

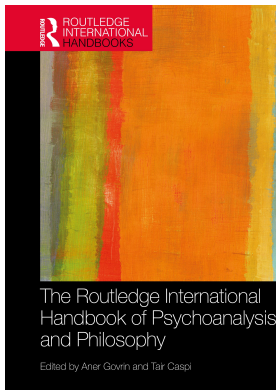
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PSYCHOANALYSIS, RACE AND COLONIALISM

Stephen Frosh

Colonialism and Psychoanalysis

Recent discussions of psychoanalysis' implication in discourses of 'race' and practices of racialisation have focused as much on colonialism as on racism itself. This has led to some very productive work that both locates psychoanalysis within the colonial project and explores the potential that psychoanalytic concepts have for critical analysis of that project. Much of this work has drawn on the writings (and figure) of Frantz Fanon (1952), though there have also been major contributions from researchers on psychoanalysis in the Global South and in postcolonial societies (Anderson et al, 2011). This work challenges the ethnocentrism of psychoanalysis as well as drawing attention to its colonial roots, which lie in tension with the anti-colonial and socially critical impulse given psychoanalysis by its Jewish origins and its resultant consciousness of anti-semitism (Brickman, 2003; Frosh, 2013). Amongst the key issues here is whether the ambition of psychoanalysis to be a European science characterised by an Enlightenment vision of the virtues of rationality also positions it as colonial and racist in its attitudes towards the imagined non-European 'savage' or 'primitive' (Frosh, 2017). Brickman (2003) argues that the movement of savagery to embrace the indigenous African and Australian population was part of an effort by Freud to position Jewish identity as European, rather than as the 'other' to Europeanism assumed by Christian and now racial antisemitism – an enterprise characteristic of other secular intellectual Jews of the time. She comments (Brickman, 2003, p. 167), 'Categorized as a member of a primitive race, Freud repudiated primitivity, locating himself and his work within European civilization, with both its scientific and colonizing enterprises, and replacing the opposition of Aryan/Jew with the opposition of civilized/primitive.' This may indeed have been the case, but even if this argument is not completely convincing, it is undeniable that psychoanalysis invested in assumptions around cannibalism and primitivity that read disturbingly to postcolonial and decolonial eyes. Assuming an antagonism between irrationality and rationality that parallels the dimensions 'savage-civilised' and 'immature-mature', as well as – more ambiguously perhaps – 'unconscious-conscious', and freely deploying tropes of primitivity and cannibalism even to this day (Vyrgiotti, 2018), psychoanalysis reproduces colonial fantasies.

In some places, this is not just an ideological issue but a very practical one, though it also has its ambiguities. For example, Anderson et al (2011, pp. 1–2) describe how psychoanalysis had quite specific colonial uses, yet also fed into some anti-colonial perspectives:

From the 1920s, psychoanalysis was a mobile technology of both the late colonial state and anti-imperialism. Insights from psychoanalysis shaped European and North American ideas about the colonial world, the character and potential of ‘native’ cultures, and the anxieties and alienation of displaced white colonizers and sojourners. Moreover, intense and intimate engagement with empire came to shape the apparently generic psychoanalytic subjectivities that emerged in the twentieth century – whether European or non-European.

The papers in Anderson et al (2011) collectively demonstrate how the enterprise of psychoanalysis contributed to the perpetration of colonial power in the twentieth century, nominating certain subject populations as potentially analysable and hence ‘civilised’, which means convertible into Europeans or at least ‘suitably modern subjects’ (p. 8), and others as ‘native’ or indigenous, and hence on the subjugated, ‘primitive’ side of things. The regulatory or disciplinary functions of this are quite apparent: ‘Psychoanalytic knowledge assisted in establishing a baseline for the native’s personality, a critical dictum for the framing of colonial educational, judicial, and administrative policies in specific locales’ (p. 8). Resonances of this can be seen in a different colonial environment, that of Brazil, in which psychoanalysis had a role to play as a mode of socialisation of a polity imagined to be uncontrollable in its forms of racial and sexual excess. As my Brazilian colleagues and I have described elsewhere (Rubin et al, 2016), the importation of psychoanalysis to Brazil happened early and was always ambiguously related to repressive policies (e.g., during the dictatorship of the late twentieth century) and to modernisation processes that were both emancipatory and controlling. Psychoanalysis became embroiled with the Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene, founded in 1923 as part of the project of sanitisation and hygienisation of the Brazilian population, based on eugenic theory and aligned with the tendency to biologise madness, race and cultural aspects of society. Even though some early psychiatrists in the League developed projects that went beyond the initial eugenic framework, the country’s racial mixture was seen as a problem and as a cause of Brazilian ‘backwardness’ that had to be overcome (Russo, 2012). In this context, the psychiatrist Julio Porto-Carrero collaborated in the creation of the psychoanalytic clinic of the League. As Russo (2012) shows, his ‘educational’ intervention was based on two main aims arising from the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality, both of which can be read as normalising, albeit partly in tension with one another. One aim was to remove the taboo that surrounded sex, working towards a non-repressive morality; the second was to control and sublimate the sexual instincts towards more ‘civilised’ ends. Russo proposes that, although psychoanalytic practice first developed within the domain of hygiene projects, physicians like Porto-Carrero saw in its non-moralistic attitude a way to humanise the psychiatric movement. As such, it might be claimed to have had a *decolonising* effect in relation to psychiatry, whilst still being part of a project of normalisation based around colonial fantasies of race and ‘miscegenation’. Cultural appropriations of psychoanalysis are also relevant here. For example, psychoanalysis had a notable presence in the art world and in debates surrounding the Week of Modern Art, held in São Paulo in 1922. Not only did several writers and painters enter into dialogue with psychoanalysis in their works, but the main document of modernism in the period, the *Manifesto Antropofágico*, written by Oswald de Andrade (1928), mentions Freud in the context of defending an original Brazilian identity free from repression and social restrictions. The social and cultural elites of the period also absorbed psychoanalysis in their search for modernity along European lines. On the other hand again, see-sawing between the different uses of psychoanalysis, the self-identity of Brazil as ‘anthropophagous’ explicitly relates to the idea of the colonised society as only developing through the materials it can ingest from the coloniser. Psychoanalysis is then one of those materials; and in being cannibalised in this way it is

not destroyed, but rather consolidates from the inside a pattern of deference and control through identification and a kind of deathly possession.

This should not be pushed too far, however. From the start the situation was always ambiguous, as it had to be given the tension between psychoanalysis' universalising claims (the Oedipus complex assumed to exist everywhere, for example) and its rigorous focus on individuals' singular experiences; and also between the marginalising of 'savagery' to the 'primitive', racialised other and the revelation of exactly that savagery at the heart of the supposedly civilized European. Freud was certainly clear that barbarism could be found at home, not in his supposedly primitive Jewish 'heim' but in the antisemitic Christian society in which he lived and the pulse of which he took with unerring acuity. 'We must not forget,' Freud (1939, p. 91) wrote in the bitter times at the end of his life,

that all those peoples who excel to-day in their hatred of Jews became Christians only in late historic times, often driven to it by bloody coercion. It might be said that they are all 'mis-baptized'. They have been left, under a thin veneer of Christianity, what their ancestors were, who worshipped a barbarous polytheism.

Even more incisively, the notion of a dynamic unconscious, expressive of a death drive as well as the loving bonds of Eros, does not suggest that the human condition is bounded by rationality even in its most civilised and scientifically non-illusory places, however much conversion of id into ego there might be. 'It is a work of culture,' writes Freud (1933, p. 80) about the triumph of egoic rationality over the id; but this is clearly also a fragile conquest, always set to fall apart under the continuing pressure of destructiveness and the drives – as indeed it did almost immediately after this Freudian hope was penned.

In addition, the decolonising possibilities of psychoanalysis were mined from early on and are not just the products of postcolonial thought, however important that might be (Greedharry, 2008). The founder of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society (incidentally, a remarkably early Society, begun in 1922), Girindrasekhar Bose, who dominated Indian psychoanalysis for most of his life, was clearly a highly educated, privileged colonial subject who made his living from the analysis of members of 'the British-educated urban elite whose professional life was interwoven with the interests of the colonial rulers' (Hartnack, 2011, p. 102). Nevertheless, he resisted much of Freud's ethnocentric thinking and associated himself strongly with the anticolonial movement; indeed, Hartnack notes (p. 109), 'His pronounced anticolonial attitudes were conformist within the circles to which he belonged.' More significantly perhaps, his psychoanalytic work was hybrid and critical in its use of Hindu ideas and its sensitivity to the specifics of his sociocultural milieu.

Bose's creative efforts to integrate elements from European and Bengali Hindu psychological and psychoanalytic thought and practice were unprecedented in the field of academic psychology and psychiatry in colonial times and thus were groundbreaking. Instead of the binary concept of black skin – white mask that Fanon adhered to, Bose opted for interfaces (in the very sense of the word). His work was not limited by dichotomises but rather strove to establish connections.

(Hartnack, 2011, p. 109)

Hartnack may be being unfair to Fanon in this quotation, because his supposedly 'binary' black-white conceptualisation of the colonial world contains within it a nuanced understanding of the multiple influences on the construction of black and white subjectivities and can be read as

a polemical device to uncover the psychopolitical workings of racism that are harder to unpick through notions of hybridity. Nevertheless, noticing that the colonised users of psychoanalysis have not necessarily been anthropophagous – and indeed that when they have been so it has sometimes been in a spirit of irony – is an important step towards realising the potential of psychoanalysis itself for decolonising practice. One might indeed see this as part of the disruptive potential of psychoanalysis itself, something which, amongst others, Edward Said, no friend to colonialism, explicitly noted:

Freud was an explorer of the mind, of course, but also, in the philosophical sense, an overturner and a re-mapper of accepted or settled geographies and genealogies. He thus lends himself especially to rereading in different contexts, since his work is all about how life history offers itself by recollection, research and reflection to endless structuring and restructuring, in both the individual and the collective sense. That we, different readers from different periods of history, with different cultural backgrounds, should continue to do this in our readings of Freud strikes me as nothing less than a vindication of his work's power to instigate new thought, as well as to illuminate situations that he himself might never have dreamed of.

(Said, 2003, p. 27)

Said incorporates this generous reflection on Freud into his general argument for a 'contrapuntal' reading of great writers: critical and postcolonial, but also alert to how their thought is productive. The same might be said of psychoanalysis as a whole, or at least one hopes so. Of course, it has colonial origins and baggage; how could it not, given where and when it originated? More controversially, its institutions have often been places of conservatism and conformity, sometimes under the guise of psychoanalytic 'neutrality' (Frosh and Mandelbaum, 2017), and when they have branched out into social commentary it has not always been in the right direction – witness the attitudes towards homosexuality held by American psychoanalysts until late in the day in America, and still left unreconstructed in relation to the notion of 'perversion' by some contemporary Lacanians (Van Haute, 2016). Nevertheless, psychoanalysis also offers the most powerful vocabulary we have available for examining the 'psychic', or at least subjective, bases of colonial power and of racism; and in its history it has often promoted progressive thinking and practices that have counterbalanced its tendency towards conformism (Frosh, 2018). Despite its colonial roots, this is true of what it has offered postcolonial thought; equally, despite its inability to deal adequately with racism and antisemitism in its own ranks (Frosh, 2012; Winograd, 2014), it has demonstrated its potential as a source of contestation of racism. It is to this I now turn, asking, through the analysis of racism, to what extent can psychoanalysis become an anti-racist and 'decolonising' discipline, and what might need to happen for this to be achieved?

On Racism

Through its colonial enterprise, psychoanalysis has at times looked like a tool of racism, abbreviating its coverage of non-European psychology and more importantly asserting the domination of rationality over irrationality in a way that identifies the former with a more 'civilised' way of being and attributes the latter to a kind of atavism resonating with supposedly 'primitive' states of mind. However, largely because of its strong links with Jewish identity and hence psychoanalysts' shared experience of antisemitism – most egregiously of course during the Nazi era but not by any means confined to then – alertness to the irrationality of racism itself, the damage it does and the passion with which its adherents hold onto it has been a subtheme of much

psychoanalytic thought. The issue to be considered here is whether there are ‘philosophical’ aspects of psychoanalysis that relate to these concerns and whether examining them can help move psychoanalysis from being an occasional and often backsliding, flawed fellow traveller of nonracism to a more active antiracist position. It is first, however, worth reminding ourselves of where an antiracist position has emerged. The critique of racism has mainly not been driven by a clinical drive towards understanding its effects in the consulting room, though this has become increasingly visible especially as analysts of colour have written or spoken about it (Winograd, 2014; White, 2002). Rather, it has usually come from social critics, philosophers and social theorists who have seen psychoanalysis as having something to contribute to the project of explaining and contesting the racist imaginary – the capacity of racism to maintain its hold over psychic processes, always seeming to return as the point of first contact when any kind of going gets tough. Antisemitism in contemporary Europe; anti-black racism in post-Obama America; Hindu-on-Muslim racism; extreme nationalism and xenophobia; post-Brexit racism; far-right racism and so on – the robustness of these phenomena is something that requires analysis, and critics have often deployed psychoanalytic ideas to help them in this. It needs to be added that this is not necessarily a reductive process in which the sociopolitical sources of racism are ignored, but a supplementary or complementary one in which the affective pull of racism is examined: why, when it is so destructive and so patently absurd, does racism *feel* so attractive, even so central, to the mental life of so many people? Even if we use the Marxist language of ‘ideology’ here, suggesting that we are dealing with the internalisation of socially produced canonical narratives and dominant discourses, what explains the hold such ideological tropes have over people, and what might make it possible to resist them? Psychoanalytically informed critics have come up with numerous answers to this, ranging from the work of the post-war *Studies in Prejudice* group of critical theorists (Adorno et al, 1950), through to contemporary Lacanians (Hook, 2018). For Adorno et al (1950), in their classic investigation of ‘prejudice’ informed by social psychology, critical theory and psychoanalysis, the source of this racist imaginary lay in a specific family scenario, in which an authoritarian father and the absence of affection produces a sado-masochistic personality structure unable to deal with the complexity of the world and insistent on the simplifying products of projection. This creates a persecutory environment full of hated beings, thus confirming the subject’s vision of being ensnared in a dangerous situation in which the other has to be wiped out for the self to survive. In particular, *difference* cannot be tolerated because it always constitutes a threat. Racism is not a ‘simple belief’ and its irrationality is not solely in the area of its truth claims (though of course it is irrational in that sphere). It is precisely the *excessive* affect added to the systematically prejudiced ideology that makes for a racist imaginary in the sense of an all-encompassing fantasy. Adorno et al enunciate this in relation to the threat felt by the ‘fascist character’ when faced with difference, and there is a lot of other psychoanalytic evidence for this, as in Klaus Theweleit’s (1977) famous investigation of the proto-fascists of Weimar Germany, which stressed the highly sexualised hatred these men had for women and the way this produced split fantasies of the ‘Bolshevik’ other, femininity (‘pure’ mothers and sisters versus the ‘red woman’) and of course Jews. Indeed, the general theme that racism becomes constituted through a projective process whereby the subject disowns aspects of the self which she or he then finds in the outside world and feels persecuted by – and consequently directs violent hatred towards – is rife in the literature. It has its limitations, as all simplifying explanations will have; but it conveys well the way in which a racist subject will both be drawn to and repelled by the object of hatred, and in spite of all evidence to the contrary, will hold a genuine conviction that its very existence is threatening.

Other examples of the application of psychoanalytic concepts to racism come from many sources. Those I have previously focused on (Frosh, 2006, 2013) have been the Kleinian theorisation of

racism in relation to psychic processes of repudiation, splitting and projection, combined with social construction of abjected ‘containers’ for these projections (Rustin, 1991); the conceptualisation of anti-black racism in the context of the fantasised division ‘bestiality/purity’ produced by slavery (Kovel, 1995); Fanon’s (1952) use of Lacanian psychoanalysis mixed with Sartrean existential analysis to examine the psychology of the colonial and of the colonised; and the idea that racism is fuelled by fantasies of ‘theft of enjoyment’ as understood by Lacanian and Žižekian theory (Hook, 2018; Dean, 2007). Without repeating too much of this material here, it is worth noting the overlaps and possible congruences of these somewhat different positions. For the Kleinian sociologist Michael Rustin, racism is built out of extreme defences against psychic fragmentation, defences which construct a paranoid world view that then reinforces the attack the racist psyche feels itself to be under. Intensely affectively charged beliefs about race, writes Rustin,

are akin to psychotic states of mind. . . . The mechanisms of psychotic thought find in racial categorizations an ideal container. These mechanisms include the paranoid splitting of objects into the loved and hated, the suffusion of thinking processes by intense, unrecognized emotion, confusion between self and object due to the splitting of the self and massive projective identification, and hatred of reality and truth.

(Rustin, 1991, p. 62)

The threat to the subject posed by fragmentary and vulnerable states of mind aggravated by social forces that undermine personal solidity and escalate hatred, are dealt with through projection of envy into the socially nominated other – the person of colour, the Jew, the immigrant, the religiously different. This makes it safer because it offers not just an *explanation* for one’s own suffering (‘they hate us and are persecuting us’), but because it confirms the state of mind that posits destructiveness as lying outside the subject and so defensible against. This is emotionally comforting even as it paradoxically stirs up feelings of paranoia and vulnerability, producing a vicious cycle built on a lie. Rustin (1991, p. 69) writes, ‘The “lie” in this system of personality organisation becomes positively valued as carrying for the self an important aspect of its defence against weakness, loss or negative judgement.’ Racism, socially structured though it may be, is consequently deeply invested in by the individual, distorting and disturbing relations with reality and with truth.

Although the specifics of the Kleinian vocabulary of projection, introjection and projective identification are not necessarily shared, the general perception that racism involves the use of socially nominated categories of derogated others as containers or channels for the socially produced vulnerabilities and hatreds of the subject is common to the positions listed above. For Kovel (1995), the sensuality forced out of the white American subject by capitalism and puritanism is projected into the black, who carries the legacy of ‘bestial’ fantasies produced by slavery. ‘Could it be,’ he asks (p. 212), reflecting on the historical development of white consciousness, ‘that as the western mentality began to regard itself as homogeneous and purified – a *cogito* – it was also led to assign the negativity inherent in human existence to other peoples, thereby enmeshing them in the web of racism?’ The vitality and diversity of the world becomes flattened and narrowed into a rigid mode of reasoning and a single narrative of experience; racism enters into the equation because irrationality and sensuality is defended against and located in the other – the one who, through exclusion and election as the ‘alien’, comes to embody the supposedly non-human. The implication here that racism is not just fuelled by hatred but also by *envy* – another important Kleinian idea – is not unfamiliar to readers of Fanon. It can be seen, for instance, in his comment that

The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. Face to face with the man who

is ‘different from himself’, he needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify the Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupation and his desires.

(Fanon, 1952, p. 170)

Whilst the threat of the other is dominant in this quotation, the evocation of fantasies of ‘sexual potency’ reveals the ambivalent core of the racist imaginary: the other is hated for sure, but also envied for what he (in this case) embodies, and also possibly *desired*. The prevalence of so-called miscegenation in racist societies has many components, including the arrogance of power and the excitement of the prohibited, but it may also be connected at times and in part to a desire for the racialised other that is racist in itself. The recognition of ambivalence also fuels the contemporary Lacanian idea that racism revolves around a fantasy of the ‘theft of enjoyment’, which is to say that the other is imagined as being responsible for the lack in the subject, desired, envied and hated precisely because the other has what ‘we’ most want but can never (because subjectivity is constructed around lack) actually acquire. Derek Hook (2008) draws together some of these disparate threads by aligning Fanon and Žižek in their accounts of how racism gets ‘under the skin’. Fanon’s (1952) line of analysis emphasises the projection of the white’s sexuality onto the black man, only for the white man to find it returning as envied aspects of his own disavowed sexual embodiment. Hook reads this in relation to the Lacanian idea of the surplus of enjoyment that is needed and yet is feared, because it locates the psychic life of the subject in the body and hence in what is ‘bestial’ and mortal. The consequence of this is that the racist subject is obsessed by a lack which she or he translates into a ‘loss’ – implying that it has been stolen by someone else, who now claims ownership of it. Hook (2008, p. 146) comments, ‘We return thus to a familiar lesson in the psychoanalysis of racism: the “racial other” is needed, envied, desired far more than the racist subject can ever admit’.

The overlaps and connections between different psychoanalytic formulations of racism are instructive in revealing some core assumptions of the psychoanalytic approach. One is the notion of the outside other as a ‘container’ of some kind for inner turmoil. This does not necessarily resolve into a reductive account that implies that racism is psychologically produced, that it is for example a kind of attitudinal prejudice endemic to the human psychological condition (Frosh, 1989). Most of the ideas presented above are fully compatible with a notion of the inner turmoil that might be the source of the impassioned feelings of the racist being itself produced by the social forces that perpetuate racism. Even though this can be a truth quite hard to hold onto in the face of psychoanalysis’ individualising tendencies, the most radical psychoanalytic theorists of racism were able to develop it out of their well-schooled critical (often Marxist) thinking. Ernst Simmel (1946), for instance, writing in the volume of essays that he edited out of a symposium on antisemitism organised by the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society in 1944, makes the connection between modernity (‘civilisation’) and the canker that destroys it.

Applying our method of psychoanalytic-dialectic thinking, we must infer not that antisemitism annihilates the achievements of civilization, but that the process of civilization itself *produces* antisemitism as a pathological symptom-formation, which in turn tends to destroy the soil from which it has grown. Antisemitism is a malignant growth on the body of civilization.

(p. 34)

For Simmel, thinking back on the Nazi phenomenon, antisemitism is both a cancer and a mass psychosis, a ‘social disease’, despite the individuals concerned not being psychotic; or rather, it is the existence of this mass psychosis that *protects* antisemites from becoming psychotic themselves,

because it contains their madness in the body of social norms. Although it is the case that there may be various neurotic processes at work, the individual antisemite is 'normal'. However, when this person joins a group the crowd dynamic takes over, distinguished particularly by 'unrestricted aggressive destructiveness under the spell of a delusion' (p. 39) – exactly the characteristic of psychosis. This further clarifies the comfortable way in which the antisemite can live with irrational beliefs:

The antisemite believes in his false accusations against the Jews not in spite of, but *because* of their irrationality. For the ideational content of these accusations is a product of the primary process in his own unconscious and is conveyed to his conscious mind through the mediation of the mass-leader's suggestions.

(Simmel, 1946, pp. 51–52)

As Otto Fenichel (1946, p. 20) noted in his contribution to Simmel's collection, 'Foreignness is the quality which the Jews and one's own instincts have in common'. The antisemite is attracted to 'irrational' beliefs precisely because they express the turmoil of a mind at war with itself and with the world, yet one that is structurally and socially weak, and needs the prop of the antisemitic society's containing madness to keep itself sane. And at the root of this turmoil, according to Simmel, is 'the process of civilization itself', suggesting that antisemitism is not something grafted onto modernity as an external force that disturbs what would otherwise be 'a culture of law, order and reason' but is expressive of the irrationality that lies within modernity itself, and is generated by it. This theme can also be found in some of Slavoj Žižek's writings, with unreason thought of not as a fundamental psychic structure, but one that is socially overdetermined.

Is capitalism's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of its own innermost, essential feature? For this reason, it is not sufficient to point out how the racist's Other presents a threat to our own identity. We should rather invert this proposition: the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to what is 'in us more than ourselves' and thus prevents us achieving full identity with ourselves.

(Žižek, 1993, p. 206)

Against the implication that it is the inner state of the subject that is primary in seeking out an external cause, Žižek (1997, p. 76) also gives us a more elaborated version of antisemitism in which it is produced by the structure of capitalism itself: 'social antagonism comes first, and the "Jew" merely gives body to this obstacle.' Culture's investment in this figure of the 'Jew' produces it as an element in the unconscious, and with it arises the widespreadness of antisemitism itself.

Psychoanalysis, then, has had something important to say about the way in which the racist imaginary works, basically interpreting it through various theoretical lenses as a process of libidinal investment in an ambivalent object that carries the weight of disowned and projected derogated or 'abjected' aspects of the psyche. Why these aspects are derogated and why these particular objects are chosen to contain them is a set of questions answered by more progressive theorists in social terms. The workings of a society constructed through colonialism, imperialism and racism are such as to leave its subjects alienated and vulnerable, in a state that both mobilises and makes unendurable rage-filled fantasies that have to be evacuated before they destroy the subject from the inside; and these same social processes elect various groups for historical reasons (Christian antisemitism, slavery, economic dispossession, imperialist self-justification) so that they are ripe for reception of the projected fantasies. This is why it does not matter if there really is 'a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean', as a recent British Prime Minister

claimed (BBC, 2015), any more than it matters if there are any Jews around; anti-migrant racism and antisemitism can still flourish, because they operate as phantasmagorical rather than reality-based processes. This theoretical contribution is a significant one in acting as a counterweight to the psychoanalytic tendency to individualise and subjectivise, hiding away both as a practice and a set of clinical ideas that have not spoken directly enough about racism. It also opposes the developmentalism of psychoanalysis that channels together colonial tropes about ‘primitive versus civilised’, associating the former especially with ‘under-developed’ modes of thought – Freud’s (1913, p. 1) famous ‘savages’ whose ‘mental life must have a peculiar interest for us if we are right in seeing in it a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.’ Racism has essentially nothing to do with the characteristics of the racialised other, though it might pick or invent some of those supposed characteristics as points to which racist fantasies can attach themselves (the claim to superiority as the ‘chosen people’ and the fact of male circumcision are two attributes of the Jews that Freud (1939) thought attracted antisemitic attention; supposed black ‘physicality’ might be a source of racist envy and assault, reducing black people to their bodies). Rather, racism is a product of racists, both as a society and in the space of the racist psyche; and psychoanalysis offers some useful tools to pick away at this in order to garner a fuller understanding.

Coda on Grievability

Taking this a little further, there is a contemporary move in both social theory and psychoanalysis that provides a slightly different lens on the processes that might comprehend and oppose racism. This starts from a perspective that Judith Butler has worked on over many years through her notion of ‘precarity’ that recognises how marginal and hence precarious some people – many groups of people – are made, particularly under conditions of racist and sexist exclusion (Butler, 2004). In the course of this, Butler has also developed a notion of ‘grievability’ which has now become central to much of her thinking, especially on resistance and nonviolence. Grievability distinguishes between lives worth preserving and others that are discardable; those lives that would be grieved if they were lost, and those that do not seem to count. Butler (2020, p. 17) is fierce on the implications and sources of this difference:

They establish this inequality within a particular framework, but this inequality is historical and contested by competing frameworks. It says nothing about the intrinsic value of any life. Further, as we think about the prevailing and differential ways that populations are valued and disvalued, protected and abandoned, we come up against forms of power that establish the unequal worth of lives by establishing their unequal grievability.

Grievability is not in itself a statement about grief, but rather about mattering, in the sense of ‘Black Lives Matter’:

To be grievable is to be interpellated in such a way that you know your life matters; that the loss of your life would matter; that your body is treated as one that should be able to live and thrive, whose precarity should be minimized, for which provisions for flourishing should be available.

(Butler, 2020, p. 59)

Yet this is not so for all people, and the inequality in grievability – in the valuing of lives – is deeply racialised. Butler (2020) discusses this in detail in relation to the killing of black men

in America, defined automatically within the racist phantasmagoria as posing a threat, even when running away; in the unreported and mislabelled deaths of black women ('overpoliced and underprotected' – p. 119); and in the contemporary European racism expressed in the willed deaths of 'thousands of migrants who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean', lives which are 'precisely lives that are not deemed worthy of safeguarding' (p. 120). She concludes,

All of these forms of taking life or letting life die are not just concrete examples of how the metric of grievability works; they wield the power to determine and distribute the grievability and value of lives. These are the concrete operations of the metric itself, its technologies, its points of application. And in these instances, we see the convergence of the biopolitical logic of the historic-racial scheme with the phantasmagoric inversions that occlude the social bond: what may appear as an isolated act of violence or as the expression of an individual psychopathology shows itself to be part of a pattern, a punctual moment within a reiterated practice of violence.

(Butler, 2020, p. 121)

The perceptions here are not peculiarly psychoanalytic ones, but Butler herself joins this recent extended statement about grievability to psychoanalysis, continuing a tradition of thought that is most apparent in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Butler, 2005), which draws on psychoanalysis (especially the theories of Jean Laplanche) as part of a project of explicating ethical relationality. In *The Force of Nonviolence* (Butler, 2020) it is Freud and particularly Melanie Klein who have a more privileged position; the latter is used in an evocative portrait of vulnerability to understand how grievability might be part of a process of reparation for the damage that one has done to others and for the damage done to oneself. What is key here for Butler is the way in which reparation and the guilt that is associated with it function 'not only as a way of checking one's own destructiveness, but as a mechanism for safeguarding the life of the other, one that emerges from our own need and dependency, from a sense that this life is not a life without another life' (p. 93). What Butler points out about this is how reparation and guilt can be 'pre-emptive': how they can arise out of the wish *not to do* damage, or perhaps the knowledge that damage is very likely to be done, and then involve putting in place the conditions under which the life of the other – and hence one's own life – can be repaired, preserved and protected in the light of that future-and-past damage. And finally, Butler suggests a 'political principle' that arises from this perception, one that contains echoes of Levinas' (1991) use of the injunction against killing, what he calls (p. 104) 'A Thou-Shalt-not-Kill that can also be explicated much further: it is the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is like a calling out to me.' Butler's elaboration of this in the context of grievability is as follows:

Perhaps the moral precept that prohibits killing has to be expanded to a political principle that seeks to safeguard lives through institutional and economic means, and to do so in a way that *fails* to distinguish between populations that are immanently grievable and those that are not.

(Butler, 2020, p. 100)

The vulnerability one feels, the hurt that has been done to one – the conditions under which racism usually thrives, as it looks to project these hurts and vulnerabilities into their socially sanctioned derogated containers – can also be the basis for a philosophy of ethics that takes the

grievability of others as foundational and so resists precisely that derogation, that disowning of precarity on which racist social forces feed.

I have offered this quite extended introduction to Butler's ideas in order to think about what psychoanalysis might say about a mode of engagement with others that acknowledges the systematic way in which racism damages lives. This is not to claim Butler totally for the regiments of psychoanalysts; but she nevertheless works in a tradition that draws creatively on psychoanalysis for insights both into psychological states (e.g., hurt and aggression as shared human conditions arising in response to dependency and vulnerability) and their intertwining with social conditions (subjectification in the context of precarity; melancholic formations of social coercion). In the material described here, there is a powerful acknowledgement of how lives are made to matter and not to matter, and how this construction of grievability is distributed on racialised grounds. Alongside this is the development of an argument for contestation of violence that is forged out of a psychoanalytic sensitivity to the conditions in which our vulnerabilities might become links with others rather than be translated into racist forms of repudiation. What psychoanalysis offers here is rather different from the descriptions of the phantasmatic enticements of racism described earlier. Instead, it suggests a set of ethical principles that could be brought to bear on racism through political action as well as social philosophy and social theory. It suggests that racialised forms of violence, so prevalent in so much of the world, can be interpreted through the lens of vulnerability and in this way can track the turning of the hurt received into the hurt inflicted. Without reducing the importance of understanding the centrality of social forces that intentionally cultivate this racism, the psychoanalytic insights that allow us to understand grievability as a potential opening out of relationality through turning back the temptation to project into others what we are afraid of in ourselves, is a compelling instance of how psychoanalysis might be drawn on to flesh out the affective domain that in its persecutory forms helps sustain racism. Our vulnerabilities make us sites for racist discarding of others and for the perpetuation of self-destructive inequalities and hatreds through this; the question is whether and how it might be possible to move from this enactive, reactive position to one in which pre-emptive work on reparative concern – 'safeguard[ing] lives through institutional and economic means' – becomes a primary, shared political concern, and one that does indeed not distinguish between different populations in terms of their racialised worth.

The focus on grievability here is part of a larger project that can be discerned within contemporary psychoanalysis, which is to articulate ways of relating that do not just *take account* of 'otherness' and relationships of sameness and difference, but that make these central to psychoanalytic concerns (Benjamin, 2018). In doing this, psychoanalysis needs to reflect back on its own practices of exclusion – class, sexuality and race have all featured in this over the years and continue to do so. The social theorists who have developed psychoanalytic accounts of racism have offered some persuasive portrayals of the workings of the racist imaginary; what Butler shows in her work on grievability is another side of this: how the temptation to racialise and exclude, to make lives ungrievable and to deny their mattering, is one that can be very easily mobilised in the service of the perpetuation of racist ideologies and practices. If, drawing especially on Freud and Klein, we might see this as an aspect of the death drive, exerting itself to preserve the subject by destroying the other, we might also hope that there is something still available from the opposing drive, Eros, in which the complexity and heterogeneity of life is welcomed. This might also mean that our awareness of the potential for doing damage that operates so strongly in our psyches and in our societies can be offset by reparative practices that understand how we are bound up with others. We do violence to ourselves when we do violence to them.

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