregrounding the so-called losses of modernization in Germany (socially underprivileged, deviant adolescents who, by virtue of being represented as such, appear as victims) and their targeting Asylbuer as scapegoats for their misery, marginalizes the phenomenon under investigation. It is not only some right wing extremists who create a racist atmosphere in Germany, but the dominant culture itself.

As much as the German population after 1945 has largely distanced itself from Nazi-crime, as it only Hitler and a few powerful people around him were responsible for the Holocaust, the distancing from and avoidance of terms
associated with NS ideology like ‘Rasse’ and ‘whiteness’ seems to serve as a substitute for dealing with the racism that is constitutive of the contemporary dominant culture in Germany. Although Germany’s Nazi past and its anti-Semitism are far from being worked through, for most Germans it is seen as a completed chapter of German history. Racism gets associated with the activities of right-wing extremists and Neo-Nazis, who violently target everybody whom they define as Ausländer (foreigner) / foreigner. However, the omnipresence of racism in its entire range of blatant to subtle expression, is living proof of the vitality of notions of race within and across the population.

I do not distinguish between anti-Semitism and racism in Germany as some might expect, since my concern is the ways of othering employed through whiteness. From the “white standpoint,” anyone who needs to be marked as alien to the national body might be augegeschirirt (blackened). As I have mentioned earlier, “black” in the German context was applied historically to different bodies, including the Jewish body. Hildegard Frühs found that contemporary representations of the stereotype of the Beautiful Jewish Woman in the European context and in particular in contemporary German representations generally foreground her darkness. Visual technologies are employed to stress the darkness of black hair and eyes, in high contrast to the background: portraits are surrounded by a black frame etc. I am less concerned in this paper with the different histories and practices of anti-Semitism, new-versus-old racisms, and differences between orientalist, anti-Africanist or anti-Slavic racisms. Again, along the lines of my aforementioned priorities I want to focus on the re-productions of racial neutrality and/or purity concerning the white subject status as privileged and as definer of racial otherness.

In attempts to avoid the peculiar term Rasse, outside of right wing circles, ethnicity as well as culture and identity function as substitutes for the unsettling term in Germany. This goes as far as translating English book titles into German, replacing race with identity as it happened with Sander Gilman’s “Freud, Race and Gender” which became “Freud, Identität und Geschlecht.” The reason given for such a decision is often that the use of the term Rasse would re-manifest notions of race.

Ironically, in the case of Gilman he discusses precisely the time of the rise of scientific race theories in Europe and Freud’s discourse on Jewish identity. People in Germany are literally afraid to use the term “race,” and racism is banished to the realm of the sub-/unconscious; however it remains particularly effective out of such a surreptitious place, falling below levels of recognition.

Dominant notions about race and ethnicity in Germany are irrational in the way that both notions are considered issues of the other. When we (white Germans) talk about racism or ethnicity, we talk about the other, not ourselves. Racial otherness is experienced by white Germans whenever a black person enters the room, and yet the blackness of that other does not necessarily explicitly refer to the whiteness of the white self. Racism is experienced as a difference embodied by the other. The racial marking of the other is accompanied by the assumption of racial neutrality of the white self. It therefore often appears as a charitable move if whites deal with the issue of racism in Germany because they feel that they themselves have nothing to do with the problem. Dominant opinion supports this standpoint. The dismay over news about brutal racist outbursts of some right wing extremists against asylum seekers in Germany, for example, does usually not “interpellate” the involvement in the racist structure of the one appalled due to her/his whiteness. One might well have concerns about being part of a society which enables, allows, or tolerates such violent expressions of racism. The connection between the popular attitude that Germany has enough Ausländer (foreigners), and that immigration should be limited if not stopped, and the Neo-Nazi attacks on Ausländer does not become visible; rather it effectively gets veiled and disguised. However, the one who is marked as Ausländer receives a variety of signals in German society, not only among Neo-Nazis, that s/he is not welcome.

If we wish for the concept of race, or what Gilroy calls “race thinking,” and thereby racism to disappear from our (social) reality, we can not “undo” race/racism through its denial or evasion as US-American president G. W. Bush suggested. In the debates on the repeal of Affirmative Action in the educational system he argued that a nationwide colorblindness should replace Affirmative Action claiming that the latter focuses on racism and thereby produces what it is supposed to combat. As much as he needs legalized “brown” workers for the (united) states’ economic well-being, he also needs institutionalized racism to prevent them from moving socially and economically upward, where they can legitimately claim the resources reserved for predominantly white people. It is exactly this relationship that is veiled, namely the dependency of wealth on poverty. It is what Butler (1997) means, using Marx, when she talks about reproduction as relations of reproduction (167). Such veiling and blurring, however, is apparently not necessary when a politician addresses the German public. Germany’s Secretary of the Interior, Schily, seemed less concerned about political correctness than US president Bush. While Bush, explaining his “desire” for a nationwide colorblindness to replace Affirmative Action, spoke to/from a naïve belief that the
American Dream can be dreamt and realized by everyone, Schily spoke straight to the greedy/racist German heart. In the debates on green cards for immigrant workers, he beseeched his audience on national German TV in summer 2001 not to worry, as not just anybody would be let in. The measure would work solely to better Germany's economy. Only highly qualified applicants would be accepted (to fill the lack of computer scientists in Germany). I want to argue that the psychic economy of racism works similarly to its material economy. The seizure over the Black body as labor, resource or field of projection for desires and destructive ‘drives’ serves the white subject's material and psychic well-being.

While the white subject takes active part in the processes of assimilation, appropriation and expropriation, her/his activity immediately gets veiled, disguised and denied. Such activity does not appear as an aggression like the brutal outbursts of Neo-Nazis. However, the destructive power of the more subtle forms of racialization / racial othering might be even greater. Racism is not limited to what Neo-Nazis declare as ‘national befetted Zonen’ (national liberated regions) but takes place wherever whites are. Whites are the teachers, doctors, counselors, administrators, policemen, neighbors, co-workers, and parents of people of color. Racism as a social injustice is constitutive in the wealth that many white people have enjoyed in the past and enjoy at present, and therefore declarations of the desire by the latter to get rid of race/racism by ways of fantasizing redemption (e.g. colorblindness) boil down to hypocrisy.

It is often argued that one cannot see Germany as a postcolonial context due to its relatively short period of colonialism and a history of immigration which differs from Great Britain, Portugal or France, insofar as the major groups to immigrate to Germany do not come from the former colonies. However, the images of the colonized as racial other are very much present in media representations, school books, etc. (Siegh: El Tayeb; Mayer and Terkessidis; Bae). Jean Walton, writing about race, psychoanalysis and feminism in the US notes that:

white Americans in a country with a history of a racialized slavery system, of racialized lynching practices, of racialized divisions of labor, indeed, of a racialized history of child care, where the tasks of the ‘mother’ so typically described in psychoanalytic accounts of early development (nursing, cleaning, eroticizing certain zones of the body, assisting in the acquisition of language, mediating in the mirror stage) were (and continue to be) undertaken by black women in the white slave-owning or servant-employing household.

However,

It could be argued that it is just as much the case for Europeans, whose fantasmatic life is permeated by the Orientalist and Afrocentrist ideologies that underwrite and justify what by the time psychoanalysis was in its nascent stages had become a long and vexed history of European colonialist expansion and decline. (225)

Psychoanalysis and Race beyond and after Germany

Many scholars have found in psychoanalysis a useful theory for understanding the economy of racism. Some argue that psychoanalysis’ very coming into being depended upon particular notions of race (Gilman, 1993). Freud developed psychoanalysis out of a personal diatribe experience; for him, as Pajakowski and Young write, “the systematic understanding of the psyche was initially the need to understand the oppressor, to anticipate the next blow, in order to defelct it and continue with self realisation” (198). Frantz Fanon, using Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, claims that racism is inscribed into the colonizer as well as into the colonized and shows how all-pervasive racist symbolic categories rule our self-images – no matter whether we are white or black. White ethno psychoanalysts like Florence Weiss (1991, 1993, 1996) and Maya Nador use psychoanalytic theory not only to gain knowledge about the other, but also to research their relationships with their research-subjects – the Jatran in Papua New Guinea and Otomi women in Mexico. Delving into their destabilizations when encountering the other, they reflect upon issues like paternalism and a sense of mission on their side, and the colonial situation which anthropological research often stimulates. Due to self-critical investigations, they come to recognize colonial and imperial patterns in their own desires and yearnings.

To re-inscribe whiteness into European history within the scope of empirical research, the use of the psychoanalytic concepts of confrontation and counter-transference can be helpful. Such concepts enable researchers to interrogate their preconceived knowledge about colonial histories and their roles as whites in it. However, the potentially racist, neo-colonial unconscious of the white, ‘First World’ researcher or therapist can equally be denied, ignored, or reflexively explored. The researcher can choose either to rest comfortably in pseudo-certainties of white privilege, or venture into uncertainty. As postcolonial critic Trinh T. Minh-ha puts it: “The understanding of difference is a shared responsibility, which requires a minimum of willingness to reach out to the unknown” (85).

It is remarkable that psychoanalytic theory is employed for research on (everyday) racism in many places other than in Germany. Particularly in the English speaking academic world, psychoanalytic subject theory is used by scholars to theorize processes of racialization and race relations, but also the engendering of race and the racialization of gender and sexuality (Ing, Cheng; Seshadi-Crooks; Butler, 1993; McClintock, 1995, Abel et al. 1997). With the “Aryanization” of psychology and psychoanalysis in Germany during National Socialism in the course of the “Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums,” it seems that not only Jewish scholars were silenced and banned from the field. A look through psychoanalytic work in Germany concerning anti-Semitism and racism today shows

a striking blankness when it comes to work on racism beyond aforementioned scholarship that focuses on adolescent right wing extremists or generally blatant forms of racism and anti-Semitism, suggesting that racism is a pathology.

Psychology's collaboration with Germany's colonial project and National Socialism was not limited to the scientific justification of state-run seizures over the body and possessions of the colonized and Jews. Many in the gentle psychoanalytic community in Germany during the Holocaust collaborated with the Nazi regime and took over the positions of the Jewish psychoanalysts who fled their persecution. Georges Devereux argued that anxiety plays a major role in the behavioral sciences for the development and employment of methods. Rigorous method helps the researcher to claim objectivity and to appear distant from their subject matter. Even though Devereux suggested psychoanalysis as research method, which explicitly works with the subjectivity of the researcher, psychoanalytic method in the realm of research on racism in Germany is often employed as a defense against knowledge of what Leslie Roman describes as "white complicity with various forms of colonial and neo-colonial oppressions... [and] against] knowledge of the complex ways in which white racial privilege is constructed so as to benefit whites collectively (e.g., through ideologies of gender, sexuality, and nationality) (...)."

The "Terror of Whiteness"

bell hooks as well as other authors such as Toni Morrison, write about the "terror of whiteness" in the black imagination, showing how it needs little but the representation of the signifier of whiteness to instigate a trauma in a Black person. A white therapist who is ignorant about her/his reproduction of racisms runs a great risk of re-traumatizing her/his clients of color despite likely good intentions. Similarly, a male therapist who works with a narrow definition of sexual abuse can harm his female clients who have experienced subtler versions of sexual abuse than blatant rape. The denial of an experience for the experience in itself may produce new 'realities' and thereby works exactly against psychotherapy's intention. As Frantz Fanon argues, the memory of colonial seizure and racism are repressed in both colonized and colonizer. The encounter between a racially marked and a white person, whether in a psychoanalytic setting or elsewhere, is always burdened by these more or less repressed memories. Instead of "remembering, repeating and working-through" as Freud (1914) suggested, the ignorant white therapist as well as the white researcher represses her/his own memory, denies her/his own participation in the process of racialization and ultimately, through her/his authority in the racist order as well as her/his position as the professional, prevents progress. She he possesses the power to define what is racist or sexist as well as to 'defuse' a (therapeutic or research) situation that "interepellates" her/his complicity in the system or even ideology of racism by interpreting the situation as an individual pathology.

I would like to digress briefly into my empirical work in order to sketch some of the manifestations of these structures in the daily lives of women. My interview partners were psychotherapists in Germany, all of them white, except one, all were Christian secularized and they worked within a feminist framework. I took biographic interviews followed by a dialogical part which investigated the situation of therapy work with clients with migration biographies / racially/ethnically marked people (non-bio-German). For analysis of the data I used a feminist discourse analytic method by Frigga Haug called memory work combined with a psychoanalytic approach based on the analysis of transference and countertransference (in-depth hermeneutic text interpretation following Alfred Lorenzer).9

"Discovering the World"

When telling her life story one interview partner (Linda) talked about the sense of a new era in the 1970s when she then in her 20s - and others active in the women's movement "wanted to discover the world" as she phrased it and she added: "we wanted to take a trip to South America or elsewhere. We wanted to learn things and do stuff that was considered typical men's domains. Taking a trip around the world was one of those things." Linda's word choice is noteworthy as it makes it clear that following the footsteps of discoverers and explorers - namely predominantly white male Europeans, who 'penetrated' large parts of the world, and subjugated the people who lived there, was considered a feminist project. South America, however, turned out to be a rough place for Linda. The machismo and the family oriented lifestyle of the people provided little or no opportunities for Linda to engage in feminist emancipatory activity. She was luckier in the US where she found a commune which practiced an alternative lifestyle and for example had quota regulations that guaranteed 50% women in male dominated jobs. Linda tells with enthusiasm how she ran the car workshop of the commune together with another woman for a couple of years, which was obviously a wonderful experience for her. Only when I asked about the demographic structure of the commune, Linda remembered that within the boundary of the community the people were predominantly white whereas in the periphery the population was predominantly black. She then explained that according to the founding narrative of that commune, the initiators could only buy the land cheaply because "nobody wanted to have it". The land, as it turns out, used to be a tobacco farm and was therefore most likely a former slave plantation. It is remarkable that my interview partner did not seem to feel any discomfort about this situation since - back in Germany - she was very engaged in anti-racist struggles within the feminist activist

9 For a more detailed description of the methodology of this research project see Tillberger 2005.

Interview partners' data were made anonymous.
scene and let go of a number of white privileges when acting in solidarity with those discriminated against. By phrases such as: 'nobody wanted to live there' she actively denied subject status to the population who lives on that land - black Americans whose ancestors might well have been laborers on that tobacco farm. Linda's story sounds alike the narritives of colonials, adventurers and explorers who discovered "virgin land" - in her case a paradise for feminist self-realization, emancipation, and freedom.

In her analysis of white US-American authors Toni Morrison writes about the constitutive role of blackness for the whiteness of the writers:

We should not be surprised that the Enlightenment could accommodate slavery; we should be surprised if it had not. The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom - if it did not in fact create it - like slavery. Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. (38)

How the Holocaust becomes a "Jewish Story"

When Linda, at that point of the interview, realized how her feminist liberation story took place in a rather colonial setting, or maybe it was more generally the issue of power, race and gender, that came up, she suddenly switched to an apparently different subject. "There were a lot of foreigners in that commune," she said. "Most of them were Israelis and Kibbutzim and therefore familiar with the commune life. However," she noted:

ey were not familiar with the 'roots' of that commune. They were not interested in the history [like she was]. But that was a very important experience for me - the confrontation with German history - for my therapeutic work later on.

While she experienced people in the alternative scene in the US generally as very open and welcoming, Linda was rather troubled by the encounters with these Israelis whom she experienced as unreasonably unfriendly towards her because of her Germanness. Asked to explain further she told about an incident during lunch when a group of Israelis at the neighboring table were upset when they learned that the commune had bought a VW. Linda walked up to them and asked why that was a problem but the Israelis turned around and walked away without saying a word. She came to the conclusion that they had not dealt with their "Jewish history," by which she meant the Holocaust, and instead simply (and unfairly) maintained bad attitudes toward Germans. Her depiction of the Holocaust as a "Jewish (hi)story" instead of, say, a German one, tells much about her/our (non-Jewish German) own blatant denial of the meaning of her/our own Germanness. Later on she learned that some of those Israelis were children of Holocaust survivors who were even connected with her home town, meaning that there was the possibility of direct links between her family as possible perpetrators and their families as possible victims. As it appeared, she considered them responsible for explaining "their" story to her rather than feeling any responsibility of her own to reflect upon "Jewish-German" encounters or the connection of the German industry like Volkswagen (VW) with the NS.

Linda mentions her discomfort with the "silence" surrounding "German-Jewish" encounters over and again in the interview. She uses the terms "speechlessness" "roots" or "history" many times when talking about her encounters with Jews in the US. This might well be a silence that started with the "silencing" of Jews by the dominant German population in the Holocaust (with active or passive involvement on the side of the dominant Germans). In the same sequence of the interview Linda mentions an exhibition which a Jewish acquaintance produced. It showed German psychologists who fled their persecution as Jews in the Third Reich and came to the US. Each partition portrayed a person with pictures and their life stories. Linda recounted that

(...) I thought 'this is unbelievable,' how come nobody ever told me about that - in school (university)? - nothing! That was, I think, my first experience, that somebody did this exhibition in which nobody talked about - what story these people had that they had to leave. I had always wondered that in our history books, our psychology books - just said that they emigrated, but what was the context? I just always thought - they were all quite enterprises - just like we - liked to travel. But nobody ever mentioned that this had a Jewish story.

I present the precise account here because it is curious how the responsibility for the silence, the non-talking, the hiding of the hi/story shifts from German, genteel history- and psychology-book writers to the Jewish people. Again the story is represented as a Jewish one as opposed to a German one. Even though we can easily see how Linda found it difficult to believe in encounters with Holocaust survivors and their children due to the lack of models in Germany, it becomes apparent that she also reproges the characteristic projection of blame onto Jews.

As I handed Linda a stack of photos to flip through and to select one that reminded her of an experience she had had in her therapeutic practice, she picked the photo of a Jew standing before the Holy Wall in black garb, praying with a Torah in his hand. Linda, looking at the picture, started talking about sexual abuse,

98 Martina Tiefberger

Project(s) of Civilization 99

9 I do not mean to oppose German and Jewishness, especially as I am talking about German Jews (e.g. the parents of Linda's interlocutors), non-German Jews (e.g. Linda's interlocutors) and also non-Jewish Germans (e.g. Linda). For convenience I do not list all the possibilities each time but use "German-Jewish" encounters by which I mean positions that have a reference to and a legacy with the Holocaust.

10 I offered interviewees to look through pictures which showed people who were of different genders, who were racially marked in different ways or white, and whose dress showed a broad cultural spectrum, and asked them to choose one which reminded them of situations in their psychotherapeutic practice. I then asked them to tell me the story they experienced with the client that came to mind when they looked at this picture.

11 Linda used the word Geistlicher, which translates into English as priest as well as priest.
apparently the most common denominator in her clients’ cases. In the long run, she said, most of the women she worked with came up with a story of sexual abuse; this picture reminded her of how all these men “have no faces” – the women don’t remember their faces until they work on their experience in therapy. However, since the picture is taken from the back of the man, one can see why to Linda, using the word “black” in a characteristically German way, it shows “a black man with no face”. While she first pretended that she did not recognize the man as a Jew, she shortly thereafter revealed her implicit framing by saying that the phenomenon of sexual abuse “is not bound to any religion or culture” but appears everywhere.

Earlier she had blamed the Jews for refusing to explain “their Jewish story” to her, and that they were hesitant to make friends with her. She had demanded that they explain to her why problems between non-Jewish Germans and Jews existed so long after the Holocaust, even in a generation that had “nothing to do with it.” In the same interview she associated Jewishness with sexual violence, and realized the connection only after it was pointed out to her. The “Jewish story” haunt Linda. Over and again, it seems, she tried to exude this memory, the object which is her participation, the part of her self, her history which is inscribed and marked by the seizure over the Jewish body, of Jewish property and of Jewish life itself in the Holocaust. At the same time her relation to Jews seems to be structured by desire and yearning. As I have lined out earlier with McClintock and Kristeva, abjection marks the borders of the self as a “compromise between condemnation and yearning”.

At the same time, it threatens the self with perpetual danger. (...) the expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary; that which is repudiated forms the self’s internal limit. The abject is something rejected from which one does not part. (McClintock 71)

Linda did so by projecting her bad feelings outwards and blaming the victim, thereby appearing as the one persecuted herself (“I kept asking but they refused to tell me about it”), “it” meaning that “Jewish” story, the Holocaust, meaning that she is open to working on her past but it is “the Jews” who prefer not to talk, as if they have something to hide. By depicting a Jew as the (embodied) representation of male sexual violence, she supports the patriarchal rule that imputes anti-Semitism and racism to the “periphery,” to construct the illusion of a “safe, pure, white” center, letting white, gentle male sexual abusers off the hook and outside the play of signification.

The man has “white skin color” but wears a black coat and a black hat and therefore appears as a “black” / “dark” figure to Linda. In Germany people with black hair and darker skin color than the majority of Germans have, are often called “black”. In order to make sure that I do not take my own reading of that picture as the “right” one while depicting Linda’s reading wrongfully as idiosyncratic, I showed it to a number of people in Germany who had nothing to do with my research and most of them recognized a Jewish man portrayed.

No End in Sight

Since the European Enlightenment, the construction of both the (white) woman and the colonized (Black) subject as other has accompanied a process of seizing, legitimizing, and consolidating power in order to establish uneven access to the life sustaining resources of the globe. The Western history of constructions of otherness shows how the dualistic system of self and other as centre and periphery is at the core of any hegemonic structure. According to Sandra Harding, the history of Western science shows remarkable parallels between the eschewing of women and that of blacks (of all genders). Biological and a-historic derivations of the alleged special case, the deviation from the white male heterosexual “norm” and “normality,” apply to both excluding tendencies. This dualistic system of self and devalued other fits well in a hegemonic structure where white women internalizes their own subservience as women for a small share of the power, thereby giving their tacit approval to racist structures.

As I have pointed out, using Toni Morrison’s words, the accommodation of slavery in the Enlightenment should not be surprising, since the concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. By analogy, freedom from patriarchal rule will not carry white feminists very far if they, speaking with Butler, become instruments of the very terms of power which threaten them. Freud’s depiction of women as the riddle of the “Dark Continent” is an exoticized and implicitly racist image drawn from an Africanist iconography (McClintock). A psychology which pathologizes women and racially marked people works in the same paradigm as the psychology that was engaged in the colonies. Much of what Freud considered to be the discontent of the white heterosexual male and which was thus projected on to women and colonized peoples (of all genders), thrives in the transferences and countertransferences in white therapists’ offices in Germany and elsewhere.

Martha Mamozi has surveyed this relationship in her historical work about white women in the German colonies.
Bibliography


SABINE BROECK

The Subject of Enlightenment:
Notations Towards an Epistemology of Slavery, Gender and Modernity

These notations sketch my provisional theoretical assumptions for an extended research project on slavery, gender and modernity which will work through the implications of white western gender theory in transatlantic modernity's self-articulations. As such, they appear necessarily abstract, and somewhat polemical. They will address white western academic gender studies "deep thinking" about a concept that has become even more crucial in the recent turn away from 'identity' and towards notions of difference, location, and agency, namely the post-Enlightenment concept of the subject. I submit them here to introduce the larger project which will assess the degree to which white western articulation of the free autonomous subject, and its hegemonic capacity to create sociality and resistance, has been itself structurally contingent on discursive premises which hamper a serious and effective reconsideration of gender and feminist practices beyond narrowly defined ethnocentric interests. I am asking white gender studies which is still and again – the default version at least in German universities (Broeck 2002) to take a thoroughly self-reflective look at our own genealogy in the Enlightenment philosophical tradition – which contrary to philosophy’s “white mythologies” (Young) has been steeped in a history of racialization, segregation and white privilege.

The subject as telos rose to prominence in early modernity as a tool of political and epistemological self-empowerment of white western men. This process itself was structurally contingent on the slave trade’s, slavery’s and later colonialist practices which constituted large parts of the world’s population under that very subject’s reign as a fundamentally other category of beings without any access to a subject position, neither collectively, nor individually, within the western modern scheme of things. Even within critical theory, this rather contingent and limited legitimacy of the subject and its inherent human rights, has not been entirely deconstructed (for this argument, see for example Couze Venn). The breakthrough of poststructuralist scepticism in academia, and the ensuing academic discourse about the subject as constituted in social practices, as an effect of interpellation and as “always out of step with itself” notwithstanding (see Radhakrishnan), the subject’s universal reign keeps re-surfacing, e.g., in much of the recent feuilleton and academic discourse about the West as a haven for the freedom of subjects and for human rights in general. (For a critical take at the particularly European constellations and implications of these discourses, see Griffin and Braudel.)