Balayi
Culture, Law and Colonialism
Cover painting: The Family Bonding, which symbolises the bond that children retain with their parents despite the break-up of their family.

Natalie Bateman is a Yuin woman whose grandparents moved from the South Coast of NSW to the La Perouse Aboriginal community in Sydney. Since 1985 Natalie has lived in the NSW mid North Coast town of Nambucca Heads, which is located on the traditional lands of the Gumbaynggirr people. Many of Natalie’s works are inspired by the landscapes and coastal seascapes found throughout the Nambucca Valley region. Natalie’s work reflects the lifestyle she lives, her love for her family and of the coast and sea life. Natalie’s totem is “Umburra”, the black duck.

Cover design and layout by Francisco Fisher

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VERUNSICHERUNG (UNCERTAINTY) AS METHOD: RESEARCH ON WHITENESS, FEMINISM AND PSYCHOLOGY IN GERMANY

MARTINA TIBBERGER

This paper discusses methodological challenges of a psychological research on whiteness at the intersection of race and gender in Germany. Since most scientists who develop methods for qualitative empirical research in Western academia are white and usually not interested in realizing the meaning of their whiteness within the system of race and within research on racism I suspect that their methods run the risk of functioning in service of white people's defense against the subject matter - whiteness - rather than aiding in an acquisition of knowledge about it. By focusing on violent expressions of racism, which are called "Fremdenfeindlichkeit" (hostility towards strangers), the social sciences in Germany support a collective immunization against the knowledge of the history of whiteness as a history of seizure. Such approaches are motivated by fear and uncertainty, and I will suggest taking that uncertainty not only as a starting point of investigation into the heavily veiled history of whiteness, but also as a method itself.

Whiteness as a social construction within the system of race has been the subject of research in many English-speaking academic fields. It has been investigated as a neutral standpoint from which the 'Other' is defined but which, itself, remains undefined, 1 as an absent centre, 2 and as a master signifier. 3 However, whiteness as a subject matter is new in Germany and brings up a number of conflicts leading back to the Nazi ideology of race as well as the denial of Germany's colonial history in public discourse. There is plenty of research conducted on the racism of right wing extremists; research on whiteness in Germany though triggers much defensiveness and fear. White researchers remain in a safe place as long as they do research on racism that apparently has nothing to do with themselves. They can implicitly claim immunity on the basis of their not killing Black 4 people by pushing them out of trains, or burning the houses of refugees in Germany. Most of these academics would identify themselves as non-racists, as liberals or even leftists.

White people can easily say that they are not racists, but it would be irritating even to them if they were to say that they were not white. If one acknowledges the existence of racism and the social injustice resulting from it, then one also has to acknowledge that somebody profits from that injustice. The racist system benefits white people but most perceive these privileges as their norm-aity and the norm. From this 'white standpoint,' many people then judge Black people's failure in society as their individual incompetence rather than as a result from a structural discrimination. The dominant definition of racism used in Germany is the obvious and blatant expression of it while more subtle forms do not count as racism. As I shall explain in this paper, this phenomenon leads to a collective immunization against the knowledge about the history of whiteness as a history of seizure. Accordingly, research on racism which focuses on whiteness rather than on neo-Nazis who exercise violent racism, triggers much uncertainty, fear and defensiveness among the white community. The acknowledgement of whiteness as a positioning in a racist system does not allow exceptions. Whiteness then becomes a fixed marker, far less mutable than variables like class, economic status, sexual orientation or political positioning. If one realizes the meaning of whiteness, one has to acknowledge her/his involvement in the system of race.

Furthermore, identifying as an anti-racist would no longer make all the difference. The fear that stems from the realization of the meaning of whiteness as a signifier of seizure is also reflected in a methodological dilemma which is the subject matter of this paper. I will focus on the methodological challenges of mapping the blank 5 or 'white' spot in a history of seizing and legitimising rule. How do we read constructions of whiteness in the narratives of white speakers who see themselves as non-racial and therefore as non-white? What method might enable us to advance this research despite the political and perhaps psychological opposition on the part of scientists and scholars active in the critique of racism? Scientists who develop methods for qualitative empirical research in Western academia are most often white and usually not interested in realizing the meaning of their whiteness within the system of race and within research on racism. Speaking with Georges Devreux, 6 I suspect that such methods run the risk of functioning in service of our defence against the subject matter - whiteness - rather than aiding in an acquisition of knowledge about it.

4 I understand race as a social construction and will use lowercase letters for white and black subjects in this text. Using the term Black with capital letter I refer to Blackness in a political sense.

5 It is customarily called the 'blind' spot but apart from this usage of the term being hostile against the visually impaired, it would be contradictory in the system of race, which is, according to Seshadi-Crooks, a system and even a regime of visibility.

After an investigation into the neutral Self-Other relationship as thematized by philosophers of the Enlightenment era, I will show in this paper how the power-imbalanced colonial relationship of white Self and racialised Other relates to the gendered relationship between ‘the’ male (white) Self and ‘his’ female (white) Other, where the ‘second sex’ is characteristic of Western relations of Otherness. In other words, I explore how gender is racialized and how race is gendered. 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. The enlightenened Self, however, does not like to see its civilization as a history of seizure, and the veiling of whiteness as a marker of racist privilege goes hand in hand with the process of Western culture.

I will use the example of Germany as a former colonial power to show how the tabooing of the term ‘race’ and the denial of ‘whiteness’ as ways of veiling a history of seizure are mirrored in the epistemologies of the social sciences. I will begin with the discovery of my own racism in a former research project in West Africa (where Germany was involved in colonial activities), which demonstrated the necessity of my paying attention to the meaning of my whiteness and therefore ‘race’ in post/neocolonial encounters, even when the subject under investigation is something very different from ‘race’.

Using the example of psychoanalysis as a theory, but also as a method, I will describe the ways in which such a method can be used to uncover subject matters as well as displace and obscure them. In this way I will juxtapose psychoanalytic discourses in Germany with cultural studies approaches, to talk about representations of Otherness in the media as well as in academic discourses or interview narratives. Using interviews I conducted and the example of a methodology workshop in which I participated, I will describe the difficulties surrounding a disciplined inquiry into whiteness. The example illuminates how the hierarchical structures in academia support the authority of whiteness, sometimes by the very power of defining what is and is not racism. I will conclude by suggesting that it is the very uncertainty white researchers encounter when confronted with the meaning of whiteness in the system of racism that could be used as a starting point and as a methodological instrument for investigations into a heavily veiled history.

Whose Difference Is It? Encountering the ‘Other’ – Ed’ Outside and Experiencing Estrangement Within

Since the European Enlightenment, the construction of both the (white) woman and the colonized (Black) subject as Other has accompanied a process of seizing, legitimising, and consolidating power in order to establish uneven access to the life resources of the globe. While for decades androcentrism has been the subject of feminist research in Germany, generating elaborate debates on the subordination, marginalisation, and exclusion of women as the ‘other’ gender/second sex,7 the alienation of ‘other’ women (e.g. immigrants, Jews or Afro-Germans) within feminist theory and practice in German ‘dominance culture’8 has until recently hardly been an issue.9

In the tradition of Western scholarship, Euro-centric, androcentric, and universalistic-ahistoric constructions of the other are still dominant and characterize most of the research conducted in the discipline of psychology. According to Sandra Harding,10 the history of Western science shows remarkable parallels between the othering of women and blacks (including all genders). Biologistic and a-historic derivations of the alleged special case, the deviation from the ‘norm’ and ‘norm-ality’ (white male heterosexual) apply to both excluding tendencies. The ambivalence between xenophobia and exoticism characterizes occidental constructions of the female, as well as the white construction of the ‘racial’ and ‘ethnic’ Other. This dualistic system of Self and devaluated Other fits well in a hegemonic structure where white women internalise their own subservience as women for a small share of the power, thereby giving their tacit approval of racist structures11.

When using a psychoanalytic method for analysing interviews conducted with women in Ghana in 1996,12 the focus on projections and counter-projections between the interview partners during the analysis of the data shifted my attention increasingly away from the Ghanaian women back to myself, the interviewer. I was stunned at the impact that my unreflected presumptions about African women, a colonized people, and other related ideas of development and underdevelopment had on the dialogues. The survey conducted at the time concerned the processes of urbanization and their effect on women’s situations as mothers and professionals in Ghana. I was juxtaposing interviews with German and Ghanaian mothers in a survey in 1995,13 and in 1996 I delved more deeply into the effect of matrilineal on Ghanaian women’s conceptions of the Self during the processes of urbanization and westernisation at the time.

Germany’s colonial history is neither included in German school- and university education nor is it represented in the media. My own linear picture of development and the dichotomy in my thinking about African women as

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subordinated vs. men being the patriarchal dominators) exemplary of the general thinking in Germany and probably in large parts of the Western world, had prevented me from realizing how my interview partners had replied to my questions. While I had largely ignored the power imbalances at the time of conducting the interviews, the neo-colonial relationship was inscribed into the encounter itself and recorded in the interview-transcript. The transfersences between the interview partners, namely the image of the African black woman – successor of the colonized - and the European white woman – successor of the colonizers - as master narratives, were spoken between the lines and could be read on a latent level of understanding. Those were unacknowledged, yet ruling roles of signification generated images of underdevelopment, oppressed and dependent African women vs. wealthy, superior, dominant and emancipated European women.

In an interview a Ghanaian sociologist totally disagreed with my notion of maternity as a resourceful practice for women. After we discussed the pros and cons of maternity and paternity, ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ lifestyles, romantic versus arranged-, commoditized vs. ‘love’-marriages, the interviewee protested: ‘the differences between you and me are nothing but the RESOURCES which we have at our disposal!’ She also expressed her astonishment about ‘these tons of research being conducted by US-Americans about the condition of African women as if they did not have enough problems in terms of women, education, and health back home!’ She was certainly not only talking about American researchers but also addressing her interlocutor! I, the German researcher, was intentionally or unconsciously seeking alternatives to a (Western) feminist perspective in Ghanaian women’s culture.

The Ghanaian interviewee, being very aware of the problems of women living in ‘traditional’ Ghanaian ways, was wary of my intentions. What was it that this white woman wanted from her? And what was she trying to ‘teach’ her? Whose emancipation was the interviewer working towards, emancipation from what, whose expense, at whose expense? Gaining resources, greed, a self-serving sense of mission was already familiar to her experience with the white colonizers. By bringing the discussion to the material level of our relationship, she also woke me up from my romanticizing dream about cultural differences and myths of strong black women. No, there could not be any innocent encounter between the white researcher and the black interviewee as long as I unconscious de-thematized the significance of my whiteness and ignored the historical context of that research setting.

White Germans in Ghana like myself, other students, scholars, foreign aid workers, and tourists at the time commonly felt uncomfortably being a white minority in a black population. Some were annoyed that the Ghanaian children called after them ‘oburon’ or ‘blafonyo’ (white man) all the time and then asked for money. Whiteness, wealth, and colonization were an association, a realization which most of us avoided. The simple fact that one’s whiteness was named was deeply disturbing for many of us. We were uneasy when called ‘oburon’ – we did not consider ourselves white. We did not appreciate being reminded of the history of black and white encounters in West Africa, of the meaning of Elmina Castle from where the enslaved were deported to the West.

Since we considered ourselves liberals and leftists, we felt our white skin should not count and we should not be ‘blamed’ for it. Were we not here to ‘help’ or to learn in some ways? We also disliked calling somebody ‘black.’ The entire suggestion of the concept of ‘race’ felt uncomfortable. In keeping with our strategy of avoidance, we instead reproduced naïve or blatant racism without naming it. Although these ‘callings’ (oburonī, blafonyo) were pushing us into uncertainty, we knew how to defend ourselves. We gathered and reassured ourselves of our righteousness, and we felt sorry for the Ghanaians who seemed to still think in colonial patterns, as they apparently could not distinguish between colonizers and harmless white liberals!

I do not recall discussions among white Germans in Ghana about ‘our’ once colonizing parts of what is Ghana today. In 1884 German chancellor Otto von Bismarck had claimed ‘Togoland’ for Germany and it was to become a model colony. Germany concentrated on agricultural development, using African labour for the plantation of export crops, mainly cacao and cotton. ‘Togoland’ was divided between Britain and France during the First World War, and its inhabitants, the Ewe, are today split between Togo, formerly a French colony, and Ghana, formerly occupied by Britain. ‘Lingerig sentiment for the reunification of Togoland, especially among Ewe people in Ghana, has occasionally strained relations between Togo and Ghana since independence’ in 1960.15

I learned about this history from Ghanaians. When I ask students in the classes I teach at the university in Berlin, hardly anyone knows about the colonial chapter in Germany’s history. Puzzled by hearing Ghanaians use German terms such as ‘Hinterland,’ or meeting an old man from the Ewe region who spoke German, I had strongly ambivalent feelings when he complimented me on my Germanness for the reason that ‘[y]ou Germans were better than the British. You taught us discipline.’ That ‘discipline,’ the rigorous measures which were later to slip so easily into anti-Semitic and racist violence in Nazi Germany, ‘made history’ of a kind not so easily denied and forgotten. Situations like that of the Ewe man speaking to my Germanness as representing discipline and vice remind one of the profound ambivalence of German national identity.16

Despite the marginal representation or even the absence of Germany’s colonial activities in German history textbooks and the dominant assumption that there is no post/neo-colonial migration in Germany, mass media in

Germany reproduce many (post/neo-)colonial images of racial Otherness. For one, Hollywood productions such as ‘Gone with the Wind’ were broadcast on German TV from early on. Secondly, documentary and commentary on issues of migration in Germany are full of racist language. The discourses of ‘floods’ of Ausländer (foreigners) coming into the country, and warnings that the ‘boat is full’ and more Ausländer will endanger German society, were dominant for a long time and still occur. These representations convey the idea that Germany is a tolerant country which ‘takes in all refugees’ from countries where there is war and famine, neglecting any connection of Germany’s wealth and development with the underdevelopment and fraught political situations in non-Western countries.

The colonial structure of centre (‘motherland’) and periphery (colony) is reproduced in the context of migration. The racially marked subject is denied access to the resources of the centre in most Western contexts with white dominance cultures. When s/he travels to the ‘motherland’ s/he is assigned to the borderlands, the periphery of wealthy society where it the service sector s/he does the ‘dirty work’ and the cheap labour. His/her work is essential to the wealth of the Western society, but the work and her/his body who does it gets devalued and s/he becomes invisible as a subject.

Scholars in Cultural Studies have used the film classic ‘Gone with the Wind’ to deconstruct the logic of Western development and the role of the racialised body in it. While the white male fights the battle ‘in the world’ and the white female holds her ground at home, the black nanny flits around in the background, incapable of any sophistication, and does the ‘simple’ work. The white subjects are in the centre of a picture framed by the racialised body in the periphery. This structure is repeated over and again, conveying the idea that subject status is bound to whiteness, contrasted by racialised Otherness which represents object status. German pop culture has adopted these stereotyped images of ‘race,’ offering a wealth of representations of ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ Otherness that oscillate between exoticism and xenophobia. Cultural Studies, which has thematised these mechanisms and dynamics, is a field prominent for students and young scholars in Germany. Great parts of the established academic community in Germany, however, are ignorant of that field. As I show later in this paper, research on racism which acknowledges subtler forms of racism than its blatant expression (e.g. Neo-Nazis beating asylum seekers in Germany) is often delegitimised.

17 See for example the body of work of the ‘Duisburger Institut für Sprach- und Sozialforschung (DISS).

18 Of course, the white body is racially marked, too, however the white dominance culture conveys the notion that whiteness represents the norm and racial neutrality (centre). This neutrality can only be because the periphery is marked by race.


Pajaczkowska and Young describe the European history of seizure and expansion, which is one of racism and sexism, as a kind of defence against knowledge of human interdependency. The dependence of the wealth of the rich on the poverty of the poor, progress of the so-called ‘First World’ on the backwardness of the ‘developing countries’ just as the dependency of the alleged rational masculine of the emotional feminine as a parasitic and as a history of seizure needs to be veiled and repressed. The absence of whiteness in the European historiography caused by the denial of imperialism leaves a blank — a white — spot in the memory of the knowledge on the destructive effects of seizure. Pajaczkowska and Young draw the line between experiences of infantile loss of omnipotence, and the absence of the identity of white culture — an absent centre. With psychoanalytic theory they argue that early experience of a loss of infantile omnipotence and a realization of dependence upon the nursing mother grows into an adult narcissism, which defends against feelings of helplessness and a traumatic loss of self-respect. ‘Because the infantile experience is repressed it will exist as an unconscious memory of threat, and it is the intensity of the pressure exerted by this memory that lies beneath the blankness identified as the absent centre of White identity.’

Many authors have found in psychoanalysis useful theories for understanding the economy of racism. Some argue that psychoanalysis’s very coming into being depended upon particular notions of ‘race.’ Jean Walton, writing about ‘race,’ psychoanalysis and feminism, notes that:

white Americans in a country with a history of a racialized slavery system, of racialized lynching practices, of racialized divisions of labour, 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, exististing 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. It could be argued that it is just as much the case for Europeans, whose fantastic life is permeated by the Orientalist and Africanist 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.

Franz Fanon, using Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, claims that racism is inscribed into the colonizer as well as into the colonized and shows how all-


23 Clare Pajaczkowska and Lola Young, op cit, p. 203.


25 Franz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, Grove Weidenfeld, New York, 1952.
pervasive racist symbolic categories rule our self-images – no matter if we are white or black. White ethnopsychoanalysts like Florence Weiss and Maya Nadig use psychoanalytic theory not only to gain knowledge about the Other, but also to research their relationships with their research-subjects – the Iatmul in Papua New Guinea and Otomi women in Mexico. Delving into their irritations when encountering the Other, they reflect upon issues like paternalism, sense of mission, 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. According to Pajaczkowska and Young ‘within European history descriptions of Whiteness are absent due to denial of imperialism, and this leaves a blank in the place of knowledge of the destructive effects of wielding power.’ To re-inscribe whiteness into European history within the scope of empiric research the use of the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and counter-transference can be helpful. They enable researchers to interrogate their preconceived knowledge about the colonial histories and their roles as whites in it. However, the potentially racist, neo-colonial unconscious of the white, ‘First World’ researcher can be denied, ignored, or reflexively explored. The researcher can choose either to rest comfortably in pseudo-certainties of white privilege, or venture into uncertainty.

In Theory: Whiteness, Fear and Method

Psychoanalytic method was not only useful for theorists like Fanon for an analysis of the colonial encounter or for ethnopsychoanalysts and anthropologists to investigate their relationships with their Black research subjects. As Pajaczkowska and Young suggest, it might be used to research whiteness in a white on white setting itself. However in my search for a qualitative empirical method appropriate to my subject matter – whiteness – I encountered the same blank/white spots in the scholarly literature as in the general discourse on the racism of white (rather than Black) subjects in Germany. Very little work has been done in the realm of racisms within feminisms when it comes to methodological issues. Scholars have reflected upon the problems of ‘irrational’ research and have discussed the power dynamics between researcher and research subjects when the researcher is white and the research subjects are not or vice versa. These discussions usually problematise one or the other aspect of ethnographic research or of social sciences methods, however they do not problematise the methods themselves in their being based on eurocentric theories of the subject. Feminist methods foreground dialogical approaches as democratising the research process but they usually presume the common agenda of researcher and research subject based on their gender. Debates on differences among women have changed dominant feminist theories and practices and thereby epistemologies and methodologies but the methods themselves remain untouched.

Whereas much research in Germany explores the relationship between Self and Other/Stranger, surveying 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 enslaving, colonizing, dehumanising, and exploiting the Other is hardly ever mentioned. Subject theories of Western philosophers engaging in the relationship of Self and Other as one between equals are taken as a point of departure to draw conclusions about racism in Germany. In such logic, racism is a pathology – a malady rather than the white norm-alloy.

One strand in the German, predominantly psychoanalytic discourse on Self and Other, focuses on adolescent right wing extremists and it advances the view of racism as a deviation. All the case studies in this field argue that the racist speech and violence of these adolescents is a product of inter-familial relationship experiences. Another strand normalizes racism by claiming that xenophobia - fear of the stranger - is a trans-cultural, universal phenomenon (i.e. Erdheim). None of the authors arguing with these theories 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 targets of these 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 ways of applying theories based on power-balanced relations between Self and Other as debated widely in Western philosophy, trivializes the consequences of racial othering. Such an approach limits the problem of racism to a minor group of deviants – mainly white low/working class adolescents - so as to avoid realizing that the entire dominant white German population carries the colonial images of the inferior racial other in their minds. Again, I


29 ibid.

want to suggest that it is the disingenuous ‘neutrality’ of the white standpoint that sets the norm and thereby immunizes itself from self-questioning.

All too often in the clinical psychological setting, the client who experiences racism is pathologised by a white therapist.34 Instead of giving support to the client, the white therapist interprets as developmental disorder or as neurosis what is simply an adequate reaction to racism. Psychological method, be it clinical or research, may be used to help the researcher/therapist understand the Other (client or research subject), but it may also be used to protect the researcher/therapist against painful knowledge about him/herself. Hence it is often the case that the white therapist, out of fear of realising her/his own involvement in a racist society, defends her/himself and ‘blames the victim’ of racism. While psychoanalytic training teaches its practitioners to differentiate between a client’s transferences and the analyst’s counter transferences, the understanding of racism is not included in the training. Although many have criticized psychoanalysis as ignorant of discrimination against women, racism seems not at all to be an issue for (critical) psychoanalytic discourses in Germany.

My experience in Ghana, together with my realization of the impact of the social construction of race in any encounter between racialised and white people, raised a number of questions for me. First, I was uncertain about whether research in the paradigm of ‘the West researching the Rest,’ even if accompanied by supervised self-reflexivity on the side of the white researcher, could be free of the reproduction of racist structures. Second, I wondered why so many of us were interested in researching the cultures of others far away and showed so little interest in Ghanaians, Turks, Indians or Nicaraguans who lived in Germany. Third, given my growing understanding of processes of racial othering from my side as a white researcher in Ghana, I had to imagine what would happen between white professionals in my field of psychology and their racially marked clients in Germany.

I developed a new research project to investigate the intersection of race and gender in Germany; this paper is based on this study. I became interested in the relation between whiteness and otherness in the encounters between female psychotherapists and clients with migration-biographies in Germany. How, I thought, do these therapists handle their images of ‘the Jew’, the veil, the Balkans, Turks, Blacks, Muslims, Poles and circumcision? How are these images related to their constructions of their own whiteness and Germanness? The most challenging part of this research project was to find an adequate method to conduct and analyse the planned interviews. In 2001 I participated in an annual methodology workshop sponsored by a centre for qualitative research in Germany. This followed a long period of testing different approaches for their utility in examining whiteness, without success. I was interested in using in-depth psychoanalytic analysis for the interviews I wanted to conduct because this method incorporates working with transferences. Looking at transferences between interviewer (me) and interview partner in my former research project in Ghana brought me to realize the significance of racism in the first place. But how should I conduct the interviews? One expert in the field suggests using psychoanalytic (in-depth hermeneutic) method in combination with biographic interviews.35

However, biographic interviews with white women in Germany would hardly bring forth narratives on whiteness, since whiteness is completely de-thematized in German society. Yet, the ‘scenic understanding’ of narratives is necessary for the analytic work with transferences.36 Theme-oriented interviews (which would allow direct questions about whiteness) pre-structure too much and do not allow the interviewees to unfold their own ‘gestalt’ of narration. Apart from that, the use of the terms whiteness or racism would provoke defences discourses but no narratives. In my proposed research I was considering a dialogical interview style first, including the feminist approach of sharing information with the interviewees and treating them like co-researchers rather than informants.37 Having used this method before, I also knew about its disadvantages. During the analysis the researcher has to distinguish constantly between the interviewees’ intention and what the interviewer has provoked.

Empiric research in Germany, maybe more than in other places, demands researchers give solid proof of their epistemologies. Whereas the criteria for quantitative research such as objectivity, reliability and validity are no longer demanded for qualitative research, the debates around criteria for the latter seem to have excluding tendencies as well. I knew from many colleagues that when they researched issues which were challenging the mainstream narratives of their discipline, the sometimes aggressive criticism from the authorities in their fields focused on their method and accused it of being not ‘clean’, not ‘objective’ or not valid. All of my colleagues who knew about my struggle to find the right method for my research suggested that I attend that methodology workshop.

In the following section I will revisit the experience of a workshop in which I participated and explore the dynamics by which whiteness even in a discussion of race is occluded from critical inquiry. The example also illustrates the mechanisms by which whiteness comes into being and is reproduced. While it may seem a rather extreme situation I will suggest that what happens in the workshop is by no means unique.

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Certainty – Authority: Workshopping Race and Gender

I was lucky enough to enrol in the workshop of two popular scholars. One was known for his biographic research on Nazi perpetrators, and the other instructor was a psychoanalyst and expert in the psychoanalytic method of in-depth hermeneutic analysis. The psychoanalyst had done research and published widely on the social psychology of right-wing extremism. Bereswill and Ehlerst had used this in-depth hermeneutic method for research on the use of cultural difference for the self-positioning of white women travellers. I therefore believed myself to be in good hands with my methodology questions, and handed in my material: an outline of my research project explaining how whiteness was at the centre of my interest as a signifier of race and that I wanted to learn about the relationship of white women / feminists in Germany who work in psychological fields with their clients’ ‘of colour’. The interview transcript I handed in was of a test-interview with an acquaintance of mine.

The first agenda of the psychoanalyst / workshop instructor was to explore the suffering of my interviewee. Referring to textual excerpts, he developed an interpretation: that my interview partner, Rose (pseudonym) identified with men and could not find her Self as a woman. While her sister was ‘Daddy’s beautiful one,’ as he quoted my interviewee, Rose had the role of replacing a son. Her identification with her mother was not successful and Rose suffered from a lack of self-esteem. In addition she was psychologically abused. According to the speaker, everything culminated in her statement: ‘I always felt like I am only worth something when a guy wants to sleep with me.’ By this point a great part of the time allocated for the discussion of my research had passed and we had not yet touched upon the topic of racism. Attempting to shift the discussion back to what I intended, I argued that the idea that biographic interviews could focus on whiteness was problematic for the reason that white people in Germany do not think of themselves as having anything to do with racism or the racist structure of the society: they do not identify as white, and believe that whiteness cannot play a role in their lives. No matter which ‘narrative generating introductory question’ (in the language of biographic interview theory) one might come up with, it would and could not generate a narrative about the experience of living a life as a white person in Germany. And yet, no matter how flawed my interview style might have been, the interview transcript contained plenty of material on the meaning of whiteness and the relationship between white and Black women.

I suggested that we take a look at a passage which follows my question about Rose’s experiences with fascination for the ‘other’ woman. Rose immediately remembered a story:


Oh yes, this black singer comes to my mind right away and she wanders around in the subculture from bar to bar, singing. And she has this beautifully voice. I’ve seen her a couple of times... always singing songs, collecting money and moving on. And I found her so beautiful, ...fall figured, well, ... what one would think of as female, fertile. Not that anorexic beauty ideal which we actually have. And normally I am not attracted to large women, I am also rather conditioned towards being skinny and anorexic but this woman fascinated me. Her voice! So I said she has to be in my film. You know, at the time I was doing this film and so I said to my assistant: listen, this woman is flipping around somewhere. Go, try and get her. You know, I am shy about these things. I grew up upper-middle class, but my assistant was at home in the subculture, so I sent her rather than go myself. She found her and Pam was willing to be in the film – for nothing! And she is now practically starting my film, at the very beginning and at the very end.

And I wanted her to – well I wanted her to ... be like – the angel of the women. Well – I don’t know ... basically, the one who is there. I mean, the women don’t see her, the four women whom I portray, these four white, middle class, German women ... don’t see, they do not see this ... black goddess. It’s like this ... who is god? She is black ... that slogan! This god-image. And for me this woman was like a goddess. Or she had this godlike energy. Or ... she ... yes, she fascinated me. And I wanted her to be this ... as the guardian angel of the women ... the anorexic, industrialized women or ... I don’t know ... wanted her to continually reappear in the film.

And I didn’t manage get her to attach to me though... I was also afraid of her! Yeah – and I was glad that Ines (assistant) took care of that because she is at home in this subculture scene, whereas I am rather middle-class socialized, whereas I am this good girl upbringing and was always afraid of people. I just never realized it but ... but I was in fear of this singer! During the shooting I never managed to bond with her. I hadn’t explored her songs really. I was somehow indifferent and detached and I think, and she noticed that. Maybe I exploited her or ... I am often criticized for objectifying black people.

And Pam doesn’t want to participate in the film anymore. Generally she doesn’t want to do film anymore. She said that she was in many other films at the time and that she hated film and she doesn’t want that anymore. I begged and beseeched her but ... no, I couldn’t get through to her anymore.

So, now I am thinking: should I leave her in there or must I cut her out because just in the beginning and at the end –what does that end up saying? And so, but ... I love the shots of her, they are divine and so ... I am still fascinated by her and want her in my film ... or ... maybe leave her in there as a final picture, you know? So ... she sings at the final party and ... and there is no problem having her there as a singer without further explanation. She sits there and sings, you know. But I would have liked to have more of her presence.

The psychoanalyst tried an impromptu interpretation of this sequence: here he saw Rose’s creative approach to gaining a healthy woman’s image through the projection on the black singer. Affirmatively she works herself through her identity problems and tries to develop a positive mother and woman’s image for herself. He went on for another five minutes before I interrupted him again, as I realized that even in this scene of the narrative he was not paying attention to the ‘foreign’, the ‘Other’, the exoticised black singer, beyond her function as a vehicle for the alleged identity-development of Rose, the Self. I offered him my interpretation of the scene: Pam does not receive any interest as a woman who has a life story to tell, a sad story like the
other women in the film. In Rose’s ‘white’ perception (as well as in
the workshop instructor’s own ‘white’ perception), Pam can only be imagined as a
prop, an objectified subject who assists a story but who cannot narrate herself.
Pam’s status as a subject is structurally denied. She is perceived by Rose in an
exotising and racialising way and becomes objectified in her function to serve
as a field of projection of white desire and yearning. While the white
protagonists, subjected to the male world’s ideals of female beauty and
suffering from anorexia, fight their way through the career world, Pam seems
to be outside of that world. These beauty ideals do not seem to apply to her.
She embodies the archaic, the motherly, the original – the resource and the
territory from which the industrialized white world gets its nourishment.
A mute guardian angel, she fits around, the black nanny in the background,
always available to pamper the white protagonists who are in the foreground
of the story. She sings them to sleep as they come home from a hard day of work
‘out there’ in the man’s world. She is used as a prop, an object of the
filmmaker’s imagination, but never treated as a subject. Whatever she might
have to express in her songs is of no interest – only her black voice, her black
body are to be represented.

The representation is one which approves the occidental, colonizing
gaze that situates its wild nature, the stranger, the mystic Other, into the
periphery, the border(land) the colony, the so-called ‘Third World’ as well as
into the marginality of migration in a Western metropolis in order to celebrate
‘civilization’, whiteness, the industrialized artificial world, which no matter
how complex and complicated, must form the core. Such a view then allows a
romanticised interpretation of Pam’s singing jobs as the epitome of
independence from the ordinary job market, rather than as a reference to the
racist discrimination Pam experiences there. Even though Pam pulled out of
the film because she no longer wanted to serve the pushy filmmakers’ images
of black goddesses, she is still singing in Rose’s film – at the beginning and the
end, for Rose has got the shots already. Rose does not want to forgo the
beautiful voice.

Rose was familiar with my research topic and wanted to be part of the
research because she was consciously interested in challenging everyday
racism, of which we are all part. She also understood that it is necessary to look
at white people’s images of the racialised Other in order to challenge them.
This was the reason why she talked freely about her experiences and fantasies
and made no effort to protect herself through politically correct speech. During
the interview we discussed scenes she described and images that she used. The
interview included critical conversations that continued beyond the formal
recording. For a while thereafter we communicated about the issues raised in
that interview over the phone and whenever we met.

Typically, biographic approaches would use introductory questions like:
‘Please tell me your life story, all the experiences which come to your mind.
You can take as much time as you want. I will not interrupt you at first but will
take notes and I will later come back to it.’ Such a question, however, would
not provoke stories that included the significance of the narrators’ whiteness in
Germany. My interviewees, being feminists in one way or another, would talk
about gender, class and maybe ethnicity issues if their family histories included
migration within Germany or from abroad. They would talk about everything
that means something to them, things that they were aware of. Being confronted
with the significance of their whiteness for their lives, a de-thematized issue in
the context they live in, interviewees’ responses sometimes appear like
protocols for the unveiling of whiteness.

Being told that the research is on whiteness, racism and feminism,
interviewees are confronted with two apparently conflicting requests: speaking
to their position as a subordinated gender in a patriarchal society and to their
dominant position as white members of a racist society. For these
terviews I chose the feminist, more dialectical approach, which, apart from
the goals described earlier, aims at a close theory-practice relation. I was in fact
talking about my theoretical frame and my theses in the test-interviews. This
touched off dialogues in which interviewees related my theoretical approach
with their life practice and their experiences.

However, the psychoanalyst/workshop instructor disqualified my
interpretation of Rose’s staging of Pam as moralistic, and compared my
argumentation to German Idealism. My interpretation seemed to be too
challenging of the white gaze with which the instructors as well as almost
everybody else in the room identified. It seemed that I was about to take away
the right from the white spectator to enjoy and be entertained by the black body
and voice. My interpretation had turned the desire of Rose for the black body,
interpreted by the workshop instructor as a positive affirmation, into an act of
aggression. Relieved to see the instructor – the authority - regaining territory
in the situation, a participant took his side. She said that she ‘comes from
objective hermeneutics’ (Oevermann) and thought that my working method
was not ‘clean’. It seemed to her that instead of letting the material speak to
me, I would – as in quantitative approaches - simply use the data to prove my
hypothesis/thesis. I should take the wandering from pub to pub of this black
singer, for example. One could not get a clearer metaphor for the desire of Rose
to liberate herself from the sexist norms from which she suffers. A number
of participants had apparently become uncomfortable to see the social order in
the room shifting. They had moved nervously in their chairs and once another
participant had stepped into the dialogue between the instructor and me and
therefore opened the discussion, others joined in, claiming more objectivity,
more closeness to the text, etc. The psychoanalyst nodded, seeming to welcome
his rehabilitation, and added that it was common sense that blacks had beautiful
voices, and he said that with no glimpse of irony.

The participant next to me – the only person of colour in the room -
finally took down his hand, which he had raised 15 minutes prior trying to say
something, but was not called upon to speak. The instructor, by reducing his

\textsuperscript{39} That is an introductory question, which Gabriele Rosenthal says in the workshops on
conducting biographic interviews at her ‘QUATEXT’ Institut.
definition of racism to blatant expressions of ‘Fremdenfeindlichkeit’ (hostility towards strangers), reproduced stereotypes such as ‘blacks are good singers, dancers, and sex-partners’, and thereby essentialised the black subject. The instructor was right that it is ‘common sense’ in Germany to essentialise blacks, Turks, Jews and everybody else who does not ‘belong’, who does not fit in the dominant definition of ‘being German.’ But what does it mean when we claim to research racism but reproduce the mechanisms through which racism is exercised? The instructor could not have given a better performance of how racism works and is being established as normative in academia.

Nevertheless, after some discussion the psychoanalyst began to get a glimpse of what I and about half of the participants tried to draw his attention to: that racism works not only through the blunt and obvious speech and action of some right wing extremists, but is exercised through simple racialised representations of the Other by the dominant white ‘centre-perspective’: a shift from racist individuals to racist structures. A ‘positive’ (good singer, motherly and goddess-like femininity) representation is about as harmful for the one essentialised as being blunt expressions of racism. It might be even trickier as it does not come as an obvious rejection, it comes in the guise of a double bind: Pam is invited to sing, and hence to be part of the form and the frame (periphery), but is excluded in terms of the content (centre). But as a subject, she, her lyrics, and her story are not of interest. ‘... [S]he dances for him in the costume of his design and forces his devotion, since she does not show him anything but the mirror of his own sketches,’ 40 writes a white woman around 1800 about the male gaze and its stagising of the white female in German romanticism, an image which then becomes her reality. White women’s emancipation – much of the dominant, feminist thought - uses the same power tools as patriarchy for the empowerment of white women. It is not the white male of whom it is demanded that he share his power but the racialised other, who ‘serves’ as a field of projection, who is being used as a resource to nurture white self-affirmation. Rose – once only worth something when ‘a guy wants to sleep with me’ - is now a filmmaker. She designs, she decides, she tells her assistant to ‘go and get her,’ ‘she has to be in my film,’ to be the ‘black goddess,’ she cuts her out or leaves her in. She decides about the frame and about the content. She positions the racialised other in the periphery and celebrates white female suffering in the centre.

The psychoanalyst found that I might have had a point in my interpretations, but nonetheless, in agreement with his colleague he concluded that there was not enough evidence to establish xenophobia in the narrative of my interviewee. Again I tried to explain that my research was not (only) on xenophobia but on whiteness and racism and that racism also works through exoticising or essentialising the Other - that it was racial othering I was interested in, not only blunt xenophobia. The interview included many more examples of racial othering, but to my disappointment, the expert of the psychoanalytic method which I wanted to use did not seem sufficiently interested in applying his expertise to my subject matter: whiteness. It did not seem to be possible for him to look beyond the dominant white perspective, which recognizes that there are some ‘racial subjects’ in the society, but at the same time resists the idea that if structural racism exists, all whites are involved in it and not just a few delinquent adolescents. He was not interested in challenging his own perspective as a white scholar. Mistaking my metaphor of the black nanny in the background he finally asked me: ‘did Rose have a black nanny when she was a child?’

The example of the interview excerpt is not only one of the reproduction of racialised representations but shows the very process of the racialisation of a subject. Pam could have been one of Rose’s protagonists but in order to construct whiteness as a signifier for subjectivity, a racial difference has to be created. Rose actively racialises Pam and the workshop instructor actively denies that and blames those who wish to regain the knowledge of the history of seizure by unveiling acts of racialisations as ideological, moralistic and wrong.

Conclusion

The episode of this workshop showed a typical dynamic of the dominant academic system’s reproduction of racist structures by superficially taking on the issue of racism, but subverting the matter. Seemingly, research on racism in the discipline of psychology is omnipresent in Germany, but it never leaves the centre-periphery structure. Even when supposedly surveying the problem of racial discrimination, the racially othered individual remains in the periphery, whereas the focus is on the centre, the suffering and the problematic of the white subject. Sigmund Freud developed the instruments of transference and counter transference out of a diasporic experience ‘and the systematic understanding of the psyche was initially the need to understand the oppressor, to anticipate the next blow, in order to deflect it and continue with self realization.’ 42 Not only did many in the gentle psychoanalytical community in Germany during the Holocaust collaborate with the Nazi regime and take over the positions of the Jewish psychoanalysts who fled their persecution. The intention of Freud’s work in terms of understanding power systems (beyond nuclear family relations) was also widely silenced thereafter. The example of this workshop shows that in Georges Devereux’s sense, psychoanalytic method in the realm of research on racism can be used as a defence against knowledge of ‘white complicity with various forms of colonial and neo-colonial oppressions... [and against] knowledge of the complex ways in which white


41 Túi T. Minh-ha has written elaborately about the ways in which this center-periphery structure is constantly re-constructed by Western sciences e.g. in her books Woman Native Other, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989 and When the Moon Waxes Red, Routledge, London, 1991.

42 Pajaczkowska and Young, op cit., p. 198.
racial privilege is constructed so as to benefit whites collectively (for example, through ideologies of gender, sexuality, and nationality).  

The concentration on what I would call avoidance discourses such as xenophobia, hostility towards strangers/foreigners, serves not only as a screen memory, it also functions as a definition of what can be called racism and what cannot be. If the experts claim the authority to tell me, a researcher who works on the intersection of racism and feminism, that there is no evidence of ‘hostility towards a stranger’ in my data, they clearly imply that their term covers mine and that racism is only a subcategory of xenophobia. It excludes all other forms of racism and in particular the forms, which the experts - white (mostly male) academics - reproduce in their theories as well as practices. Focusing on xenophobia and ‘hostility towards a stranger’ in research on racism targets a group socially very distant from the scholars: working class people. In doing so, the scholars stay in a safe place and suggest their trainees do the same. Yet by avoiding uncertainty, one also avoids development. Psychoanalysis works through nothing but memory, remembering, shifting the repressed, the unconscious into (pre) consciousness and that is a working through uncertainty. Using uncertainty as a method, a researcher has to become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

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'Men are Tougher, Bigger, and They Don't Act Real Girlie': Indigenous Boys Defining and Interrogating Masculinities

WAYNE MARTINO & MARIA PALLOTTA-CHIAROLI*

Introduction

Debates about boys and their constitution as disadvantaged subjects continue to rage in Australia, North America and the United Kingdom, with the media playing a major role in promulgating a feminist backlash politics. However, driving this rhetoric is a normalising tendency to construct all boys as a homogenous group who are suffering as a result of the attention and resources committed to girls through feminist interventions in educational policy and practice. In fact, schoolboys have emerged as mono-cultural, hetero-sexualised white subjects within a policy and educational social context set by the dictates of the Right agenda, fuelled by the media and men’s rights’ advocates. Within this context, the perspectives of Indigenous boys and their experiences of schooling are silenced or erased. In light of this polemic, this paper presents our research with Indigenous boys in schools. We aim to provide a more nuanced analysis of the social and racialised practices of masculinity in these boys’ lives at school. Hence, our aim is to draw attention to the problematics of a normalising logic that drives the constitution of boys as a homogenous group, without paying heed to the interweaving of gender with other social variables such as indigeneity, geographical location, socio-economic status, sexuality and a historical analysis of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous peoples.

What is needed, we argue, is a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which masculinity is articulated and deployed in the lives of boys who are positioned and position themselves within a borderland or mestizaje space,

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